PLUG INTO HYBRIDS

If a bride asked for a “Casablanca”-themed wedding, you might start envisioning Moroccan tents, white dinner jackets and a few gambling tables. But when Michael Derouin, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, got the request recently, the star power his customer sought wasn’t from Humphrey Bogart or Ingrid Berman — it was for the ‘Casablanca’ lily variety.

“She loved lilies that much — how great is that?” said Derouin, a designer at McArdle’s Florist & Garden Center in Greenwich, Conn. It’s pretty great — as it underscores that lilies are not just for funerals, but can hold their own at weddings and parties and add some tasteful drama to dinner tables and sophistication to the reception desk.

We talked to breeders, growers, wholesalers and retailers for names of today’s hottest varieties, and LA hybrids dominated the list (Why? See Up the Supply Chain, p. 18).

Not unlike fashion designers’ love of leggy models, floral designers appreciate LA hybrid lilies for their long laterals’ ability to make arrangements appear more lush and alluring. Because of their longevity, LA hybrids are among Derouin’s top picks for corporate clients. “People get to experience the lily’s entire life cycle,” he said. His secret (and profitable) weapon for adding natural light to an office space: 10 stems of ‘Timaru’ LA hybrid lilies in a sleek black vase. “When one blossom begins to fade, a new bud blooms. It’s interactive!”

Jeff Corbin, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, echoed the monobotanical preference. “No lily is done justice hidden under other blossoms or other foliage,” said the co-owner and lead designer of Radford City Florist in Radford, Va.

Here’s some LA Hybrids to add to your lineup.

‘Esprit’ pops at the oft-requested orange and hot-pink weddings. Alex Jackson, AIFD, PFCI, likes them with bright orange pincushion protea and safflower in hand-tied bouquets. For everyday arrangements at Phoenix Flower Shops, Jackson suggests putting them in a terra-cotta window box with a base of wheatgrass.

“Orange isn’t just for fall anymore — it’s the new ‘happy’ color,” said Teleflora’s Marie Ackerman, AAF, AIFD, PFCI. Her look of the moment is a Lilly Pulitzer palette (orange, hot pink, “and a dash of chartreuse”). For an arrangement mimicking the preppy, perky Palm Beach look, Ackerman recommends ‘Massimo’ with hot-pink gerberas, spray roses or carnations and ‘Yoko Ono’ button spray mums.
Finding ‘Nemo’ the perfect accent against the popular black bridesmaid dresses, Walter Fedyshyn, AIFD, PFCI, reaches for these lilies often. The creative design manager at Philip’s Flowers in Chicago recommends pairing ‘Nemo’ with orange roses or mokara orchid florets for a monochromatic look, or adding a pop of green hypericum for a modern look.

For brides requesting the very traditional all-white palette, Fedyshyn turns to ‘Timaru’, which he calls “the classic white lily.” Its pure white blooms, mixed with white and ivory roses and antique-green hydrangea, “make a majestic bouquet for any bride or bridesmaid,” he said.

Laurie Lemeck, AIFD, PFCI, predicts ‘Papaya’ will pop up in a variety of wire orders this fall because its burnt-orange hue will complement other autumn-colored flowers, such as ‘Black Bacarra’, a burgundy rose, ‘Coffee Break’, a bi-color orange and red rose and sunflowers. “Want something super delicious? Put ‘Papaya’ beside a sunflower’s chocolate center,” said the sales representative for Delaware Valley Wholesale Florist.

‘Trebbiano’ is Fedyshyn’s choice for corporate clients, where vase life is what counts. “We send them out in bud form and they last the entire week,” he said of this avocado-colored lily. “Everyone in the office can watch them develop and admire their beauty.”

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DOUBLE DELIGHT

Unlike any lily in the marketplace, Roselily, a series of Orientals available in the U.S. this fall, boasts double blooms, a very faint scent and no pollen — meaning no more orange dustings threatening white bridal gowns, linens and allergy-suffering customers and employees. For now, the series includes two varieties: ‘Belonica’ (bottom) and ‘Fabiola’ (top). Both have vase lives of 10 to 12 days, at least five days longer than a regular Oriental, and strong stems that can grow to 90 centimeters, said Robin van der Schaff, president of Flamingo Holland, a lily distributor in Vista, Calif. Among those already interested are Whole Foods and Safeway. But everyone will have to be patient. Flamingo Holland’s supply will be about 100,000 this year. Within two to four years, van der Schaff expects both will be readily available — and perhaps joined by new varieties.