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Picking Petals; A Floral Designers Guide to Finding YOUR Floral Identity

What an exciting time to "write another chapter" of your life: your wedding! Some have dreamed of what the day would entail since they were little. Others do not know where to start planning. Flowers will play an important role in your special day though. They not only add beauty and decoration but they also showcase your personality and tell your story for years to come.

In the age of technology which we live, brides have many resources to draw upon to harvest ideas for the composition of their wedding flower arrangements. Unfortunately however, when beginning the planning process, wedding magazines and websites, which promise to highlight the latest trends in floral fashion, are not always the best places to start. It has been my experience that many magazines and websites tend to showcase magnificent floral pieces which are actually very complicated and are from sophisticated events whose costs were tens of thousands of dollars. It is therefore unrealistic for the average bride to be expected to pay for or be able to afford such designs. In addition, the magazine's publication date(s) may not coincide with the time of year a couple reading the publication will be having their wedding, so the flowers in the designs they are seeing may simply be unavailable. A professional and experienced Floral Designer however, will be able to achieve the theme, feel and ambiance that the bridal couple is striving for by using a much more realistic approach to flower selection and design technique. I hear so many times that peonies or cherry blossom branches are a must (these are seen often in magazines). My solution to this for a couple getting married mid to late summer or fall is to incorporate silk versions of these flowers with fresh flowers. Many quality silks today look like actual live flowers and are fast becoming an affordable alternative for hard to get or out of season stems.

Another recent trend in floral event decorations is to change the shape of pieces to create character, dimension and visual appeal. I have used this concept numerous times when working with couples that desired tall impressive "statement making" centerpieces that their budget would not allow. To achieve the desired look, and provide their desired theme, half of the reception tables had the fabulous "statement making" tall centerpieces and the other half had creatively designed lower centerpieces. Alternating the high / low layout around the venue and incorporating the same flowers through both types of arrangements help tie in a theme and provide a consistent feel. In one instance, Gerbera and Roses in bright orange and raspberry colors positioned in mist of full white Hydrangea balls along with loops of variegated Lily Grass is the base of the tall and low centerpieces. The tall vases had ice crystals and colored stones securing curly willow stems and a Gerbera to be seen peeking out thru the inside of the cylinder vase. The vase filled with water was topped off with sheet moss disguising the mechanics for the floral display incorporating Dendrobium Orchids and twists of Curly Willow whimsically flowing out of the Gerbera, Roses, Hydrangea and variegated Lily Grass Base. Shorter cylinder vases had a tighter ball style arrangement showing the gems and ice crystals in the bottom. An added bonus was that guests could see thru and over centerpieces to talk with others on the opposite side of their table.

Another trend which is emerging is the incorporation of lighting into arrangements. Votive Candles, Floating Candles, along with disposable and reusable floral lights create instant romantic ambience. Lighting can be used with simple arrangements to create an elegant and sophisticated (but inexpensive) look, while using submersible floral lights in taller or complicated pieces can add a very dramatic look. You can also consider personalizing glass vases and glass votive holders with double faced satin ribbon and a monogrammed emblem. This is often done when taking advantage of another popular trend: having the centerpieces be of multiple pieces so they can also be used as party favors!

Couples who are trying to stretch their floral budget dollars are also creating some new trends. Using the toss bouquet as the cake topper decoration for instance has become very popular

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lately. Many couples also have ceremony pew or chair decorations serve double duty by decorating the reception cocktail tables or reception facility furniture with these same pieces later in the event. Simple ideas such as these are increasingly popular among cost-conscious couples today who want to get the most out of their beloved floral pieces. Another idea is to have designs which incorporate bud vases with large headed single flower stems and tea lights in glass holders for certain areas (like fireplace mantels) that need some floral decorations but not necessarily a full arrangement.

According to the "Society of American Florists and the American Institute of Floral Designers", three popular bridal trends that they recognize as emerging are: "Royal Garden, Romantic Sophistication and Contemporary Chic." 1 Royal Garden portrays an outside summer wedding under a trellis or in a gazebo with flowering vines and lilies. Beautifully landscaped grounds have been the backdrop for my creatively built four posted Chuppah (with the families' "talismans" incorporated) and partial two column canopies. This creates a magical setting for the ceremony and family photos afterward. This is also cost effective since they are rental items. The neutral sheer and textured material can be enhanced with branches, vines, greens and flowers coordinating to the overall wedding theme.

Romantic Sophistication incorporates roses, rose petals, variegated ivy and silk streamers. Using a florist familiar with your venue is an asset since many venues have specific rules and regulations regarding the use, types allowed and placement of event decorations. For instance, some facilities prefer fresh rose petals not be used to prevent damage to linens, rugs, or the finish of their dance floor. Quality silk rose petals can then be used and are available in a rainbow of colors. They truly provide the appearance of the real thing. When purchased in bulk, extra petals may also be enjoyed in the couples' home after the event.

Contemporary Chic uses Callas and variegated or green Lily Grass loops. Thru the years Calla Lilies have been as popular as Roses for the brides that I have had the pleasure of working with. They are so beautiful alone or unique with peacock feathers added for example. Callas, which are available year round, compliment designs no matter the season. Raspberry tones brighten Spring and Summer bouquets and boutonnieres while yellow and orange Callas add character to black Bacara Roses and Yellow Kangaroo Paw in Fall and Winter wedding event work.

Some trends have remained constant in event floral arrangements. Traditional rose with hydrangea bouquets will always be in style. It is the extra attention to fine details of how to wrap the bouquets as well as individual touches that stand out and personalize the event. Over the years I have had to pleasure of being asked to incorporate some "special and unique" items into bridal pieces. Three different items that stand out to me are: the bride's deceased fathers' wedding ring so that the father would be symbolically present at the event. Another bride's Mother supplied blue ribbon from an outfit belonging to the bride when she was a little girl. (So meaningful and special to have the something old and something blue combined together.) A third bride requested her Grandmother's handkerchief be used in her bouquet. This was done by using the handkerchief as a wrap in the bride's bouquet with complimenting sheer ribbon French knotted to hold the handkerchief in place.

Dress Styles, colors of the season, which types of flowers are "in style". These are trends which may come and go. One thing that has been constant and will not change however is how an event can be transformed from special to magical with the incorporation of the right flowers: your flowers.

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1 Society of American Florists. *Floral Trends- Bridal Trends: Fashion Wedded to Flowers*. Localized on September 28, 2008 on the World Wide Web: <http://www.aboutflowers.com/wedding.html>