Join the “Micro Experiment”
How many of you in the ADS have opened your 2019 ADS Classification and Handbook of Dahlias (CHD) yet? This CHD is different! Take a look at page 14. My first reaction was what the heck are all those “M’s?!” The answer is that they provide a new class number for every form (except two) in a “micro” size, less than 2” in diameter. The two exceptions are the two where a micro size already exists: balls (P) and singles (MS). You will find that pages 4 through 6 in the CHD provide the definitions for the various micro forms. They are the same as the normal forms but are limited to 2” in diameter.

The objective of this five-year experiment is to encourage the growth and the distribution of evolving tiny dahlias. At the end of that time, the Classification Committee will either adopt or drop the new classes. I suppose they might also extend the experiment in the Forms where the most new cultivars are being shown. In the meantime, look for new opportunities to show tiny dahlias of all forms, in addition to P and MS blooms. I would anticipate that the classes would likely be joined together like in Fully Double and Open-Centered classes.

Robert Walker [MC FD DB (5013)] at right, is one of very few micros in the CHD. It looks like a P from the front but the ray florets must flatten out near the equator and beyond—to make it FD.

The success of the experiment could have long-term effects on the future of the ADS. Like Mignon Single plants, the micro dahlias tend to be small plants that can readily be grown in pots. If we were to succeed in
interesting “patio gardeners” to join the ADS and participate in our shows, we might substantially broaden our membership base.

We may be called upon to judge a micro class this summer. Don’t panic. Just follow exactly the same criteria you use for evaluating any other size class. You definitely want to reward diminutiveness [Guide to Judging Dahlias (GJD), p. 32]. Size may come to be a critical question in the process. There are only about 20 micros listed in the 2019 CHD, so you are likely to have a mixture of those micros plus new cultivars plus small cultivars classified as Miniatures or one of the Open-Centered forms. Those Miniatures or Open-Centered entries should be set back or moved to the right class if they are larger than 2”. Seedlings should probably be given the benefit of the doubt up to perhaps 2.5”. They might, in the long run, be classified as micros.

Judging Trueness to Form in Stellars
The ideal definition for the Stellar form includes several important characteristics: long, narrow, and pointed ray florets; space between the ray florets; a uniform regular arrangement; a partially involute U-shaped cross-section; and recurving toward the stem. Note, too, that the minimum depth for a ST is half the diameter, unlike most fully double cultivars that require 3/4 the diameter. Remember that, if you are judging a seedling, trueness to form comprises only 5 of the 28 Form points. On the show bench, however, the deviations from that ideal definition could determine the winner of the class. What are those associated Form faults? Answer: Just the opposite of the foregoing list including wide ray florets with a round tip, a high petal count producing a very dense set of ray florets and, perhaps, great depth, an “informal” appearing distribution of florets, and flat rather than U-shaped florets.

Try to rank order these blooms on the basis of their “elevation” on Form mountain. Camano Pet, at right, is the cultivar that
served as the starting point for the creation of the Stellar class. Consequently, the definition was largely written around it, and it would be near the top of the Stellar Form mountain. How do the three blooms below deviate from this ideal? The orange bloom on the left exhibits ray florets that are clearly U-shaped, but they are somewhat irregularly distributed around the bloom. They give an appearance of an “informal” stellar, rather than a “formal” stellar. The yellow bloom, in the middle, has narrow pointed ray florets but they are certainly not U-shaped up near the front of the bloom. No doubt they are more U-shaped near the equator of the bloom but they don’t show in this picture. As always, a picture is a difficult basis for classification, but there would appear to be no “extra” space between the ray florets here. They are closely packed, at least from the front view. The florets also exhibit some of the irregular arrangement as the orange bloom.

What deviations from the ideal form definition do you find on the bi-color bloom? The ray florets are long and narrow, but they certainly are not pointed. They are arranged uniformly in a “formal” manner. There is space between the florets. In addition, the florets have a partially involute, U-shaped cross-section. The bottom line, at least as far as we can tell from the picture, is that this bi-colored bloom deviates from ideal form only in that the tips of the florets are not particularly pointed.

Now, if we could only put those pointed tips from any of the other blooms on the end of the bi-color, we would have a nearly perfect match to the ideal definition. My answer to the foregoing ranking question would be that the bicolor and Camano Pet are close to the mountain peak. The orange is down the hill a bit and the yellow is down far enough to deserve a failing score on “True Form.” Judges: What is a failing score on True Form? (GJD, p.40)