

AMERICAN-GROWN HERO

# Botanical Still Life

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

**E**llen 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:

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