

Slow Flowers JOURNAL

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Field to Fashion

In its fourth year, American Flowers Week celebrates U.S.-grown (and foraged) botanicals with five fresh, inspiring and handcrafted couture looks.

American Flowers Week burst onto the floral scene in 2015, and its significance and influence has grown ever since, attracting participation across all channels of domestic flowers – from seeds to bouquets to beautiful floral fashions.

Social media engagement from florists, designers, retailers, wholesalers and flower farms posting on Instagram and Twitter generated more than 5 million impressions during the 2017 campaign, giving the hash tag #americanflowersweek top-of-mind presence, up from 1.2 million impressions the prior year.

Planning for the 2018 American Flowers Week floral fashion collection began almost immediately after the 2017 campaign ended. I was lucky to be on location in Homer, Alaska, last July, when floral designer **Kelly Shore**, of **Petals by the Shore** in Damascus, Md., teamed up with peony farmer **Beth Van Sandt**, co-owner of **Scenic Place Peonies** in Homer. Together, these creative women envisioned a styled shoot that reflected in-season, just-picked peonies and a story line to mirror the character and geography of Homer, which appears on Pages 66 and 67.

Producing this amazing collection of American-grown floral fashions continued through the subsequent months, including an October photo shoot celebrating *Dablias* in Sonoma County; a January woodland narrative reliant upon one designer's penchant for foraging from the forests of the Pacific Northwest; a March session on the Big Island paying homage to tropical flowers and foliages of Hawaii; and later that month, a tribute to the iconic *Iris*, straight from the greenhouses of Arcata, Calif.

It is a privilege and honor to present five compelling looks and the behind-the-scenes stories about the people and floral passions that fill these pages. The inventiveness and creativity expressed by the **Slow Flowers** community – flower farmers and floral designers alike – elevates American-grown botanicals to new levels. To learn more about these designs, the floral artists, the farms and their flowers, you can find bonus content at americanflowersweek.com and in the *Florists' Review* digital edition for June at floristsreview.com.

A Celebration of American Flowers

June 28 - July 4, 2018

Launched in 2015, **American Flowers Week** is the advocacy, education and outreach campaign produced by **Slow Flowers** to promote and commemorate domestic flowers, flower farming and floral design. Find free resources and promotional material at americanflowersweek.com.

Alaska's Freshest Catch of Peonies

Peony farming keeps pace with commercial fishing as important income source for Homer.

In July, Kelly Shore, of Damascus, Md.-based **Petals by the Shore**, and Beth Van Sandt, co-owner with her husband Kurt Weichhand of Homer, Alaska-based **Scenic Place Peonies**, documented a quintessential moment for Alaska-grown peonies, all in celebration of **American Flowers Week**.

Their peony-centric collaborations occurred when Kelly traveled to Homer as the featured floral designer for the **Field to Vase Dinner** at Scenic Place Peonies. She also designed and produced a romantic styled shoot photographed in the farm's peony fields (which appeared in *Florists' Review* in October 2017).

"I met Beth and Kurt when they came to volunteer at last year's First Lady's Luncheon in Washington, DC," Kelly explains. "It made me want to learn more about what they do, to immerse myself in the farm culture and understand what makes Alaska's peonies different than peonies here in the lower 48."

Homer is known as "The City of Peonies" in acknowledgement of the attention the flower has brought to local agriculture, business and tourism. Yet, Homer is also known for its dynamic fishing industry, which touches Beth and Kurt's lives as personally as peonies. Beth wanted the American Flowers Week photo shoot to reflect Homer's two economic engines – commercial fishing and peony farming. "I grow the flowers, and Kurt harvests wild Alaska salmon, and we're passionate about both catches," she points out.

Brainstorming led to a thoroughly unique peony experience, documented on the docks and shoreline of Homer's small boat harbor. The women envisioned a "catch" of peonies gathered in seine netting traditionally employed in commercial fishing. Using a repurposed seining net, Kelly attached a medley of white, cream, blush and pink peonies to appear just-gathered from the water's surface.

Lush and fully opened, the peonies represent the best of the season. Beth explains that, "Because of our cooler temperatures and our outrageous hours of sunlight, not to mention our fantastic soil, our peonies grow extremely well, and we get beautiful, vibrant colors."

Kelly and award-winning Alaska photographer **Joshua Veldstra** scouted for just the right boat to help tell their story visually. "I was so adamant about finding a boat with the 'HOMER' name on it," Kelly insisted. "I had this whole



vision of the pink flowers popping off the blueness of the water and the sky and the glaciers. And I love seeing this feminine flower against the ruggedness of that maritime setting."

Ashley Johnson, a flower-farmer-in-training who spent the summer as an intern at Scenic Place Peonies, agreed to model for the peony-and-fishing storyline. She wore a pair of white bib overalls, the female version of the bright orange Grundens overalls typically worn by commercial fishing pros and many peony farmers. "I wanted the net of peonies to almost be part of Ashley's attire, as if she was pulling up this teeming catch of flowers," Kelly says. Adding peony petals to the suspender straps and adorning Ashley's head with a full crown of peonies further incorporated the flowers.

Homer's famous Kachemak Bay and the majestic glaciers in the distance are a constant presence for Homer's fishing and flower farming cultures, Beth points out. "While I'm harvesting peonies in my field, Kurt is harvesting for fish in the inlet. The two seasons are pretty much parallel."

Scenic Place Peonies' crew begins cutting peonies during the second week of July and continues to the second week of August. About 1.5 acres are devoted to growing 6,000 peony plants representing 14 varieties.

Caring for this very special place on the planet, where glaciers meet ocean, and seafood and flowers are gifts from nature, is of utmost importance to Beth and Kurt. Scenic Place Peonies is a Certified Naturally Grown farm, reflecting its sustainable practices. "I want to be able to put my face in my peonies and not have to worry about inhaling chemicals. I want to smell the scent of my peonies and touch them and connect on all the senses," Beth maintains.

For Kelly, her time spent in Homer's peony world was deeply moving. "I felt such a connection, and I wanted to express how being there influenced me. That meant making sure every part of my art and my creativity was representative of the location."



CREDITS

Floral Palette: Peony flowers and petals, Scenic Place Peonies (Homer, Alaska) scenicplacepeonies.com, @scenicplacepeonies

Designer: Kelly Shore; Petals by the Shore; Damascus, Md. petalsbytheshore.com, @petalsbytheshore

Design assistance: Lisa Thorne; Thorne & Thistle; Auburn, Ala. thorneandthistles.com, @thorneandthistle

Models: Ashley Johnson, @ah.schlee

Hair/Makeup: Elizabeth Morphis, Scenic Place Peonies

Apparel: Donated by Grundens, shop.grundens.com @grundens

Photography: Joshua and Brittney Veldstra joshuaveldstra.com, @joshuaveldstra

Location: Homer Small Boat Harbor; Homer, Alaska



