

Slow Flowers JOURNAL

PRODUCED AND WRITTEN BY DEBRA PRINZING
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JOSHUA VELDSTRA AND LEON VILLAGOMEZ

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.

Local Designers Say Aloha with Flowers

The Big Island offers a tropical color palette for big floral dreams.

The flora of the Big Island of Hawaii provided **Alison Grace Higgins**, owner of **Grace Flowers Hawaii** in Honoka'a, and manager **Nicole Cordier**, a complex palette with which to dream up their remarkable his-and-hers botanical garments.

With the island's plant life as artistic muse, the Grace Flowers Hawaii team wanted their designs to celebrate both familiar and uncommon flowers and plants. They used gradient color banding to "weave" an intricate tapestry incorporating locally harvested *Anthuriums*, gingers, orchids, birds-of-paradise and dozens of other types of petals, pods, leaves and deconstructed flower parts.

These floral artists were clearly influenced by the botanical landscape of the Hawaiian Islands and Polynesian culture. Yet the majestic garments they devised are not costumes. Instead, the dramatic cape modeled by **Na'iwi Young**, owner of **Olowalu Entertainment**, a local firm known for Polynesian entertainment, and a hi-low-style skirt worn by **Kayla Maluhia Kawai**, a Luau dancer, stage actress and artist, reflect Hawaii's horticultural diversity found in the natural landscape, cultivated gardens and small agricultural plots that supply flowers to the studio.

"We started with the color scheme, which we wanted to be bold," Alison explains. She chose to avoid pastel hues, which the shop often works with for destination wedding clients.

Both Nicole's playful skirt design and the masculine cloak that Alison created draw from an audacious floral spectrum that ranges from spiced orange, flamboyant purple, hot fuchsia and vivid canary yellow to glossy green and burgundy foliage choices.

Together, rows of floral pieces form rhythmic bands, the sheer variety of which is staggering, considering that botanical elements were individually glued in overlapping rows onto the garments' cloth foundations. Alison estimates that each piece took about two full days to produce. The designers kept the garments rather simple, attaching them to the models' bodies with drawstrings, and used minimal black garments (sarong and a bandeau top) that basically disappear as the vibrant florals move to the foreground.

"There is a strong influence of wearing flowers here in Hawaii, although rarely on this scale," Nicole acknowledges. Grace Flowers Hawaii regularly designs leis for ceremonies



and occasions, but for this production, strands and strands of single-variety "jewelry" take on a fashion-forward vibe with blue jade vine, birds-of-paradise, kissing crowns, *Camellia* buds, *Cymbidium* orchids, Spanish moss and other unexpected ingredients. "We were all hands on deck with the lei-making – I think every employee made one strand," Alison says.

The elaborate Lei Po'o (also known as head lei) lends a regal quality to the finished designs, framing the models' striking faces and completing the floral narrative. When it came to location, Alison, Nicole and photographer **Megan Spelman**, of **Bikini Birdie**, were drawn to a hard-to-reach cliff above the Kohala Coast.

"I wanted something that showed Hawaii but not just palm trees and white beaches," Alison says. "This is a special place where you can actually walk from the cliffs down to the river bed and the ocean."

There was just enough breeze to catch Kayla's hair and lift the cloak from Na'iwi Young's shoulders, lending a moody, cinematic quality to Megan's photography. The dramatic fashion shoot expresses the sense of local pride that motivates Alison and her staff at Grace Flowers Hawaii. Flower farms and nurseries on the Big Island supported the idea of an all-Hawaii-grown fashion shoot to commemorate American Flowers Week.

"We wanted to source as close to home as we could, so everything was grown locally on the Big Island," Alison says. "We put our hearts and souls into these designs."



CREDITS

Floral Palette: Tropical and temperate flowers, foliage and botanicals grown on Hawaii's Big Island, including lantern ilima (*Abutilon*), Spanish moss, *Calathea* leaves, fiddlehead ferns, ti leaves, *Cymbidium* orchids, statice, snapdragons, *Dianthus*, *Anthuriums*, *Epidendrum* orchids, hanging fuzzy *Heliconias*, bottlebrush, fishtail palm, blue jade vine, crown flower, *Kalanchoe*, foxtail Agave, *Camellia*, ginger, *Bougainvillea*, bromeliads, pincushions and croton leaves.

Designers: Alison Grace Higgins (owner) and Nicole Cordier (manager), Grace Flowers Hawaii (Honoka'a, Hawaii), graceflowershawaii.com; @graceflowershawaii

Florals supplied by: J&D Farms (Kamuela), Pacific Floral Exchange (Hilo), Hawaii Isle Flowers (Volcano), The Orchid People (Kamuela), ESP Nurseries (Kamuela) and High Country Farms (Pa'auilo Mauka).

Models: Na'iwi Young and Kayla Maluhia Kawai

Hair/Makeup: Gracia Malendres, Grace Makeup Artistry

Photography: Meghan Spelman, Bikini Birdie Photography bikinibirdie.com, @bikinibirdie

Location: Kohala Coast, Big Island, Hawaii

