

FLOWERS FOR FÊTING

It's not surprising that flowers arranged by Botanicals ooze with drama. Casey Cooper, the charmingly finicky force ("I don't tolerate any brown spots," she insists) behind this favored florist of Chicago's biggest party throwers—the Field Museum, the MCA and the Cultural Center, to name a few—has a background in theater. In fact, Cooper's foray into fleurs came out of her need to learn a bread-and-butter skill that would allow her to produce plays on the side. "I have this wise friend from India whom I asked for career advice, and he sort of looked down thoughtfully and said, 'Flowers.'" Far more promising than "Plastics," the one-word tip given to *The Graduate's* Benjamin, that's for sure. While Cooper did serve for a time as Eclipse Theater Company's first artistic director, it was the floral bug that stuck. A business that started in Cooper's basement in 1993 is now housed in a huge warehouse space on Elston and employs 16 to 30 (depending on the season) people, who do everything from de-thorning roses for bridal bouquets to conceptualizing themes for galas. And it's not just standbys like roses and orchids that find their way into Botanicals' vases: "Everything botanical is fair game," says Cooper, who's been known to incorporate brussel sprouts into her head-turning designs. Beats eating them, we say. 2214 N. Elston Ave., 773.269.3142, www.botanicalschicago.com



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