BLUSHING BEAUTIES

Georgia O’Keefe’s paintings in the 1930s may have cast orchids as symbols of sexuality, but it’s their ornate shapes and breadth of colors that have consumers, particularly brides, blushing these days. Conveying opulence without the frill, orchids are the preferred flowers for women with upscale tastes and a sophisticated style, said Sharon McGukin, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, author of “Flowers of the Heart — a bride’s guide to choosing flowers for her wedding.” The abundance of varieties in deep purple, chartreuse green and white — all popular in wedding palettes — make them all the more desirable, she added.

At Botanica International in Tampa, Fla., where clients’ budgets range from $4,000 to $120,000, “orchids are the consistent frontrunner” in requested looks, said event coordinator Zoë Gallina. Her brides have adorned their updos with mokaras, carried phalaenopsis bouquets down the aisle and accented cakes with cymbidiums.

Across the country, BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, said that, while demand for orchids has remained consistently high throughout his 25-year tenure in the industry, he marvels at the scope of varieties and design applications used today.

“In the late ‘80s, it was all about dendrobriums,” said the owner of Bouquets in Denver and two-time Floral Management Marketer of the Year. “Now, it’s not unusual to see cut phalaenopsis, paphiopedilums, arandas and mokaras — even cymbidiums [which were once] too expensive for all but the toniest shops.”

Among his favorite orchid looks: adhering small blossoms (with glue or sparkly bullion wire) to bare branches, mimicking apple, cherry blossom and quince trees; inserting exquisite, but short-stemmed varieties (such as paphiopedilums and potinaras) in full Euro-mass style arrangements; enclosing large, pricier varieties (especially cymbidiums) in large glass vases; enveloping potted varieties with a mass of mixed flowers. Here are seven alluring varieties available. For photos of designs featuring orchids, see www.safnow.org/moreonline.

Looking for a hip take on the hand-tied bouquet? String seven or eight blooms of ‘Red Bull’ on decorative wire and dangle like a chain from the bouquet’s perimeter, suggests Vince Butera, AAF, AIFD, PFCI. For fall and winter events, the owner of Butera the Florist in York, Pa., gravitates to “a deep toned mixture with a lot of texture,” achieved by hanging the dendrobium orchid from a mass of red roses, burgundy dahlias, purple trachelium, ‘Safari Sunset’ leucadendron and burgundy hypericum. For May and June nuptials, ‘Red Bull’ would add “a dramatic punch” to bouquets featuring white or pink peonies and green hypericum, he said.
Fresh Choices

Take a cue from the French tradition of highlighting treasured objects in glass cloches. Placing cymbidium orchids, such as ‘Roxburgh Red’, inside large vases “creates a museum-like display and emphasizes their rarity,” Dyer said.

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“A fun twist on a normal phalaenopsis,” ‘Purple Everspring’ would make a stunning focal flower in a high style arrangement with assorted greenery, said Karen Fountain, AAF, owner of Flowers ‘n’ Ferns in Burke, Va. Teleflora Vice President of Education Marie Ackerman, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, echoed the suggestion of minimal adornment for this dramatic variety. Her pick: Place it in a vase with “a sinewy piece of kiwi vine” and some simple foliage.

For a bridal bouquet, “nothing is more dramatic than white dendrobiums paired with white Oriental lilies,” said Wilton Hardy, AAF, AIFD, PFCI. The Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., designer pictures a dramatic cascade of ‘Lervia White’ featuring white lilies in the focal, with individual orchid florets strung from bear grass, for a look with “motion and flair.”

‘Ruby Red’ looks “rich and inviting” on the Thanksgiving dinner table, especially when mixed with garnet-colored chrysanthemums and ‘Black Magic’ roses, said Walter Fedysyn, AIFD, PFCI. Add some purple grapes and pomegranates “to complete the harvest look,” suggests the creative design manager at Phillip’s Flowers in Chicago, who sees the mokara orchid appearing in a host of holiday designs. Pair it with red winterberry branches, sprays of fresh cedar branches and pinecones for some Christmas festivity, he said. Decorating for a New Year’s Eve party? Show off the intense crimson hue in a silver metallic container.

Fedysyn itches to get his hands on ‘White Pannee’ for winter weddings. The popular red and burgundy bridesmaid dresses would accentuate the petals’ delicate red speckles, he said, adding that florists can make the petals stand out more by wrapping individual florets with wire. For the holiday bride, add clusters of red holly or hypericum berries, he said. Ackerman, envisions the mokara orchid accenting vibrant purple and magenta flowers, such as dianthus, lisianthus and statice.

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