

Artistic Genius

A fabulous florist, a great bartender, and a creative crafter show you how to design a day that's totally you.

TEXT BY *Rebecca Dalzell*

KATE HOLT Floral Designer

KNOWN FOR Colorful, textural arrangements that look just-picked

WHERE TO FIND HER Flowerwild in Los Angeles (she's the owner; flowerwild.com)

At what point should couples hire a florist?

Typically, six months out is plenty of time, though that can jump to 10 or 12 months if the person you want is especially popular. Many designers do only one event a day, so they can book up really fast.

How do you find someone great?

Check out online portfolios and meet with a few of your favorites to narrow down the field. Go with the one who seems the most excited by your vision, because that's the person who's going to execute it to a T. It's also important that they're willing to go the extra mile, like visiting your venue if they've never been before, or showing you how to hold the bouquet on your wedding day. And while rates can vary, transparency is key: Costs should be clearly broken down item by item.

Do you have any tips for the bride who wants to do her own flowers?

Potting a mini citrus tree, an herb plant, or a few succulents in an interesting vessel is one way to make a gorgeous centerpiece. Whatever you decide to do, budget plenty of time to complete the work—especially if you want something more elaborate. Twenty tables takes me two days.

What's the secret to a beautiful arrangement?

To get that professional look, you'll need to consider depth, shape, and interest. The easiest way



to do this is to work in layers. Make some flowers recede and others lean forward; they shouldn't be flush. I usually start with foliage, then add big, hearty blooms, and drape something delicate on top, like jasmine vine or bell-shaped fritillaria.

What are some pointers for flower care?

Store them at 45 degrees in buckets filled with a couple of inches of water and a capful of bleach, which is the best way to prevent mold growth. In hot weather, they need to stay hydrated. So after your vows, set your bouquet in water for a few minutes before you take photos. And remember that anything with a stamen, like lilies, can be messy. You need to pull off the pollen or it will stain everything it falls on or brushes against.

"Buy flowers from your local farmers' market. They're fresh, environmentally friendly, and almost always higher quality than anything that's been flown in."

Any sneaky ways to cut costs?

Put your cash toward the reception and keep the flowers simple for the ceremony—it's so short, and everyone's eyes will be on you anyway. Anything you use during the vows can be repurposed for the party: Decorate the cake table with bouquets, and hang altar garlands on the bar.



HOLT'S TIPS

1. GET INSPIRED

"Check out Ariella Chezar's *Flowers for the Table*," says Holt. "There are so many lush ideas" (\$114, amazon.com).

2. USE SEASONAL BLOOMS

"I love pompon dahlias for summer," she says. "Other varieties can be too delicate, but these won't wilt quickly."

3. FIND UNUSUAL VESSELS

"Jamali Garden has an amazing selection. I'm drawn to these cement vases," says Holt (from \$6, jamaligarden.com).

PORTRAIT BY TARA DONNE; STILLS, FROM TOP: RAYMOND HOM, ISTOCKPHOTO.COM, RAYMOND HOM; LOCATION COURTESY OF MARVIMON IN LOS ANGELES

MAYUR SUBBARAO Bartender

KNOWN FOR Using homemade ingredients and garnishes to mix cocktails with a twist

WHERE TO FIND HIM Cienfuegos bar (he's the beverage director; cienfuegosny.com) and Evoke events (he's a cofounder; evoenyc.com), both in New York City

How can couples find a skilled bartender?

If you want well-crafted drinks beyond the basic vodka soda, stop by your all-time favorite cocktail spot and hire someone there. You need one person per 75 guests, plus a couple of bar backs.

What will a good bartender handle in addition to pouring drinks on the day-of?

A pro will work closely with you and the caterer to concoct a custom drink list. We want to play up flavors you like and serve cocktails that complement the food, like Bellinis with caviar. We can also consult on the wine pairings for dinner.

What's the going rate?

For a bartender to design a menu, do all the prep, and work a four-hour wedding, you're looking at around \$1,000. A second person will cost about \$300, and bar backs go for \$100 each.

What's the cheapest way to have an open bar?

The secret is to avoid premium spirits (save the Johnny Walker Blue for the honeymoon), and pare down your selection. If you stick to the basics and offer just one or two midrange bottles of each type of liquor, you'll come in around \$20 a head. Stock a red and a white wine and a couple of beers,



plus Scotch, bourbon, gin, rum, and vodka. Then gather an array of mixers like sodas and tonic; bottled orange, grapefruit, and cranberry juices; and fresh-squeezed lemon and lime juices.

And what about specialty drinks?

I love them. To save time and money, make batches in advance. If the recipe calls for one or two liquors (like the Maiden Voyage, below), leave them out until serving time. Then return unopened bottles.

Any quick updates on classic cocktails?

Gin and tonic is always a good summer drink. To add some extra flavor, soak fruit or herbs overnight in simple syrup, strain, and pour a dash right in. Another unexpected touch is to drop pomegranate seeds in your toasting Champagne.



"Bitters are a key component of many old-timey libations, which are really popular right now. You can think of them as a seasoning for your cocktails. To get in on the trend, have Peychaud's at the ready. It's the gold standard."

THE DETAILS: Peychaud's bitters (\$7, buffalotrace.com).

SUMMERTIME SIPPERS

Say cheers with one of Subbarao's inventive signature cocktails.

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3

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1. THE MAIDEN VOYAGE

SERVES 20

Bunch of mint leaves
15 oz cucumber juice
15 oz fresh lime juice
15 oz elderflower liqueur or syrup
2 tsp salt
30 oz blanco tequila

Muddle mint in a 2-quart pitcher, then add everything but tequila, and chill. To serve, combine 2¼ oz of mixture with 1½ oz tequila in a cocktail glass. Garnish with cucumber wheel or mint leaf.

2. THE OLD AND NEW

SERVES 20

20 oz gin
20 oz dry gin
30 oz water
15 oz bianco vermouth
5 oz maraschino liqueur
Grapefruit bitters

Combine all ingredients except bitters in a 1-gallon pitcher, and chill. To serve, pour 4½ oz of mixture over cracked ice in a mixing glass, add a dash of bitters, and stir. Strain into a rocks glass over a large ice cube, and garnish with an orange twist.

3. THE VICTORIA

SERVES 20

20 oz dark rum
15 oz cognac
15 oz vermouth
15 oz fresh lemon juice
10 oz pineapple syrup
2 tsp Angostura bitters
Peychaud's bitters

Combine all ingredients except Peychaud's in a 1-gallon pitcher, and chill. To serve, pour 4 oz of mixture in a wine glass, and add crushed ice. Add dashes of Peychaud's to create the red tint. Garnish with a mint sprig or pineapple slice.

DENISE SHARP Crafter

KNOWN FOR Imaginative paper favor boxes and thoughtful, intricate cake toppers

WHERE TO FIND HER D. Sharp in Portland, Oregon (studiodsharp.com)

How can couples create the look of their day?

The most successful events draw inspiration from an overarching theme rather than a single object. A *Great Gatsby*-style party with parasols, croquet, and mint juleps could be hugely successful, while a beach wedding with seashells everywhere is overkill. Not everything needs to match.

Creating the little details is fun, but it's definitely time-consuming. What's the best way to manage the workload?

Think about how much time you have to spend on projects and what you're good at. Even if you're crafty, it's really hard to make everything yourself.

"When you make things by hand, some won't turn out perfectly. But you know what? That's okay. Just keep an open mind and practice on samples to work out the kinks."

Consider bringing someone else onboard to help. Whether it's a friend or an artist, the person should possess a skill set that's different from yours so you can divide and conquer.

Where can couples find a crafter?

Start by checking out Etsy. If you find someone who's selling items you love, inquire if she'd take on a custom project. Or ask a local art school to recommend a student (or even a teacher). And there's always Craigslist—posting an ad for a person with the skills you need sometimes works, too. Try to hire someone at least two months out so there's time to e-mail prototypes back and forth.



What are the most impactful ways to work in something handmade?

Focus on the elements guests will see up close, like centerpieces or escort cards, and also on those they'll be able to touch, like favors.

Speaking of favors, what makes a good one?

Anything that's delicious! I've never met a person who doesn't appreciate candy at the end of the night. Present it beautifully, and make sure it doesn't leave behind a lot of trash, or else you'll wind up with crumpled paper all over the place.

Your favorite easy-to-do project?

Stitch together paper flags or circles with a sewing machine, and hang the garlands on the guest-book or cake table. It takes no time at all and looks charming. [For a similar example, flip to page 252.]

Are there any great, inexpensive materials a couple could utilize in their décor?

Absolutely—raid your own house. Basket coffee filters make lovely faux flowers: Just stack them, pierce with wire, and twist the petals. Plain white rope, knotted around napkins, looks cute at a nautical wedding. And paper is really versatile. Draw a design on butcher paper to cover an ugly table, or decorate water bottles with wrapping paper.

Are there any wedding décor items a couple could repurpose after the big day?

I once made a wreath out of gold ribbon as a ceremony marker for a friend's wedding. Now it hangs above the mantel in her home. And handmade favor boxes can be used for storing jewelry long after the sweets inside have been eaten.

SHARP'S STRATEGIES

1. INCORPORATE THE UNEXPECTED

"I often utilize vintage paper, like these sheet-music covers, in my cake décor," says Sharp, who finds it on eBay. Check out page 233 to see her designs in action.

2. USE QUALITY SOURCES

"Castle in the Air (castleintheair.biz) sells awesome trimmings," she says. "I crunch up their crepe paper to create ruffles like those on this flower-girl headband." To buy: \$40, studiodsharp.com.

3. EMPLOY TOP TOOLS

"The Martha Stewart Crafts Scoring Board makes pleating paper and scoring cards a cinch," says Sharp (\$20, marthastewartcrafts.com).

