

BLOOMING BEAUTIFUL

Florist Dianthus Kiss unveils the secrets behind her show-stopping arrangements and explains how one can replicate the magic at home

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Be it rouged roses for a Valentine or chrysanthemums and carnations for Mother's Day, a meaningful bouquet is a sure-fire way to garner a positive response. At home, flowers are wonderful at setting a particular mood, something that florist and founder of Maison Dianthus, Dianthus Kiss, knows well.

Her family has been in the florist business for 40 years, so Dianthus grew up surrounded by ferns and blossoms. Even so, leaving her home state of Johor to start her own venture in Kuala Lumpur at the age of 18 was daunting. "When you come from a family business that is so entrenched, it is hard to create your own identity," she says. "In the early days, there was a lot to prove."

It was only after two decades that her years of effort began to pay off. "People trust my judgement and appreciate how I curate things," she says. "The exciting time is now."

"I like what flowers do for a space," Dianthus adds. "You don't need a hundred stems — just the perfect one or two can shift a room's energy. I am a great fan of that."

Her husband and biggest supporter Adam agrees, saying flowers help us to "slow down", serving as "a reminder that there is life to be lived" outside of the stress and hecticness of everyday life.

Like most creatives, Dianthus is a huge advocate of figuring out one's personal style and expressing it proudly. "Sometimes, people are so afraid to like things," she says, referring to a struggle that most design-conscious people face — a peculiar desire to stand out from the general masses, even if it means denying themselves what they truly fancy.

For her, whether a bouquet contains conventional roses or fruit and vegetables, it all boils down to how one styles and infuses it with their own panache. After all, "it is important to observe trends but also carve out your own, which, really, is just what *you* like".

Dianthus and Adam Kiss in their Kuala Lumpur home with beloved feline companion, Tubs



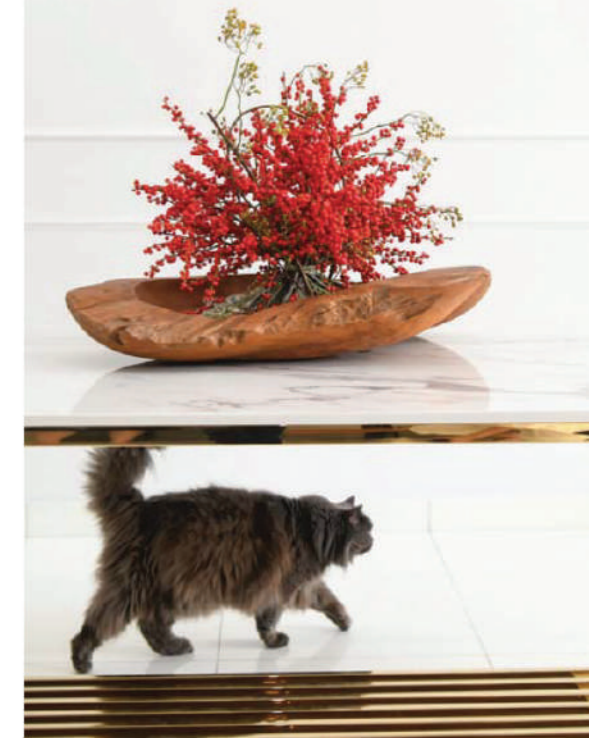
A CHEERY CENTREPIECE

You will need:

- A wooden basin or tray
- A small vase
- Floral shears
- Floral wire
- Twine
- Fine gravel (choose a quartz variety for extra colour or opt for regular grey stones if you like a modern edge)
- Red ilex berries
- Forsythia
- A project partner (a significant other, a friend or family member will do best!)

METHOD

1. Place the small vase upside down in the middle of the wooden basin. This is used as a foundation for the bouquet — think of it as scaffolding for your construction process.
2. Trim the ilex berry stems to your preferred height. Snip off small twigs on the lower end of each branch to give the bouquet a clean look, as well as for easier handling.
3. With the help of your project partner, arrange the branches around the vase, using floral wire to secure the placement as you go. The bouquet should begin to resemble a small tree.
4. Once the bouquet is to your liking, wrap a length of twine around the branches to conceal the wire and add a rustic touch.
5. Carefully lift the bouquet out of the basin and remove the vase. Take the opportunity to clean out any fallen berries from the basin. Hold on to the good ones for final touches.
6. Put the bouquet back into the basin and adjust the branches before adding a few handfuls of gravel to keep it upright.
7. For the arch, cut the forsythia to the desired length — shorter for a small arch, longer for a higher one. Slide one end into the bouquet, securing it underneath the trunk of wire and twine, then arch the branch over the berries before securing the other end in the same fashion.
8. Add a few sprigs of forsythia to the bouquet for pops of yellow.
9. Scatter the reserved berries and any additional forsythia shoots over the gravel.



Want to recreate Dianthus' festive arrangement or attempt one of your own? She shares some tips and tricks here:

Carefully select the right vessel size and shape. Sometimes, floristry novices think a smaller vase offers too little space, when in reality, it is perfect. Location should also be taken into consideration. Our florist suggests "thinking about where you would like to place the flowers and how many stems you would need before deciding on the container".

Purchase your flowers two to three days in advance and prep them according to their specific needs. Make sure to do your research beforehand for a seamless experience. "Flowers usually arrive wilted and tired, especially if they have been imported by air," Dianthus says. "They need time to bloom and look nice, just like people."

Use less water but change it daily because drowning your blooms in dirty H₂O is an early death sentence. "Too much water makes the flowers deteriorate faster," Dianthus warns. "People tend to think that flowers need lots of water. While they do need it, they don't require very much. Pour a little water just at the base and always start with a clean vase." **H**