Flower arranging is a valid art form that embodies the fundamental elements of design with a true appreciation of design principles. Together the two provide a means of creative self expression through the flowers. It is an art form that captures feelings and attitudes in the language of nature.

A flower arrangement, like a piece of sculpture, is three dimensional and must have sense of organization, rhythm, and balance. When we build an arrangement, a design is created which has an orderly relationship first between the flowers and the foliage, next, to each other, and finally, to the container in which the arrangement is placed.

Basically, there are two broad categories of design. Those that are based on straight lines and those that owe their origin to curves. Certain styles have become classic styles of arrangement--the traditional or tri-linear design which reflects Oriental influence; mass arrangement designs that are characteristic of the Western world floral arrangement; and modern trends that are carried out in many and various ways.

One definition of design is organizing the elements (space, line, form, pattern, texture, and color) according to certain principles (balance, contrast, dominance, rhythm, proportion, and scale).

ELEMENTS

The elements of design are the basic building blocks from which all composition are created. The final product is the design, but the elements are the pieces that make it a unified whole.

The first element to consider is SPACE, the total space to be used within and outside the arrangement. It is important to select a container that is in proportion to the arrangement’s total space. Aside from the container, space also exists inherently in a plant or in flowers. Blossom and leaf size, stem length, void space between flowers and leaves, all provide their own space which must be considered in the whole arrangement. When created within a design, these various items will divide the total space equally or unequally and affect the placement of the parts of the whole design. Spaces need to be irregular to provide a dynamic role in modern arrangements. Space will balance solids, thus avoiding the monotonous look of solids balancing solids. The designated space (as in a niche) will determine the dimension and direction of the arrangement.

The second element is LINE, the back bone or foundation that gives the general outline to the arrangement. Line is used both as a unit of construction and as an expression of the art form. It is the most powerful of the design elements. Line determines the main movement of the design as it creates a path of motion which will take the eye through the structure of the design. The structure begins with the placement of the first line of material. The position of this line creates the central axis; its length, the height, its angle, the direction of the design. From the one main line all other lines take their relationship to the whole.

If the primary line is upright, straight, and in the center, and other lines conform to it, the design becomes vertical (as opposed to horizontal). The line makes a statement, is stable, shows action and evokes interest. The vertical line determines the height of the arrangement. Rules of proportion suggest that the height of the arrangement should equal one and a half times the height and width of the container while the width of the arrangement should not exceed the length of longest line. Balancing the container is controlled by the length of the longest line in the arrangement.

The Oriental influence is seen in the “Rule of Threes” which is a standard guideline for the use of line within a design. Let us consider a simple VERTICAL design following the “Rule of Threes”.

Establish the center with a tall, strong upright line. The line may have a slight curve but the tip of the stem is brought back to the center and has a forward pull for balance.

A second line, a diagonal, two-thirds the length of the main stem, is placed to appear with the main stem. Allow it to radiate to the back of the first line flowing with any curve.

The last placement is a horizontal line about one-third the height of the main stem. It appears to begin as one with the other two stems and then takes a direction to the opposite side with the tip pulling to the front. (Figure 1)

A VERTICAL design is basic but can become complex by adding supporting lines to the three basic lines (vertical, diagonal and horizontal). A diagonal line creates motion and rhythm, and adds a dramatic flair. The concept of width is created by the horizontal line.

We return to the rule for governing the placement of these supporting lines - the “Rule of Threes”. Once you add a secondary placement, a third placement must be added to re-establish the balance and complete the dimension of the line.

VERTICAL GROUP

Begin the arrangement with the tallest and strongest plant material in vertical position to establish a center line. Place a shorter vertical stem to support the first stem - it will radiate to the back with a forward pull.

Next, select a medium strength stem, shorten it to support
placement one and two, but making it appear as one with them. Allow it to radiate forward and take its position in the curve of the center line. (Figure 2)

DIAGONAL GROUP
The second grouping's primary line is the longest and strongest diagonal stem and is shorter than the vertical placement. Add a second stem, shorter than the first and allow it to radiate to the back. The third stem, also angular and shorter, will radiate forward and silhouette below stems one and two. This placement group gives depth and width. (Figure 3)

HORIZONTAL GROUP
Select a small stem placed to begin at the base of all other stems in the arrangement, with a curve that allows it to radiate to the back. The second stem is the most horizontal line and establishes the forward dimension to the other side of the container. Last, the strong, short stem is placed in the center. This grouping is the shortest of the three groups in the design. (Figure 4)

The Oriental influence from the "Rule of Threes" has been modified by our flower arrangers with the development of the triangular arrangement. The same directions and positions are used with the addition of a focal point as the center of interest at the base of the arrangement.

Many variations of the triangle are possible: formal and informal in balance, equally tall as wide, broad and short, or tall and narrow. A variation of line arrangements incorporating curves is found in crescents and Hogarth curve designs.

Some flower materials grow with a simple curve suitable for a crescent design. Create a strong center position with lines radiating to the right and left. (Figure 5)

The Hogarth design is actually an S curve--two simple curves blended together with a focal point. Differing from the crescent design, the lower curve is placed contrary to the upper curve and guides the eyes along the S line. (Figure 6)

In addition to space and line, flower arranging incorporates FORM, TEXTURE AND COLOR.
FORM, as applied to design, has two different meanings. One refers to form as the total organization of a design, identifying what it is. Here the type of arrangement may vary, but the objective is identified. The other definition uses form as an element signifying shape or structure.

The basic, elemental forms are the sphere, cube and triangle (the simplest design). Form may be geometrically precise or free form with irregular curving, easy flowing lines as random as water spilled on a table.

Flowers also have their individual forms. A spear or spike form is found in an elongated leaf or flower stalk like flax, stock, gladiola, or larkspur. These give line, action, or lightness. A round form can be found in the shape of a blossom and it pulls the eye to the point of emphasis, the focal point. It gives body and weight to the design. Transition between these two forms can be provided by small composite forms that are logical fillers. The round form gives suggestion of the larger circular or spherical form.

Variation and differences in form give contrast. An arrangement may be made primarily of one form but with another acting as an accent, i.e. light to heavy in weight for balance.

PATTERN is the element that shows the contour or silhouette of an arrangement. It identifies the style as traditional, modern, or Oriental. The design of the space and solids, the line, and the form make up the pattern of an arrangement.

The fifth element of arrangement is TEXTURE. This involves the structure of the plant materials, how the surface
PRINCIPLES

The principles of design “are the rules by which the elements are manipulated to create beauty, harmony, expression, and order.” These principles, as with the elements of design, all work together to create the whole.

BALANCE is the visual and physical weight in a design. It can be symmetrical with equal distribution, or asymmetrical with balance that is unequal in distribution. Balance can also be achieved by compensation through color—light to dark; through form—light to heavy weight; through texture—fine to coarse; and with space or solids to fill the space.

CONTRAST comes about through changes in color, gradation of size, or through use of the stages of plant development, a bud to a mature bloom.

DOMINANCE provides the focal point, the strength of the arrangement. More of one element, such as line, direction or color, a large flower or a mass of flowers, will be dominant and focus the eye, while small flowers or a different form will provide the secondary focus. Stability will emerge at the dominant point of focal interest.

The fourth principle of design is RHYTHM. This is the motion that draws the eye through the design. Use of the natural growth patterns of the plants provides a natural rhythmic movement. Repetition of color, form, a gradual transition of dark to light or large to small also give the design motion.

PROPORTION is the relationship of plant material to the container and the total space. The accessories to the arrangement and their placement are also important to the proportion of the design.

Closely aligned with proportion is the principle of SCALE. This is a matter of size, and deals with gradation in size of plant material, of color—light to dark, of containers that fit the arrangement, and the placement of plant material with the small, airy plant material at the height of the arrangement and larger flowers and foliage near base.

All of these principles lead to unity; that sense of all elements being part of a whole that has flow and continuity with the dominant feature powerfully holding the composition together.

STYLE OF DESIGN

Now that we have considered the theory of the Elements and Principles of design, we need to look at the STYLE OF DESIGN.

As mentioned earlier, certain styles have become classics: the traditional, mass arrangements which are predominate in the Western world, and the modern arrangements with their many and varied forms including the abstract design.

ABSTRACT ART is non-realistic. In abstract flower arrangement, we look at plant material in a new way in order to create new forms. To abstract something is to simplify by eliminating all extraneous detail. The essence is represented, rather than the concrete detail.

Abstract flower arrangement does not conform to any set standard as do traditional flower arrangements. Rather, the arranger carries the work beyond the restriction of traditional designing to a freer work with a difference in interest.

The abstract character of an arrangement depends on the use of materials as DESIGN ELEMENTS. In using the
qualities of these materials, the arranger can create symbolism and expression. There will be varying degrees of abstraction including borderline designs which will embrace both traditional and abstract characteristics.

There are two broad groups that encompass abstract design. The first is a composition with no subject matter, other than the design relationship. A simple pattern of lines that cut up space. (Areas of empty space are as rhythmical as the lines of movement formed by solid items.) The second group of abstract design is that design which is drawn from a subject, theme, or idea; and uses material symbolically to convey an impression of a scene, object, mood, or experience. (One may not see the real object, such as a bird, but the design artist can suggest the grace of a bird.)

Since abstract arrangements are not constructed to any set plan, the unit can be assembled in an infinite number of ways, but certain general design characteristics can be considered for clarification purposes. It is interesting to make this consideration by comparing the abstract with other types of design, remembering that there are no rigid or clear-cut divisions between one and the other.

**ABSTRACT ARRANGEMENTS**

In abstract arrangements, items are assembled quite differently. The eye can begin its path anywhere, drawn from one interest area to another with no static focal area. No unit or single part is more important than any other; all may be isolated in space, but there must be a relationship so the arrangement is easy to look at and the rhythm is easily evident. Line does not always taper off gently as it moves to the outline of the design as in traditional design. The characteristic lack of traditional material strengthens the force of design. The use of material as design elements in abstract arrangements is exemplified in the use of space.

**SPACE** assumes great importance in the abstract design. It is used to tie together all of the separate parts of design by eye control. Space intervals speed up or slow down the eye movement depending on how close together the spaces are. Space is very much a part of the balance of design. **LINE** is accented by the obvious use of space, so that the individual plant is dramatized.

Space in abstract design is not so much in the arrangement as with traditional work, but of the arrangement. Because the abstract arranger is not concerned with realistic representation, plants are often altered or modified in appearance to increase their abstract quality. Strap leaves are looped or clipped, only parts of a leaf are used, flower stalks are used with blooms removed. Dyed or painted materials are utilized. Distortion is employed but is effective only when it adds to the beauty and expressiveness of the design.

Freedom from restriction is necessary to allow the abstract arranger the initiative to design imaginatively. But even with this freedom, there are characteristics that are generally shared by all modern arrangements:

1. Dynamic balance
2. Sharp contrasts
3. Bold forms
4. Few materials
5. Clarity of line

The ultimate aim of modern arrangements, however, is still to create a visually pleasing, aesthetically satisfying composition.

The emphasis in this presentation has been on the standard interpretative flower arrangement. The same approach can be used, with appropriate adaptations, for interpretive plant arrangements.

Flower arranging should be an art of natural growth with all that is good in the new trends adding to, rather than replacing, the time tested old traditions, and without abdicating good taste or the principles of design. These principles will always stimulate new dimensions to flower arranging as an art form.

**Footnotes**


2. op. cit., p. 71

**References**


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