10 TRENDS TO HAVE AND TO HOLD*
*UNTIL A NEW, HOT LOOK COMES ALONG

BY KATIE HENDRICK
The market is saturated with images and inspiration for brides-to-be planning their big days. With a click of the “On Demand” button, she can enter the esteemed Kleinfeld Bridal for the trendiest selection of wedding gowns through TLC’s “Say Yes to the Dress” or learn how the über-affluent on We TV’s “Platinum Weddings” are incorporating callas, crystal-edged layer cakes and elephants into their nuptials. Online, she can lose many a lunch hour reading blogs — a Google search of the terms “bridal blog” yields more than 5 million results, with roughly 780,000 wedding message boards to boot. And don’t forget the standard: the bridal magazine. Dozens of publications, from Martha Stewart Weddings to Grace Ormonde Wedding Style, await the bridal rite of passage that is the trip to the magazine rack.

So just where do you, the florist, fit into this giddy, glossy world? You are the brides’ guide, translator and director, helping them separate the “wow” from the “wow, now that works for me and my budget.”

“It used to be that we’d help them create. now, you have to help them edit,” said BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, of his trend-savvy and research-happy brides. Often armed with a binder brimming or a laptop bookmarked with ideas, Dyer’s clients expect a florist who understands and recognizes what they’re seeing on the runways, at the movies, in the media and, “especially, on the Internet,” said the co-owner of Bouquets in Denver and Beavercreek, Colo.

To be that informed trend navigator, Ian Prosser, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, tunes his radar to all things fashion. “It’s crucial to use the same terminology as the fashion designers,” said the owner of Botanica International in Tampa and Orlando, Fla., whose brides have spent up to $120,000 on flowers and décor alone. “If I can’t distinguish between a ‘trumpet’ and a ‘mermaid’ skirt, or if I don’t know what she means when she says her shoes are by ‘Jimmy’ or ‘Manolo’ or ‘Christian,’ how can she trust me to be stylish enough for her?” Mindful to inquire about footwear early in the consultation, he’s found that roughly 80 percent of his brides pick a pair that’s a bold color and a status symbol. The shoe shoptalk “shows you have a pulse on current trends,” Prosser said, but even more, “gives you a good sense upfront about what kind of bride you’re talking to when you know she dropped $700 on a pair of heels.”

If you’re starting to shake in your Payless boots about keeping up with the super-informed, on-trend bride while still running a business, consider this your crash course — your Wedding Wikipedia of the moment.

We talked to eight high-volume wedding florists nationwide who meet, and often exceed, the demands of the informed couples. With their help, we’ve compiled 10 of the strongest trends for 2011 — and detailed how you can own it, or at least rent it until the next thing comes along.

1. Table Tableaux

Picture a spattering of votive candles, succulents, sprigs of rosemary and frames intermixed with vases of various shapes, sizes and styles. What you’re envisioning is exactly what more and more brides want: to let their trinkets, your vases and assorted baubles and collectibles dot the landscape of their wedding surfaces.

“Last year, a lot of brides wanted a more classic, tight, pavé look,” said Marisa Tsikounas, manager and design consultant for Michael Daigian Design in San Francisco. “Now, it’s all about lots of little elements instead of big round centerpieces.”

Svenja Brotz, AIFD, of Chestnut & Vine Floral Design in Berkeley, Calif., uses seasonal fruits and candles to create this hugely popular layered effect. Though still very elegant, tablescapes don’t have that same ostentatious air that giant centerpieces can give off, she said. “A wedding is a personal, intimate moment in a couple’s life and they’re trying to create that ambiance for their guests, too.”

“The ‘grouping’ look has definitely hit a critical mass,” said Julie Stevens, of Julie Stevens Design in Sonoma, Calif. “The style is becoming very loose and whimsical — lots of mason jars, wildflowers, herbs, moss and garden roses.”

Dyer remembers not so long ago having to convince brides that composite centerpieces featuring several vases “were cool and contemporary,” he said. “Now they ask me for it before I can even bring it up at the consultation!”

Know it, Own it, Sell it

A budget bride might opt for this, as well as one who wants to be very hands-on in the planning. Rather than rent containers, many brides scour eBay for inimitable designs. Then, at the end of event, guests take home these “mini arrangements” as party favors, Brotz said. If your customer would rather just sign a check, you can similarly source these accents. Remember though, you’ll have to store the flotsam and jetsam ... and clean it. And your definition of a cute find might be her idea of junk. Work closely together to come up with a style sheet that works.
Comfy seating is part of the overall push to make weddings more intimate, encouraging even those who don’t want to cut a rug to at least hang out near the dance floor. Prosser relies heavily on furniture for wedding décor, keeping his inventory stocked with items such as French chairs (“for that Anthropologie look!”) that he acquired at the Dallas Market, and stores in his studio. He also rents from area furniture and antiques dealers. “You can really edge out the competition if you market yourself as a florist that can secure extra touches, like the lighting and furniture,” Prosser said. “It’s a hassle to run around to a lot of different vendors, so if you can take care of those errands for her, she’ll pick your services.”

Get familiar with the layouts and loading docks of local venues. Find out if they even allow outside furniture in their facilities. Network with furniture dealers, so when you need a rental, you have ample options. Browse popular home-furnishing catalogues — Pottery Barn, Restoration Hardware, Crate & Barrel, Frontgate — and architecture magazines for popular looks. Scour the classifieds for estate sales, auctions and hotel liquidation sales. And while you’re hunting the thrift stores for knick-knacks, keep your eyes peeled for bigger pieces.
Forget mothers of the brides, it’s Mother Nature who’s calling the shots and setting the tone on many a knot-tying these days. Yelverton, who isn’t geographically in farm country, has seen the aisle run through a horse farm and an alpaca farm at weddings he co-designed recently. Those not willing to gamble with the weather are bringing the outside in. “Of course, this is a romanticized, dream version of the outdoors — not the family camping trip,” Yelverton said. “Think: airy dresses, no bugs and perfect hair.”

For flowers, “brides want them to look freshly picked, or like they’re growing right out of the middle of the table,” Sebenius said. For his high-end, low-country brides, he might start with a birch trunk, then top it with a lush arrangement of hydrangeas, seeded eucalyptus and Italian ruscus, accenting the base with moss and orchids. A budget-friendly version would use the same flowers, but fewer, arranged in a wooden box. When brides drop words such as “rustic,” “green” and “organic,” think multi-textures. “These weddings are your opportunity to pull out the unique greens like pittosporum and Galax leaves,” Sebenius said.

You don’t have to head for the hills or hop a tractor to get a glimpse into this rustic scene. Prosser finds inspiration at Anthropologie, a women’s apparel, accessories and home furnishings retail store known for its ethereal shabby chic feel. “What brides really gravitate to is a bastardization of defined, delicate fabric, like burlap with silk or lace, and pairing high and low containers, such as fine glass and a festive urn,” he said.

Rustic means the end of “cookie-cutter glass containers,” Tsikounas said. “Brides want you to create visual interest wherever you can — from layering different ribbons on her bouquet to placing more modern arrangements in weathered containers,” she said. “It’s like taking an apartment with cement floors and brick walls, and decorating it with antique furniture.”

**KNOW IT, OWN IT, SELL IT**

This look (almost) always involves some organic components, Yelverton said — sometimes garden-like flowers (dahlias, zinnias, marigolds, garden roses) and accessories (watering cans, planters, tins), but could involve bamboo flatware for dinner, antique patina (oxidized copper) signs and fabric with a nubby texture. Whiskey barrels fit in well with these weddings, said Sharon McGukin, AAF, AIFD, PFci, author of “Flowers for the Heart: A Bride’s Guide to Choosing Flowers for Her Wedding.”

Need inspiration? Get outside! Farmers’ markets and consignment shops can yield inexpensive, distinctive linens and jars. Be sure to tap your wholesaler’s expertise to learn about available greens and containers you might not use regularly.

**BLACK (AND WHITE) BEAUTY**

Marisa Tsikounas’s design speaks to the ballerina chic trend emerging from the popularity of “Black Swan,” using peonies, garden roses, cymbidium orchids, plum leaves, black eucalyptus leaves and chocolate cosmos.
MEET THE TREND-WATCHERS

SVENJA BROTZ, AIFD
Chestnut & Vine Floral Design; Berkeley, Calif.
YEARS IN BUSINESS: 15
AVERAGE BRIDE’S FLORAL AND DÉCOR BUDGET: $5,000
2010 WEDDING TALLY: 68
ACCOLADES: “People’s Choice” 2010 winner at Teleflora’s annual “California’s Top Ten Design Competition”; exhibitor at “Bouquets to Art” fundraiser at San Francisco’s de Young Museum
GO-TO TRENDS TOOLS: art exhibitions, newspapers’ style sections, architecture magazines

JULIE STEVENS
Julie Stevens Designs; Sonoma and Marin, Calif.
YEARS IN BUSINESS: 15
AVERAGE BRIDE’S FLORAL AND DÉCOR BUDGET: $5,000-6,000
2010 WEDDING TALLY: 60
ACCOLADES: Work appeared in Elegant Bride, Real Simple Weddings, San Francisco Weddings, the Knot and Style Me Pretty
GO-TO TRENDS TOOLS: the Knot, Bride & Bloom, InStyle Weddings, Real Simple, Grace Ormonde, BRIDES, Town & Country; International Special Events Society; networking with wedding planners

ROBBIN YELVERTON, AIFD, PFCCI
Blumz...by JRDesigns; Detroit and Ferndale, Mich.
YEARS IN BUSINESS: 30+
AVERAGE BRIDE’S FLORAL AND DÉCOR BUDGET: $3,500 and up
2010 WEDDING TALLY: 90+
ACCOLADES: 2010 National Floral Designer of the Year (National Alliance of Floral Associations); Voted Metro Detroit’s “Best Florist” 2007
GO-TO TRENDS TOOLS: bridal blogs, bridal magazines, bridal television shows

IAN PROSSER, AAF, AIFD, PFCCI
Botanica International; Tampa and Orlando, Fla.
YEARS IN BUSINESS: 30+
AVERAGE BRIDE’S FLORAL AND DÉCOR BUDGET: $4,000-120,000
2010 WEDDING TALLY: 100+
ACCOLADES: 2010 Event Solutions Designer of the Year
GO-TO TRENDS TOOLS: Grace Ormonde, BRIDES

MARISA TSIKOUNAS
Michael Daigian Design (shown in photo); San Francisco
YEARS IN BUSINESS: 33
AVERAGE BRIDE’S FLORAL AND DÉCOR BUDGET: $5,000-25,000
2010 WEDDING TALLY: 23
ACCOLADES: published in the Knot, Grace Ormonde, San Francisco Brides, C-Weddings, Martha Stewart and Fusion Flowers
GO-TO TRENDS TOOLS: Style Me Pretty, 100 Layer Cake, Green Brides

SASHA GORDON, AIFD
Starbright Floral Design; New York, N.Y.
YEARS IN BUSINESS: 6
AVERAGE BRIDE’S FLORAL AND DÉCOR BUDGET: $5,000
2010 WEDDING TALLY: 40-50
ACCOLADES: 2010 “Best of” by City Search, 2010 “Top Florist in NYC” from the Knot
GO-TO TRENDS TOOLS: InStyle Weddings, Martha Stewart Weddings, New York Magazine: Wedding Issue. “Other times, I just do a Google image search for ‘centrepieces’ and when I find one I like, I go to the florist’s website.”

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2010 WEDDING TALLY: 90+
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GO-TO TRENDS TOOLS: Style Me Pretty, 100 Layer Cake, Green Brides

B J D Y E R , A A F , A I F D
Bouquets; Denver and Beavercreek, Colo.
YEARS IN BUSINESS: 25
AVERAGE BRIDE’S FLORAL AND DÉCOR BUDGET: $3,000
2010 WEDDING TALLY: 100
ACCOLADES: 2003 Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year; Winner of three ICON awards, recognizing the top companies in Colorado’s special events industry; two-time Floral Management Marketer of the Year

GO-TO TRENDS TOOLS: Style Me Pretty, 100 Layer Cake, Green Brides
These days, when guests hear the clinking of spoons on champagne flutes, they’re no longer directing their attention to the front of the room. Now in vogue: a super-sized round or rectangular table, large enough for the bride and groom, their attendants and dates. Called the “empire,” “king” or “queen” table, it sits in the center of the room, with smaller guest tables branching out around it.

“People have caught on that the chairman or head table was awkward,” Yelverton said. “Sitting everyone on one side stifled conversation; it separated people from their dates and it ultimately became a collection of coats, shoes, purses and empty glasses once the music started.” This new seating arrangement still designates a table of honor, but it fits in with the rest of the room. “It’s a lot less stuffy than its predecessor and it’s a lot of fun for floral design,” Yelverton said.

**KNOW IT, OWN IT, SELL IT**
For budgets that don’t allow for flowers on every guest table, the move to centralized seating helps the bride provide a show-stopping but not bank-breaking look. “It’s natural: When you walk in a room, your eye zeros in on one spot,” Yelverton said.

**NEW ARRANGEMENT** Forget the head table. Wedding parties nowadays enjoy centrally located and more inclusive seating at an empire table, like this one Robbin Yelverton, AIFD, PFCI, designed.

**7. COME INTO THE LIGHT**

“Lighting is one of the biggest emerging trends,” Stevens said of her Sonoma County brides, emphasizing the appeal no matter the length of the guest list. Color washes, leaf motifs and monograms projected on the wall and dance floor are highly prized in her market. Prosser, too, has seen increased requests for extra illumination. The mother of a bride recently asked him what “one thing” could make the reception more fabulous. “I suggested splurging on professional lighting,” Prosser said. When the wedding day came, the mother was so astounded by the added glamour that she didn’t flinch at the $7,500 lighting package. Lighting presents one more opportunity for personalization, such as taking the pattern from the invitation and shining it on the wall, he said. Dyer frequently incorporates lighting into his reception decorations, most often to add color splashes to the room, but also to uplight focus points. “Think about it, lighting completely affects how good your other services look,” he said.

**LIGHT STYLE** Brides beg for extra flash, such as the color splashes used at this wedding Marisa Tsikounas helped design.

**KNOW IT, OWN IT, SELL IT**
Network with lighting professionals. Know their skill sets and prices so you can inform your brides. Discuss potential partnerships so you can get a cut for bringing them clients. If you’re doing the set-up, be prepared to spend more time with the venue’s facilities people. Plan to purchase your own equipment? Dyer recommends LED-battery remote controlled units, and be aware of your competitors’ fees, he said. “Lighting is an add-on sale, so we charge what the market will bear,” he said. If a DJ or hotel offers a more affordable package, he’ll scale back his price to be in the same ballpark. But if he knows a bride’s only other option is a professional lighting company, he’ll “stretch the cost to be just below them,” he said.
**SIMPLY CHIC** Julie Stevens used white and green hydrangeas, white peonies, orange parrot tulips and kumquats for this monofloral-designed reception.

While brides may want an eclectic assortment of tins, jars and trinkets on the table, they are increasingly going for arrangements of only one flower type. With an abundance of small, compact containers, monofloral designs shine for their cool, clean look, Dyer said.

Some brides can’t commit to just one variety, but still like a crisp, compartmentalized look — that’s where “grouping” comes in. This technique uses multiple varieties but keeps like buds nested together: “Think of the aesthetics of a Cobb salad, compared to a tossed salad,” Dyer said.

**KNOW IT, OWN IT, SELL IT**
To do the monobotanical look, invest in an inventory of geometrically shaped vases — cubes, orbs, cylinders, rectangles and spheres — for rental and choose clean, bold flower varieties with strong lines, Dyer said. His favorites: callas, anthurium, hydrangeas, tulips, roses, protea, orchids and gerberas.

"For every trend, there is a counter-trend, and it usually follows the 80/20 ratio," McGukin said. So for the majority who fawn over dainty details, there’s an equally devoted subset who want their weddings to be bric-a-brac free. They don’t want curio; they want clean, cool and contemporary. Their no. 1 request? "callas!” said both Dyer and sebenius of the versatile flower available in a wide spectrum of colors. Sebenius suspects it’s the sturdy flower’s “strong line and neat, polished look” that garners so much adoration. Other frequent requests in this category include submerged flowers and cube designs with a leaf wrap.

**9. FANCY, FRILLY FROCKS**
Sebenius, a voracious reader of InStyle and Martha Stewart Weddings, has detected a demand for detailed gowns in 2011. “Brides are going back to lace, as well as floral embellishments,” he said, looks that make him inclined to reach for softer flowers, such as roses and peonies. In California, there’s been a definite shift to flowy, airy fabrics — namely chiffon — for brides and their attendants, Stevens said.

**DEMURE DETAILS** Sharon McGukin, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, replicated the ruffled hem on a bride’s dress on her bouquet.

Those demure dress details can be a dream for floral designs.

**KNOW IT, OWN IT, SELL IT**
Scan her dress for its most brilliant asset. When a bride showed him her gown, which featured a giant blossom on the hip, Yelverton suggested a bouquet that would let that fabric flower get even more mileage. Removing petals from a gladiolus, he built a massive camellia — “a glamelia” — with a “stamen” made of rhinestones, crystals and pearls. “She fell in love with that dress, so you can only imagine her excitement when she saw I recreated its main detail in her bouquet,” Yelverton said.

McGukin had a similar experience when doing flowers for her daughter’s friend. Upon spotting the satin ruffle at the hem of the bride’s dress, McGukin grabbed a hotel iron to press folds into the ribbon on her bouquet’s handle, while the bride got dressed. “My daughter teased me about being so detail obsessed,” McGukin said. “Of course, she was completely excited to show it off to her friend, who was just delighted with that final touch.”