ROYAL REPLICAS

At about 6 a.m. EST April 29, the world got a glimpse of the year’s most anticipated floral arrangement. Kate Middleton’s “shield-shaped wired bouquet” (as described in a royal press release) of lily-of-the-valley, sweet William, myrtle and hyacinth drew praise from the media as “tasteful” and “diminutive.” Florists, too, admired her understated style, but knew that it involved a lot more time and money than the public realized.

On her April 30 blog, Cathy Walsh, owner of Sprout in Worcester, Mass., appraised the retail price tag at $1,500 to $2,000. The highly seasonal lily-of-the-valley on its own would cost Walsh nearly $800 for 100 stems (but some estimates put the count closer to 200 stems). Factor in labor — three to four hours of hand wiring for an “adept” florist, said BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of Bouquets in Denver — along with other product, and the price easily soars into the four digits.

Some brides set on mimicking the much-revered Kate won’t blink an eye at that price. But what about those who crave regal fashion, but lack royal funds? We challenged two designers to create a bouquet that captures the royal bride’s look, but for less than $100. Dyer, the winner of the first annual Colorado Retail Florists Association Wedding Bouquet Design Competition, and Austin, Texas-based event designer Kathi Thomas, AIFD, PFCI, TMF, delivered … royally.

LOVELY LILAC

Dyer picked white lilac as the focal flower “because it’s high end,” but “less so” than lily-of-the-valley. Purchased while in season (March, April or May), white lilac costs about $10 a bunch. Otherwise, it’s expensive, he said. He included hyacinth, in season January through May, and freesia, available all year, to show the two’s resemblance. “Freesia has a softer trumpet shape, but it could make a good substitute,” he said. To save time and to provide a water source, he used a bouquet holder, hand wiring just the hyacinth blossoms and half the freesia. This bouquet cost Dyer just more than $15 for wholesale product and supplies, took about 30 minutes to make and would retail for $79.95. But, given its upscale look, you could easily double the price, if you need to charge a “difficult bride premium,” he said. “It’s an opportunity to bury the billing for all the time you spend [on her wedding] beyond what was originally planned.”

A TOUCH OF TUBEROSE

Thomas used tuberose, ‘Million Stars’ gypsophila and miniature myrtle. Unlike lily-of-the-valley, which is sensitive to balmy temperatures — a major problem for Texas nuptials — tuberose has high heat tolerance and year-round availability. She taped pieces of gypsophila along a wire, “as if I were making a garland,” she said, to mimic “the feeling of depth” in Middleton’s bouquet. Thomas’ design cost her less than $25 for wholesale product and materials, took about an hour to make and would retail at $80 to $100, she said.

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