



CONFESSIONS OF A JUDGE

Den Seamen admits all about the day he donned a wig, picked up a gavel and went rooting through the gravel – as an adjudicator in our home aquarium competition

Bright and early on the morning of the 9th of May, 1999, Ilford's Mike Brill and Martin Howells of East London fishkeeping club came to my house. We faced an interesting and in some respects, difficult task, considering the standard of entries: to judge the eight final entrants in the final of the home aquaria competition.

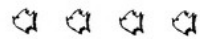
For me, this was a particularly interesting day: I have been in the final of the competition since 1963 so I have not had the opportunity to judge before. I was really looking forward to it. Here's what we saw that morning. No names, no pack drill, but you'll probably recognise your own set-up if you entered.

Tank No 1: The first aquarium on our list was a large bow front, set-up in the Dutch style. There was no doubt from our first glance: this was a nice design, well achieved. But not totally perfect at closer inspection, with a minor criticism on the rocks and wood. We thought a few large rocks or some driftwood would have been better than slate. But the tank was clean and the water crystal clear, but it lost a point as the water level was a shade low. The plants were in good condition, and I admired the red of the *Cryptocoryne Willisii* set against the green of the *Cordamine* and *Wisteria*. And excellent fish completed this high-scoring entry.

Tank No 2: was a six-foot tank that has done very well in previous competitions – but not this year. The water was not clear and the plants had algae on them. Nevertheless, there were some nice blue discus in the tank, and this set-up could easily be brought back to its old self.

Tank No 3: was a new, or almost new, 4ft tank. It is said that a first impression is the one that counts. In this case, the impression was of a sparkling and brightly set-up aquarium. As you looked closely at the tank, however, there were a few things wrong – but not many. Plants were nice and the fish fine, with some good-sized swordtails.

Tank No 4: This was the home of one of our newer members. We did not



know what we were going to find, but it was a pleasant surprise: a nicely designed 4ft bow-fronted set-up. It could do with a few more plants and rocks, and the fish were good, but the aquarium was a little overstocked so their respiration rate was up. But overall a clear and clean tank, winning a commendable 4th place.

Tanks 5 and 6: Next we judged two entries in the same house – father and son. Dad's aquarium was a somewhat flat design and could do with some large rocks. His fish were good, with some handsome dwarf cichlids that caught the eye. Now to the son: a difficult aquarium to set-up – a 24inx24inx12in tank, made to stand on its end, making it 24in deep. But this was a nice try on design – and with more light to make the plants grow it might become a stunner. It was one of two entries from juniors that made the final.

Tank No 7: the other junior next – both boys kept their tanks in their bedrooms. This one was a 3ft aquarium with a bit of design to it. But more plants would really help it mature into a more attractive waterscape. The fish were generally excellent, however, and the tank was well-maintained, clean and tidy.

Tank No 8: Last but definitely not least. A 6ft aquarium with lots and lots of plants – talk about not being able to see the wood for the trees! There was no design as such to this set-up – it was all wall-to-wall greenery, despite the presence of a few unusual red rocks. At first we could not see the fish, but when you peered between the plants they became visible. And what a sight: shoals and shoals of magnificent tetras and barbs – and the plants were in peak condition too.

Tank No 9: a very small set-up this one – a circular container containing just one pint of watery liquid and set on a table. However, it was a peaty brown colour and there was considerable foam on the top. Fortunately there were no fish or plants in it (so far as we noticed) so we drank the contents and mulled over what we had seen that morning. Cheers!

Den Seaman