

FLORAL DESIGNS BY BOTANICALS

CHICAGO
HOME & GARDEN



CUTTING EDGE

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CASEY COOPER LIVES BY FEW RULES. IT IS, in fact, the very lack of them that puts her and her husband John Nicholson on the map with their innovative and sometimes downright daring event planning company, Botanicals Inc. If you're conjuring up a vision of "thinking out of the box," then you're getting the idea. Innovative, but always handsome, elegant, and defiantly stunning, Botanicals (with the graphic of a floating leaf dotting the "i") stretches the imagination.

"But it has to be organic," explains Casey, reciting her one never-to-be neglected rule. "Even when we do something structural and architectural it must relate to nature," she affirms, describing the edgy but lush inspired event designs that come out of the Elston Avenue location.

"You know in the 80s and 90s, flowers were bent over and bound. We don't want our flowers to look tortured or manipulated," she states unequivocally, "No flowers in



bondage,” she adds with a smile.

Casey has been working with flowers in one form or another for 20 years. “I was told I needed a marketable skill. ‘What’s that?’” She remembers asking. “I want to be an actor. That’s what I can do,” she stated with confidence when a mentor at the time suggested working with flowers and in a helpful comment sowed the seeds of Casey’s love for flora.

Though acting continued to be a mainstay in her life for a time, floral designing soon became her passion, until she was asked to design a friend’s wedding. Her quick response to that welcome request was the impetus for the business that in several years would become Botanicals.

Casey smiles as she tells stories about how she and John began seriously designing out of their basement. “We used the washing machine and dryer as the bases upon which we placed large designs and story boards for presentations,” she recounts.

For a long time, Casey describes their business as “doing pretty flowers. But then anything with a lot of product in it is pretty,” she maintains. Watching and learning from other designers led her to a new freedom. “The edge started getting pushed and we became more edgy. Our clients helped us branch out, especially our corporate clients who were willing to try new things. And that’s fun for us.”

But in addition to corporate and private events, Botanicals caters to a large wedding following. Creative

consultant Susie Blair describes their design philosophy as “keep it natural but think out of the box. We ask a gazillion questions of the bride before we suggest anything,” she explains. “Most people don’t know a lot about flowers,” she advises. In attempting to understand the bride’s tastes and developing a palette for the occasion as well as complementing the wedding location, “we often ask ‘what does your home look like?’” It helps establish an understanding of their tastes. The one thing we always heed,” says Susie, is that “the bride should carry whatever she likes, no matter what it is, from contemporary to traditional, from formal to daisies.”

Innovation reigns within this young and somewhat daring staff of designers. Small, plump boudoir pillows on the settee inside the front entrance doors are made from green hydrangea blossoms studded with persimmon rosebuds. What others might demolish with a chain saw arrives as tree stump intended for the base of a buffet table centerpiece, with orchid and fern plants spilling over and softening its somewhat awkward arms.

Wreath shapes are no longer the proverbial round. Four square of framed dried flower petals, lotus pods, pine cones, and rolled strips of birch bark transcend the expected” and invite the eye to feast on something new and stunning, yet befitting the warmth of a family home.

Jewel boxes are the fortunate recipients of flowers overflowing their edges an unusual, yet natural addition to the bedroom hall dresser top. Mundane bookshelves are

are easily dressed up for a party with every-day containers studded with orchid blossoms and amaryllis stalks.

Maybe unusual, but definitely not strange. Always creative, but never forced. Ever mindful of nature and ever respectful of nature and ever respectful of it. (Striking design, solid lines, delicious colors, richly-textured materials, unique pairings. Botanicals, Inc., not a cliché to be found.)

CAPTIONS

Bunched together with satin napkin rings are the cream open-cut calla lilies that fairly leap from a trio of tall rectangular vases of varied heights. Their lofty scale is grounded by several square bud vases filled with submerged green dendrobium orchid blossoms topped with water and a votive candle. "The modern look is a submerged flowers," notes Susie Blair. "But all styles go in phases. Flower-wise, we're seeing some traditional styles coming back with elevated arrangements in ornate containers." The angular shapes of the containers are repeated in the stemware with square plates extending the geometric line into each place setting. The apple green linens strike a much more subdued pose at night in the candlelight, as the shade of green turns to a muted celadon.

A WONDERFUL FRAGRANT CLUSTER of blue hyacinth is featured in an ornate silver bowl with napkin rings created by individually stringing together some of the aromatic hyacinth blooms. Colors don't have to match on the table, explain the Botanicals consultants, but they do need to blend and complement each other, as do these plates, linens, and flowers.

BOTANICALS purports that a powder room can be every bit as interesting a corner for flower art as other rooms in the house. Susie Blair's custom wall art with fresh liquidambar leaves glued to a piece of Styrofoam is adorned with a square of fresh rose hip berries and two stems of strategically placed rose hips proof of what Susie says that "we look to organic but the unusual. We want to provide something you wouldn't expect to see." A narrow rectangular vase next to the stack of finger towels is filled with submerged orange mokara orchids.

DRAWERS from a library's former card catalogue play host to pots of vivid kalanchoe plants, nested in

bright green reindeer moss. Susie says "keep it natural but think out of the box. Nothing should look forced.

"TEXTURE IS SO IMPORTANT," teaches Casey, as she explains how she adorned the tree stump with a collection of fern plants and "Wild Cat" orchid plants. The four-piece organic wall décor features boxes of pinecones, antique hydrangea, birch bark, and moss-covered lotus pods. "This design was created by Susie in response to a request for a wreath," recalls Casey. "It was the beginning of wall art for us.

A GLASS COLLECTION of vases holds green dendrobium orchid sprays, cream hydrangea punctuated with chartreuse cymbidium blooms, and cream calla lilies. A creative addition to the setting are flower buds pressed between the two glass plates, giving the eye a hint of the flowers gathered in the middle of the table.

PEEKING OUT from the shelving are various artifacts, books, antiques, and candles, all held together by the presence of flowers. Amaryllis blooms are in Ball jars, caramel-colored cymbidium orchid blooms sit in apothecary jars, as do orange "Ad Rem" tulips. An easily created scene, with a minimum amount of work to produce, it stands in contrast to the effusive arrangement atop the antique dresser. Spilling out from a silver jewelry box are fresh pink sweet peas, peach stock, pepperberry, cranberry hanging amaranthus, silver dusty miller, ivory spray roses, and silver brunia with tufts of green hydrangea and feathers.

GATHERED into an immense woven basket above the fireplace is a collection of ivory French tulips, natural birch branches adorned with pale pink stock (to look like cherry branches), red kangaroo paws dripping green hanging amaranthus, and pale green hydrangea. Single stems of tulips and red kangaroo paws stand sentinel on either side of the mantel. 🍀