

Slow Flowers JOURNAL

PRODUCED AND WRITTEN BY DEBRA PRINZING

PHOTOS BY ALEX BROOKS, BECCA HENRY, MEGAN SPELMAN,
JOSHUA VELDSTRA AND LEON VILLAGOMEZ

Field to Fashion

In its fourth year, American Flowers Week celebrates U.S.-grown (and foraged) botanicals with five fresh, inspiring and handcrafted couture looks.

American Flowers Week burst onto the floral scene in 2015, and its significance and influence has grown ever since, attracting participation across all channels of domestic flowers – from seeds to bouquets to beautiful floral fashions.

Social media engagement from florists, designers, retailers, wholesalers and flower farms posting on Instagram and Twitter generated more than 5 million impressions during the 2017 campaign, giving the hash tag #americanflowersweek top-of-mind presence, up from 1.2 million impressions the prior year.

Planning for the **2018 American Flowers Week** floral fashion collection began almost immediately after the 2017 campaign ended. I was lucky to be on location in Homer, Alaska, last July, when floral designer **Kelly Shore**, of **Petals by the Shore** in Damascus, Md., teamed up with peony farmer **Beth Van Sandt**, co-owner of **Scenic Place Peonies** in Homer. Together, these creative women envisioned a styled shoot that reflected in-season, just-picked peonies and a story line to mirror the character and geography of Homer, which appears on Pages 66 and 67.

Producing this amazing collection of American-grown floral fashions continued through the subsequent months, including an October photo shoot celebrating *Dahlia*s in Sonoma County; a January woodland narrative reliant upon one designer's penchant for foraging from the forests of the Pacific Northwest; a March session on the Big Island paying homage to tropical flowers and foliages of Hawaii; and later that month, a tribute to the iconic *Iris*, straight from the greenhouses of Arcata, Calif.

It is a privilege and honor to present five compelling looks and the behind-the-scenes stories about the people and floral passions that fill these pages. The inventiveness and creativity expressed by the **Slow Flowers** community – flower farmers and floral designers alike – elevates American-grown botanicals to new levels. To learn more about these designs, the floral artists, the farms and their flowers, you can find bonus content at americanflowersweek.com and in the *Florists' Review* digital edition for June at floristsreview.com.

A Celebration of American Flowers

June 28 - July 4, 2018

Launched in 2015, **American Flowers Week** is the advocacy, education and outreach campaign produced by **Slow Flowers** to promote and commemorate domestic flowers, flower farming and floral design. Find free resources and promotional material at americanflowersweek.com.

Alaska's Freshest Catch of Peonies

Peony farming keeps pace with commercial fishing as important income source for Homer.

In July, **Kelly Shore**, of Damascus, Md.-based **Petals by the Shore**, and **Beth Van Sandt**, co-owner with her husband **Kurt Weichhand** of Homer, Alaska-based **Scenic Place Peonies**, documented a quintessential moment for Alaska-grown peonies, all in celebration of **American Flowers Week**.

Their peony-centric collaborations occurred when Kelly traveled to Homer as the featured floral designer for the **Field to Vase Dinner** at Scenic Place Peonies. She also designed and produced a romantic styled shoot photographed in the farm's peony fields (which appeared in *Florists' Review* in October 2017).

"I met Beth and Kurt when they came to volunteer at last year's First Lady's Luncheon in Washington, DC," Kelly explains. "It made me want to learn more about what they do, to immerse myself in the farm culture and understand what makes Alaska's peonies different than peonies here in the lower 48."

Homer is known as "The City of Peonies" in acknowledgment of the attention the flower has brought to local agriculture, business and tourism. Yet, Homer is also known for its dynamic fishing industry, which touches Beth and Kurt's lives as personally as peonies. Beth wanted the American Flowers Week photo shoot to reflect Homer's two economic engines – commercial fishing and peony farming. "I grow the flowers, and Kurt harvests wild Alaska salmon, and we're passionate about both catches," she points out.

Brainstorming led to a thoroughly unique peony experience, documented on the docks and shoreline of Homer's small boat harbor. The women envisioned a "catch" of peonies gathered in seine netting traditionally employed in commercial fishing. Using a repurposed seining net, Kelly attached a medley of white, cream, blush and pink peonies to appear just-gathered from the water's surface.

Lush and fully opened, the peonies represent the best of the season. Beth explains that, "Because of our cooler temperatures and our outrageous hours of sunlight, not to mention our fantastic soil, our peonies grow extremely well, and we get beautiful, vibrant colors."

Kelly and award-winning Alaska photographer **Joshua Veldstra** scouted for just the right boat to help tell their story visually. "I was so adamant about finding a boat with the 'HOMER' name on it," Kelly insisted. "I had this whole



vision of the pink flowers popping off the blueness of the water and the sky and the glaciers. And I love seeing this feminine flower against the ruggedness of that maritime setting."

Ashley Johnson, a flower-farmer-in-training who spent the summer as an intern at Scenic Place Peonies, agreed to model for the peony-and-fishing storyline. She wore a pair of white bib overalls, the female version of the bright orange Grundens overalls typically worn by commercial fishing pros and many peony farmers. "I wanted the net of peonies to almost be part of Ashley's attire, as if she was pulling up this teeming catch of flowers," Kelly says. Adding peony petals to the suspender straps and adorning Ashley's head with a full crown of peonies further incorporated the flowers.

Homer's famous Kachemak Bay and the majestic glaciers in the distance are a constant presence for Homer's fishing and flower farming cultures, Beth points out. "While I'm harvesting peonies in my field, Kurt is harvesting for fish in the inlet. The two seasons are pretty much parallel."

Scenic Place Peonies' crew begins cutting peonies during the second week of July and continues to the second week of August. About 1.5 acres are devoted to growing 6,000 peony plants representing 14 varieties.

Caring for this very special place on the planet, where glaciers meet ocean, and seafood and flowers are gifts from nature, is of utmost importance to Beth and Kurt. Scenic Place Peonies is a Certified Naturally Grown farm, reflecting its sustainable practices. "I want to be able to put my face in my peonies and not have to worry about inhaling chemicals. I want to smell the scent of my peonies and touch them and connect on all the senses," Beth maintains.

For Kelly, her time spent in Homer's peony world was deeply moving. "I felt such a connection, and I wanted to express how being there influenced me. That meant making sure every part of my art and my creativity was representative of the location."



CREDITS

Floral Palette: Peony flowers and petals, Scenic Place Peonies (Homer, Alaska) scenicplacepeonies.com, @scenicplacepeonies

Designer: Kelly Shore; Petals by the Shore; Damascus, Md. petalsbytheshore.com, @petalsbytheshore

Design assistance: Lisa Thorne; Thorne & Thistle; Auburn, Ala. thorneandthistles.com, @thorneandthistle

Models: Ashley Johnson, @ah.schlee

Hair/Makeup: Elizabeth Morphis, Scenic Place Peonies

Apparel: Donated by Grundens, shop.grundens.com @grundens

Photography: Joshua and Brittney Veldstra joshuaveldstra.com, @joshuaveldstra

Location: Homer Small Boat Harbor; Homer, Alaska





Local Designers Say Aloha with Flowers

The Big Island offers a tropical color palette for big floral dreams.

The flora of the Big Island of Hawaii provided **Alison Grace Higgins**, owner of **Grace Flowers Hawaii** in Honoka’a, and manager **Nicole Cordier**, a complex palette with which to dream up their remarkable his-and-hers botanical garments.

With the island’s plant life as artistic muse, the Grace Flowers Hawaii team wanted their designs to celebrate both familiar and uncommon flowers and plants. They used gradient color banding to “weave” an intricate tapestry incorporating locally harvested *Anthuriums*, gingers, orchids, birds-of-paradise and dozens of other types of petals, pods, leaves and deconstructed flower parts.

These floral artists were clearly influenced by the botanical landscape of the Hawaiian Islands and Polynesian culture. Yet the majestic garments they devised are not costumes. Instead, the dramatic cape modeled by **Na’iwi Young**, owner of **Olowalu Entertainment**, a local firm known for Polynesian entertainment, and a hi-low-style skirt worn by **Kayla Maluhia Kawai**, a Luau dancer, stage actress and artist, reflect Hawaii’s horticultural diversity found in the natural landscape, cultivated gardens and small agricultural plots that supply flowers to the studio.

“We started with the color scheme, which we wanted to be bold,” Alison explains. She chose to avoid pastel hues, which the shop often works with for destination wedding clients.

Both Nicole’s playful skirt design and the masculine cloak that Alison created draw from an audacious floral spectrum that ranges from spiced orange, flamboyant purple, hot fuchsia and vivid canary yellow to glossy green and burgundy foliage choices.

Together, rows of floral pieces form rhythmic bands, the sheer variety of which is staggering, considering that botanical elements were individually glued in overlapping rows onto the garments’ cloth foundations. Alison estimates that each piece took about two full days to produce. The designers kept the garments rather simple, attaching them to the models’ bodies with drawstrings, and used minimal black garments (sarong and a bandeau top) that basically disappear as the vibrant florals move to the foreground.

“There is a strong influence of wearing flowers here in Hawaii, although rarely on this scale,” Nicole acknowledges. Grace Flowers Hawaii regularly designs leis for ceremonies



and occasions, but for this production, strands and strands of single-variety “jewelry” take on a fashion-forward vibe with blue jade vine, birds-of-paradise, kissing crowns, *Camellia* buds, *Cymbidium* orchids, Spanish moss and other unexpected ingredients. “We were all hands on deck with the lei-making – I think every employee made one strand,” Alison says.

The elaborate Lei Po’o (also known as head lei) lends a regal quality to the finished designs, framing the models’ striking faces and completing the floral narrative. When it came to location, Alison, Nicole and photographer **Megan Spelman**, of **Bikini Birdie**, were drawn to a hard-to-reach cliff above the Kohala Coast.

“I wanted something that showed Hawaii but not just palm trees and white beaches,” Alison says. “This is a special place where you can actually walk from the cliffs down to the river bed and the ocean.”

There was just enough breeze to catch Kayla’s hair and lift the cloak from Na’iwi Young’s shoulders, lending a moody, cinematic quality to Megan’s photography. The dramatic fashion shoot expresses the sense of local pride that motivates Alison and her staff at Grace Flowers Hawaii. Flower farms and nurseries on the Big Island supported the idea of an all-Hawaii-grown fashion shoot to commemorate American Flowers Week.

“We wanted to source as close to home as we could, so everything was grown locally on the Big Island,” Alison says. “We put our hearts and souls into these designs.”



CREDITS

Floral Palette: Tropical and temperate flowers, foliage and botanicals grown on Hawaii’s Big Island, including lantern ilima (*Abutilon*), Spanish moss, *Calathea* leaves, fiddlehead ferns, ti leaves, *Cymbidium* orchids, statice, snapdragons, *Dianthus*, *Anthuriums*, *Epidendrum* orchids, hanging fuzzy *Heliconias*, bottlebrush, fishtail palm, blue jade vine, crown flower, *Kalanchoe*, foxtail Agave, *Camellia*, ginger, *Bougainvillea*, bromeliads, pincushions and croton leaves.

Designers: Alison Grace Higgins (owner) and Nicole Cordier (manager), Grace Flowers Hawaii (Honoka’a, Hawaii), graceflowersthawaii.com; [@graceflowersthawaii](https://www.instagram.com/graceflowersthawaii)

Florals supplied by: J&D Farms (Kamuela), Pacific Floral Exchange (Hilo), Hawaii Isle Flowers (Volcano), The Orchid People (Kamuela), ESP Nurseries (Kamuela) and High Country Farms (Pa’auilo Mauka).

Models: Na’iwi Young and Kayla Maluhia Kawai

Hair/Makeup: Gracia Malendres, Grace Makeup Artistry

Photography: Meghan Spelman, Bikini Birdie Photography bikinibirdie.com, [@bikinibirdie](https://www.instagram.com/bikinibirdie)

Location: Kohala Coast, Big Island, Hawaii



Woodland Couture

Farmer-florist uses nature to forage for new design materials and inspiration.

In Montana, flower farmers and florists who adhere to the Slow Flowers mission have learned to broaden their definition of what's seasonal. For **Carly Jenkins**, of **Killing Frost Farm**, a farmer-florist-forager based in Missoula, Mont., that means viewing every single gift from the forest as a design element.

Carly's reliance on foraging was inspiration for her wearable botanical creation, which draws from design materials used to create her wildly popular "Game of Thrones" holiday wreath series. Her favorite ingredients are sheets of moss and patches of lichen in many shades from gray to green. When accented by glossy, chestnut-colored scales of deconstructed ponderosa pine cones, the gown represents a botanical palette unique to much of North America's woodlands – the organic debris found on the forest floor.

Creating a wearable and attractive garment with such humble materials was part of the challenge. "At the same time, I didn't want it to be too literal. I wanted you to look at this dress from a distance and see a beautiful textile rather than thinking, 'Oh, that's lichen in the shape of a dress,'" she says.

Carly began with a floor-length fitted sheath as the first layer and added a three-tiered overskirt to define the shape of her garment. She fashioned elbow-to-wrist "gauntlets" for the forearms and a cropped "shrug" to adorn the shoulders, upper arms and neckline.

"I definitely wanted to create a beautiful gown, but something that also felt strong and fierce," the designer explains. "I was obsessed with how the gauntlets could look like armor. Rather than having beauty and strength be mutually exclusive, I wanted to see them together. To me, this look is a little 'Joan of Arc meets Queen of Hearts.'"

In early January, Carly set out from Missoula, her car packed with foraged woodland materials, a six-foot roll of chicken wire, her tool box, glue gun and the completed gauntlets (look closely, and you'll see how she glued hundreds of scales onto two black tube socks).

She brought along **Katherine Sherba**, of Missoula-based **Mighty Fine Farm**, with whom she co-founded the **Westside Flower Market**, a farmer-to-florist wholesale hub serving Missoula and beyond.

For two days, the women set up shop in space donated



by the **Seattle Wholesale Growers Market**, cutting, tearing and gluing pieces of acid green moss and verdigris-toned lichen, forming textural skirts, bodice and shrug. The lichen-adorned sheath fit close to model **Berkeley Danysh's** body while the overskirt's lovely silhouette was formed by chicken wire shaped with deep darts and twig dogwood "boning" to wrap around her hips.

"We had no idea how to tie on the outer skirt until the morning of the photo shoot," Carly explains. "That's when I grabbed rustic crown wire and wove it through the chicken wire, cinching it tightly around Berkeley's waist."

Embellished in layers of lichen, the shrug-style shoulder piece includes a standing collar that echoes the pine-cone gauntlets and conveys the impression of a female warrior's "armor." Carly finished the look with a dramatic, Medieval-inspired moss wrap to frame the model's face.

The setting at **Old Goat Farm** in Orting, Wash., is as mossy and lichen-clad as Carly's fanciful woodland gown. As on most days during the Pacific Northwest's winter months, it was drizzly and overcast. But through the lens of photographer **Alex Brooks**, the model, garment and setting exude a rich glow, perhaps from the mossy patina unique to time and place.

CREDITS

Floral Palette: Pacific Northwest-foraged moss, lichen and pine cones

Production support: Seattle Wholesale Growers Market (Seattle, Wash.), @seattlewholesalegrowersmarket

Designer: Carly Jenkins, Killing Frost Farm (Missoula, Mont.) @killingfrostfarm

Assistant: Katherine Sherba, Mighty Fine Farm (Missoula, Mont.), @mightyfinefarm

Model: Berkeley Danysh, TCM Models and Talent, tcmodels.com

Hair/Makeup: Carly Jenkins

Photography: Alex Brooks @alex_brks

Location: Old Goat Farm; Orting, Wash.



The Allure of Dahlias

Appeal of *Dahlias* burns bright against Tubbs Fire background.

Against the backdrop of the October 2017 Tubbs Fire that decimated large areas of Northern California’s wine country, *Dahlia* farmer **Kate Rowe**, of **Aztec Dahlias** in Petaluma, Calif., and farmer-florist **Hedda Brorstrom**, of **Full Bloom Farm** in nearby Sebastopol, produced a loving homage to *Dahlias* for **American Flowers Week**.

This story takes place at Aztec Dahlias, located just minutes from the local airport where a constant stream of fire-fighting helicopters took off and landed, lending noise and stirring up dust. According to both women, the decision to not cancel the photo shoot was a defiant act against the fires.

“It was the best thing that we could have possibly done, even though it was a crazy time, and smoke and ash filled the air,” Hedda says. With a motivation to “make it work,” despite the constant threat of being evacuated or worse, Kate and her business partner, **Omar Duran**, wanted to showcase Aztec Dahlias’ flowers and support the American Flowers Week botanical fashion shoot.

“We pride ourselves on having the largest selection of high-quality *Dahlias* you can purchase in our area, so this project was a great way to share our flowers for something wonderful. Even with the fires, the timing was perfect. We had this abundance in the fields, and the idea of making a dress out of them was so much fun,” Kate says.

The farm donated more than 350 stems to Hedda and a small team of volunteers who adorned the extraordinary skirt from waist to hem in a vibrant gradient of flowers. At the time, the farmers were close to wrapping up their first full season growing *Dahlias* as cut flowers, tubers and plants. Last year, Aztec Dahlias grew 5,200 plants, representing more than 400 varieties of *Dahlias*. This year, Kate has bumped the total to 7,800 *Dahlias* for cutting, with plans to sell most flowers direct to florists and also through the **Sonoma Flower Mart**.

Hedda has designed and made floral wearables in the past, so she knew that having a fitted bodice would be a flattering complement to the model’s body. “*Dahlias* are so fluffy, so I made a top to fit snugly and covered it with lamb’s-ear and dusty miller foliage, pieces of moss and ruffles of *Santolina* around the hem.” She glued layers of leaves in an overlapping pattern, using the backside to show the veins of each leaf. The succulent “belt” was originally intended as a headpiece, fashioned from a strip

of soft leather. Its gray-green palette complements the smooth herbal leaves and helps define the model’s waist.

To create the *Dahlia* skirt, Hedda laughingly says she began with an image of her favorite childhood birthday cake. “I had a Barbie cake growing up – you know how the cake is like a big dress and then there’s this little doll coming up out of the middle?”

She re-imagined the stacked layers of a birthday cake with an exaggerated circumference (held in place with a hidden hula hoop attached to the gopher wire form). By the time it was finished, the skirt practically stood on its own, and model **Sophia Lane** was able to step inside.

The gradient *Dahlia* palette – from burgundy to blush to white – echoes “about six weddings I designed last summer,” Hedda says. “It was such a big year for those colors, so I was used to playing with them and mixing them. The idea of starting with the burgundy-red *Dahlias* at the waist – an element that looked hot and smoldering and fiery – then moving into the peachy pink down into the whites, which look cool and softer, was inspired by what was going on in Sonoma County at the time.”

Rather than photographing in Aztec Dahlias’ fields where the dress might have disappeared against rows of flowers, Hedda and photographer **Becca Henry** chose a rustic barn as the iconic agricultural backdrop to silhouette model and dress. According to Kate, the barn is owned by her landlords and has “been in support of a flower farm for a very long time, since **Neve Bros. Roses** used to own it.”

Both Kate and Hedda say they were deeply moved by the visceral response to flowers from people in their community who were threatened by the wildfires. “We decided that week of the fire that it felt kind of insane to be in business selling flowers, so we gave away everything we grew,” Kate says. “At a core level, we learned how important the role flowers play in people’s lives.”

The *Dahlia* dress symbolizes creativity, collaboration and a celebration of community, Hedda adds. “There’s this profound intimacy that you experience seeing an image of someone wearing an outfit made of plants,” Hedda says. “We don’t often interact with wild lands because we’re so detached from nature. This project helps call that relationship into question and reminds us that we’re not separate from nature but part of nature.”



CREDITS

Floral Palette: 350 *Dahlias*, Aztec Dahlias (Petaluma, Calif.) aztecdahlias.com, [@aztec_dahlias](https://www.instagram.com/aztec_dahlias); herbs and succulents Full Bloom Farm (Sebastopol, Calif.) fullbloomflower.com [@fullbloomflowerfarm](https://www.instagram.com/fullbloomflowerfarm)

Designer: Hedda Brorstrom, Full Bloom Farm

Harvesting/Production Assistance: MaryAnn Nardo, 7 Petals Floral Design, San Rafael, Calif. [@7petalsdesign](https://www.instagram.com/7petalsdesign) Sarah Reyes, Unfurled Design, Hayward, Calif. [@unfurleddesign](https://www.instagram.com/unfurleddesign); Dan’yell Powell [@danyellily](https://www.instagram.com/danyellily)

Model: Sophia Lane (with assistance from Amanda Lane), [@sophialane](https://www.instagram.com/sophialane)

Hair/Makeup: Sophia Lane

Photography: Becca Henry, beccahenryphotography.com, [@becca.henry.photography](https://www.instagram.com/becca.henry.photography)

Location: Aztec Dahlias, Petaluma, California





Ode to the Iris

Single-color flower creates impact in stunning final piece for photo shoot.

Faye Zierer Krause, of **Flora Organica Designs** in Arcata, Calif., considers the standard *Iris* a bit of an underdog. But having grown up on her parents' organic farm before starting her floral design studio in 2015, she finds appreciation for the best traits of any plant. "I love the saturation of purple and dark blue that *Irises* have," she says.

Like Faye, flower farmer **Lane DeVries**, CEO of **Sun Valley Floral Farms**, also in Arcata, has a nostalgic affection for *Irises*. When he first arrived in America in 1984 and began working at the farm that he now runs, *Irises* were an important field crop. These days, Sun Valley is one of the leading *Iris* growers in the U.S, producing standard *Irises* 12 months of the year.

"I think *Irises* are ready for a revival," Lane proclaims. "The *Iris* is one of those old flowers having a comeback."

In 2017, Sun Valley Flower Farm hosted a **Field to Vase Dinner** inside its greenhouses and asked Faye to serve as guest floral designer. In addition to using a rainbow of tulips for the table décor and chandeliers, she created a dramatic *Iris* "curtain" where dinner guests clamored to take selfies. Faye tied hundreds of standard *Irises* onto agricultural netting typically used to support the flower's slender stalks as they grow. The stunning blue botanical backdrop impressed many attendees, myself included.

So I knew Faye's artistic sensibilities would be compatible with this commission. While planning for the **American Flowers Week** botanical fashion shoot, she says, "I wanted to use a single color *Iris* because I knew it would be more impactful and define the garment's form better than a mix of *Iris* colors."

Sun Valley provided her with 1,500 'Hong Kong' *Irises*, with slightly ruffled sapphire blue petals and a yellow "blotch." These features are portrayed beautifully on the floor-length *Iris* skirt, which has a soft drape that is reminiscent of regal velvet. To create the garment, Faye allowed hundreds of *Iris* buds to open in her warm studio for about two days. When the flowers were ideal, she moved buckets into her cooler to hold at the right stage.

Construction took place the day before the photo shoot, beginning with a tulle underskirt that supports the flowers, about 600 of which Faye individually stitched to the fabric. She worked upward, from the hem to the waistband, laying each row of blooms over previous rows to hide the cut stems. Two types of native huckleberry finish off the hem, adding flair, depth and contrast. At the waistband, Faye



reversed the *Irises* so their heads create a finished edge. Because the completed skirt was quite heavy, Faye zip-tied a thin belt to the fabric waistband, cinching it around the model's waist to stay in place.

A mass of open *Irises* felt too voluminous for the bodice, so Faye dressed her model in a ballet-style jersey top and wove flowers into a botanical stole for the shoulder detail. "The stole has a fabric base and a chicken-wire-like 'sausage,' which I sewed on to build the structure," she explains. "I added greenery and glued on the *Irises*, hyacinths and tulips – all from Sun Valley, plus some hellebores from my garden."

Faye's own property and an ancient, multi-trunk bay tree serve as the moody setting for this luxe *Iris* garment. She "planted" 400 extra *Irises* in the ground beneath the tree, using their clustered placement to suggest a naturalized floral meadow. "Now, I really want someone to let me do this for a wedding, because the *Irises* held up so well," she says.

The yellow eyes of the deep blue *Irises* resemble flecks of sequins against the richly colored skirt – they seem to have a reflective quality, even on a foggy, wet day in late March.

CREDITS

Floral Palette: 1,500 'Hong Kong' *Irises*, Sun Valley Floral Farms (Arcata, Calif.) thesunvalleygroup.com [@sunvalleyfloralfarms](https://www.instagram.com/sunvalleyfloralfarms)

Designer: Faye Zierer Krause, Flora Organica Designs Arcata, Calif., floraorganica.com, [@fayekrause](https://www.instagram.com/fayekrause)

Model: Morgan Mireles

Hair/Makeup: Angela Cheung, Onyx-Private Holistic Studio, Arcata, Calif., [@onyxarcata](https://www.instagram.com/onyxarcata)

Photography: Leon Villagomez, leonvillagomez.com [@leonvillagomez](https://www.instagram.com/leonvillagomez)

Location: Flora Organica Designs, Arcata, Calif. ■



AMERICAN-GROWN HERO

Botanical Still Life

Nothing wasted as designer makes use of donated material to create floral art.

Ellen Hoverkamp's compositions of just-picked flowers, leaves and herbs are modern-day versions of 17th and 18th century herbarium studies – except, instead of pressing and preserving *Dahlia* petals that eventually yellow with age, she digitally captures three-dimensional blooms in hyper-real color.

As a result, Ellen's art is botanically accurate and vividly exciting. Her pieces reflect one moment in time: At an arboretum that has granted her "picking privileges," a beachcombing walk on the Long Island Sound, not far from her West Haven, Conn.-based studio, or a carefree day with clippers at **Trout Lily Farm** in Guilford, owned by her farmer-florist friends **Michael Russo** and **Raymond Lennox**.

A former art educator, Ellen has worked in many media, including printmaking, textiles and ceramics. When she started composing images from nature with an early model flatbed photo scanner in the late 1990s, Ellen didn't even own a camera.

"I originally used plants grown by my neighbors," which explains her studio name: **My Neighbor's Garden**. "I'm forever grateful to the people who supply me with plants that I can scan."

Buds, pods, branches, vines, roots and stems as vibrant still-life art against backgrounds ranging from robin's-egg blue to dramatic black. She works quickly, often in air-conditioned spaces as she races against wilting petals. "It's like making a live-plant herbarium but upside down," she explains of her layering and arranging method. "It's a satisfying process to create a new kind of botanical photography, which makes the ephemeral more permanent."

Ellen has perfected a signature technique of capturing large-scale assemblages of flowers, vegetables, seashells and other wild-gathered elements, earning accolades and

commissions. Her work has been profiled in *The New York Times*, in periodicals, in a photo technique book and in a craft compendium. Ellen collaborated with author **Ken Druse** on the gardening book *Natural Companions*. Most recently, her work was used in packaging for a national candle company. Her digital images are printed on archival, museum-grade paper for framing, as note cards, and on gorgeous silk scarves.

Once unfamiliar with the botanical names of plants, Ellen's intense focus on the seasons and the sources of her horticultural ingredients has turned her into an advocate for local flowers. She loves collaborating with flower farmers and floral designers who invite her to work with their just-picked stems. She and Michael Russo, for example, offer a special service for wedding couples: a post-ceremony work of art by Ellen who incorporates petals and buds from bouquets and table arrangements into custom-designed-and-scanned mementos.

Her two-dimensional floral compositions are tapestry-like, rich with layers of texture, form, line and hue. When I asked Ellen to create a red-white-and-blue floral piece to commemorate **American Flowers Week** 2018, she joyfully harvested Michael's late-season red and white *Dahlias*, cockscomb, castor-bean pods, *Nigella*, cilantro and feverfew blossoms, blue and white *Hydrangeas*, *Viburnum* berries – and an assortment of fragrant gray-green herbal foliage – to create art that truly reflects the mission of **Slow Flowers**. Ellen hand-dyed a piece of silk ribbon as the playful finishing touch to her all-American botanical tribute.

Details:

Ellen Hoverkamp, myneighborsgarden.com, @garden_images ■

