

Business 2 Trade

The delivery of flowering azaleas to the trade is a speciality of Mario Naudts, also based in Lochristi.

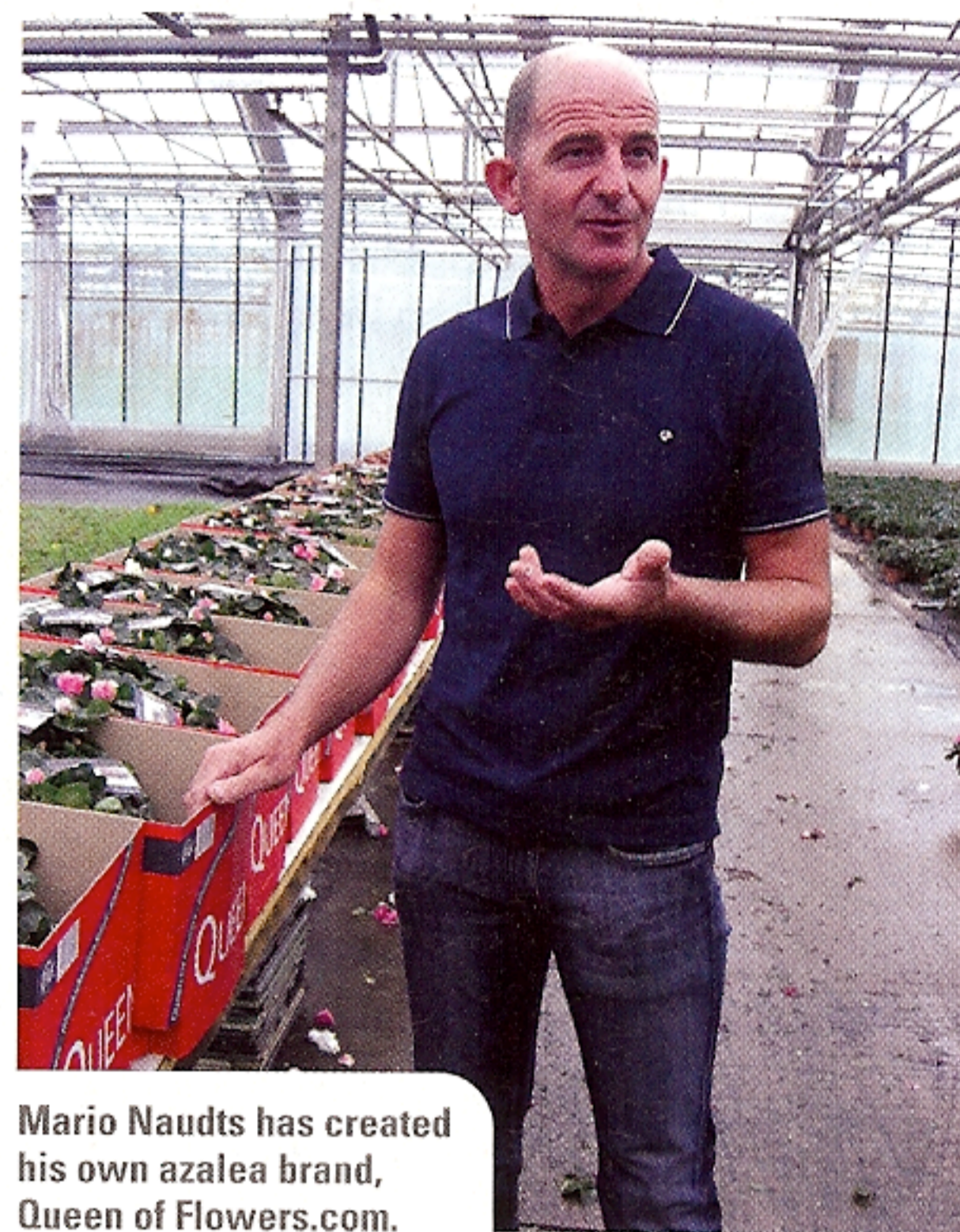
He is a member of FloraHolland and has created his own brand in the Dutch auction rooms with the red boxed, Queen of Flowers.com labelled azaleas. Naudts is a natural marketer who has cleverly combined his own passion for modern design with the marketing experiences of his brother and sister in the fashion world. "In the 1990s azalea sales were paralysed by an overwhelming trend to categorise the azalea as a traditional plant," says Naudts. His disbelief in the azalea stereotyping triggered his

interest in creating a refreshing, new image for the azalea which the consumer could access. "Modern societies are inspired by photographic images," says Naudts. "I therefore decided to launch a website for consumers where the Queen of Flowers was visually positioned as a decorative plant for classical, contemporary or modern interiors. Visits to garden centres in the Netherlands, France, Scandinavia and the UK were first used to better understand the retail culture in different countries and judge the consumers buying habits – *Which presentations persuaded the customers to stop and buy?*" Naudts and his wife also drew inspiration from studying lifestyle trends in general – with visits to high fashion cities, such as Milan and Paris. That was four years ago. "Today, the website is available in eight languages, but tracking the visitor hits has shown us that the site has been accessed from 30 different countries and the pages with images (rather than text) are the most popular," adds Naudts. A revised website is being launched this year. To reinforce the Queen of Flowers image of his nursery, all azaleas leave the premises with their own photographic label. Naudts currently has several different label designs depicting various lifestyles. "Our next step will be to work towards seasonal campaigns, starting with



Christmas," explains Naudts. The priority is to continue providing retail and the consumer with visual inspiration on how to use the azalea which importantly avoids any language barriers. Naudts stresses, "I do believe in presenting azaleas in a *pure* form, rather than in combinations with other ornamentals, and in our presentations, while the colour selections for the decorative pots can vary tremendously from bright colours to earthy outdoor styles brought indoors, you can see our emphasis on having the azaleas sitting deep in the pots." Apart from the individual plant labels, Naudts says, "Recognition in the supply chain is as important as at retail, and so I also introduced the red Queen of Flowers boxes for transportation and movement through the auction rooms." His marketing flair has worked; Naudts confirms that the price for Queen of Flowers was 40% up on the

The Queen of Flowers brand is visually positioned on the consumer website as a decorative plant for classical, contemporary or modern interiors.



Mario Naudts has created his own azalea brand, Queen of Flowers.com.

average auction price for potted azaleas in 2007. He adds, "We are very strict on our plant selection and do not receive claims from our clients." Naudts ambition is to continue developing his Queen of Flowers brand; he is introducing an "inspiration booklet" for his clients and investigating sleeving options. In terms of production, he intends to continue with his very regular deliveries to the auctions; however a limited supply is in line with his exclusive image and supply of a quality product to his trusting clients. >>>