

FIVE MINUTES WITH

Notes on a Floral Arrangement

Meet the floral designer crafting botanical sensations and bringing a touch of magic to every space *By Lynette Ow. Photography by Daniel Adams*



When people received a bouquet of flowers during the Victorian times, instead of reaching out for their vase, they would consult their floral dictionary to look up what the secret message of the flowers meant. Then and now, flowers have always come loaded with messages. For example, it reminds us too that it needs water and of what it takes to sustain life. Its ephemerality is a lesson in fleeting beauty and harnessing this to the pinnacle of its artistic form, is Dianthus Kiss, a spirited 37-year-old who has been in the floral design trade for 20 years.

Having learnt the ropes from inside the family business, her designs are lush and luxurious, enhanced by textures and play on elegant tone-on-tone colours and harmonious moods. “I always want everything that the sender would like to be said, be conveyed in pure, unadulterated prettiness. Every care would have been taken to work the flowers with subtle, whimsical flourishes which is very distinctive to my signature flair for flowers.”

On a spectrum of rustic “woke up like this” dry foliage aesthetic and monumental Rorschach-like

installations, her arrangements are neoclassical with a touch of whimsical—something that looks right out of a *Bridgerton* set.

This flair of hers has garnered a solid roster of repeat projects from the country’s biggest luxury fashion houses and watch brands, although the floral designer shares that her biggest, loyal customers are “private clients that look to flowers for personalised, thoughtful gifting. They themselves love flowers and see them as ideal gifts to express their feelings and sentiments to their loved ones.

“The sweetest, simplest gesture in the world must be picking a pretty stem of anything from the grass or ground and presenting it to a loved one, just because you love them. Perhaps having a bunch made up by your florist to bring home, emulates that expression in modern times when a field of flowers to be found anywhere is scant!”

BLOOM TO PERFECTION

Like an empath of the natural world, Kiss invokes “energies” of the flowers repeatedly in our conversation as she works through an arrangement spontaneously for us. “I seek to transform spaces and convey emotions with my medium, flowers,” she says. “A great florist seeks to tame and temper a live medium that wants its own way, and the only way to do it is to relinquish the inherent need of dominating your muse into a viable design. To be a great florist is to be inspired by nature but not hold on to an idea of the design itself too rigidly. Being

calm in your emotions while you work, and malleable in both your thoughts and your touch, help in creating your best work,” she shares.

Florist is too narrow a definition for Kiss—an artist who not only reveals the charms of blooms, proportions and balance of an arrangement, she also understands in her art, the unforeseen in life.

“Upon closer inspection, [a great arrangement] should have elements of interest in it. A trailing fern, an exciting, exceptional bloom, perhaps a great scent in a flower you didn’t know was tucked into it. I’m always looking for an unexpected surprise.” It does seem out of fashion to see a dome of roses, or single blooms clonelike in its symmetrical perfection these days.

TAKING SPACE

For bigger spatial installations, the transformational power of floral imagery can elevate the atmosphere instantaneously, capturing the eye and the imagination. So much is said and can be said within the stems, blooms and foliage in an arrangement of visual symphony. For Kiss, it should also “exude undeniable extravagance, thoughtful planning, and a natural point of interest to gravitate to as well as to spark the start to an easy conversation.”

This is what guides her as she recently completed an installation for Four Seasons Hotel Kuala Lumpur, the proudest feather to her cap yet. “They’re outlandish in their dimensions which create so much ‘wow’, and it’s exciting to not be



Left: The floral designer surrounded by blooms of ranunculus, lilacs, veronicas, hellebores, panicum grass, tulips, viburnums and Phalaenopsis orchids

symbolises but for its name. “Dianthus is the name for all breeds of carnations, and no one could ever pronounce it right which felt tedious to explain and I would always shorten it. Its meaning too, ‘Flower of the Gods’, was an overwhelming one, and it took me an age to come into my own, embrace my name and embody it. If you ask me now ‘do I love carnations?’, I will say yes unequivocally, and it is facetious humour to amuse myself, that they are now always included, just a bloom or two, in almost every arrangement I make. It reminds me of who I am.”

Also, she shares that carnations happen to be “the flower of choice” for Mother’s Day and contrary to popular belief, it’s the busiest season of the year for floral designers, though most people might think it’s Valentine’s Day. “Everyone has a mother, aunt, grandmother, sister, an extraordinary woman they admire in a maternal role that they want to celebrate, so we tend to be most busy in May. My personal ethos on Valentine’s Day on the other hand is to celebrate it absolutely, but show [your partner] that you love him or her every other day too.”

As for her favourite flowers, Kiss favours dainty blooms in white, which are “nearly always scented” like the freesia, magnolia, camellia and lilac. “My childhood days were steeped in the memories of my mother who would always leave a gardenia in a shallow bowl of water by my bedside when they were blooming in her garden.”

confined to the perimeters of a vase, but now the towering heights of a lofty ceiling.

“I think of the Four Seasons as a sumptuous, palatial home, with many familiar guests that come to visit, so my inspiration is to decorate its interiors with an element of quiet magnificence that seeks to enhance

and not detract from its stately, opulent beauty.”

WHAT’S IN A CARNATION?

Do floral designers have their favourite blooms? For a time, Kiss definitely knew what her least favourite was and it would be carnations—not for what it

VENUE FOUR SEASONS HOTEL KUALA LUMPUR