

WED DOSSIER FLOWERS!

BY JAYDINE SAYER



BLOOM TOWN
Clockwise from top: White and chartreuse cymbidium orchids bound in a pearl-embellished wrap by Scarlet Petal. Larkspur combines sarracenia, fern curls and white blooming dogwood for a breathtaking centerpiece. Mila Design's bold bouquets combine cymbidium orchids, spider mums and viburnum.



IN THE BUD

This wedding season, Chicago's flower experts flaunt a flare for the exotic

Every bride knows that the venue sets the tone of the wedding. No arguments here, but nothing puts that individual stamp of style on the festivities quite like the flowers. Bouquets, table arrangements, seating fixtures and more—the right buds can make or break a beautiful décor. This season, we recommend going for the bold and accentuating the spirit of the season with exotic florals that offer a fresh spin on staid centerpieces.

For starters, think big and unusual shapes in a mixture of bright and soft colors. And there are no limits to how you group and arrange them: Add a dash of inky black fern curls and punch up the color of pink roses, or mix in a handful of pompon dahlias and make some peonies sing. One tiny tweak can make a dramatic difference.

“Exotic flowers bring new textures and shapes to the table,” says Tatiana Chelekhova, owner of **Mila Design** (miladesign.com). “Most exotics aren't rounded but asymmetrical, so they give a lot of life to a bouquet or arrangement. Brides want something unique, but they also want the flowers to look romantic. Exotic flowers bring out that romantic, garden feel.”

One of her favorite tricks? Gluing orchids to tree branches for a centerpiece that pops. “They end up looking like real blooming trees,” says Chelekhova. “You can't get this look with conventional flowers. Add in the right lighting and you've got a fairytale setting.” Orchids are one of the more widely used exotic flowers for a few reasons; most importantly because they



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can survive up to 48 hours out of water and because they come in a slew of different colors and shapes. “I think all types of orchids will grow in popularity in 2009, putting pressure on calla lilies and peonies as the most popular flowers,” adds Chelekhova.

Aside from orchids, there are endless other avant-garde options suitable for upscale wedding designs. King protea and spiky pincushions, for example, come in a lot of hot hues and both are a nice complement to regular roses. “If you want something really out-of-the-ordinary, try mink proteas—they have a fuzzy texture and are available in ivory, peach and black,” says Esther Galantowicz, co-owner of

Scarlet Petal (scarletpetal.com). “With exotic flowers, it's all about the quantities and how you pair them with more traditional blooms. All you need is two or three proteas, next to some basic roses and filler flowers, and you have an exotic-looking bouquet that begs attention.”

According to Beth Barnett, owner of **Larkspur** (larkspurchicago.com), more and more of her brides are bypassing old-school tropicals for elegant exotics including organic-feeling mosses and unique plant materials like pods. “I get a lot of artistic brides who want something creative with a ‘wow’ factor,” says Barnett. For spring, she anticipates a lot of white and cream-colored flowers set against splashes of deep color; for summer, combined shades of green and saturated jewel-tones. And in terms of the best display, Barnett recommends clear, square vases for a clean modern look.

Still scared to break totally from the traditional? Grace Ha-Kim, owner of **Vale of Enna** (vale-of-enna.com), can offer some easy-to-warm-up-to nontraditional twists. “I love to add green ranunculus to a common bouquet because it's a hard, bright green that always achieves the right amount of modern.” She also likes coxcomb—which comes in great colors like dark magenta, hot pink, orange and coral—because of its velvety rich texture. “Brides are very particular about flowers, but they're flexible on the fillers. Interesting fillers can make an arrangement distinct,” adds Kim. Her overall advice? “Be willing to work with your florist to create the feel you want.” ■

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