The American Institute of Floral Designers

presents

The
AIFD
Education
Experience

THE AIFD CONNECTION

The Abstract Experience
The Abstract Experience

Floral design styles have been evolving for millennia, ever since man first began to place plant materials together into pleasing arrangements. Civilizations throughout history have all contributed to the styles that we see today, and just like every other medium of artistic expression, floral design continually changes in response to social customs, political climate, economic conditions, fashion trends, mechanical innovations and creative inspiration.

Fads may come and go while classic styles retain their timeless appeal, but the elements and principles of design are always in operation. However, abstract floral design can be influenced by fads. Fashion, colors, textures and social influences can contribute to the design created. The practice of ikebana contributed some of the first formalized guidelines for arranging flowers and many of our present-day ideas about floral design, such as balance, proportion and radiation had their beginning in the Buddhist temples of 15th century Japan.

Abstract Art
To understand definition of Abstract Art, first consider what the word Abstract means.

As an adjective the definition of abstract art is something apart from concrete existence. Things theoretical and not applied or practical, things not easily understood. When applied to art it refers to a style of art that the intellectual and affective content are dependent solely on the intrinsic form.

As a noun the definition of abstract art is the summarization of the important parts of a text, the concentrated essence of the whole.

As a verb it mean to take away, to think of a quality or attribute without thinking of a particular object or example. To summarize or remove from reality.

Abstractionism is where the artist content depends on internal form rather than pictorial representation. It uses a visual language of form, color and line to create a composition which may exist with a degree of independence from visual references of the world. Abstract art emphasizes moods and impressions and is characterized by the use of bold colors and geometric shapes and lines. Compositions that usually do not portray an existing floral design style generally falls into the category of abstract. Artists like Monet painted in a manner that relied more on how the individual interprets the world, rather than depicting in absolute realism.
Abstract floral design is a design that employs nonrealistic uses of natural and or man-made materials solely as pure elements of line, form, color and texture in space to create a statement evoking a well thought-out emotion.

The distinctive non-realistic qualities of an abstract design are the following:

- Extreme lines
- Space, positive and negative
- Unusual forms
- Color
- Defined textures

**Abstract Stem Placement:**

Stem placement is a process of positioning plant materials into a design. There are three basic stem placement techniques, each clearing expressing a different method of design construction. These are abstract, radial and parallel. Integrated is the use of two or more different stem placement end techniques into one composition. In a Abstract Design, abstract stem placement is essential. There is no apparent plan or order to this stem placement.

Abstract

Parallel

Integrated

Radial
**Space**

**Negative Space**
Negative space is the planned area within a composition that is devoid of any materials, essentially, empty space. It is negative space that allows individual materials in a design to be seen clearly. The term “void” is used to describe empty space that serves to visually separate areas of positive space.

**Positive Space:**
Positive space is the planned area in a design occupied by flowers, foliages and other objects.

**Line:** *Element of Design*
Is the vital visual path that directs the eye movement through a composition. The lines may be straight, curved, or a combination, they may be actual or implied. They are either:

**Static line:** this line is either vertical or horizontal. Creates strength and stability in a floral composition and as the name implies are seen as being rigid, unchanging and without much energy or motion.

**Dynamic line:** may be curving or slanted, zigzag, contorted or meandering. They move in more than one direction relative to the vertical/horizontal axis and consequently are seen as more lively and energetic.

Lines may be actual: creating a physical presence or implied: created in the mind’s eye when it visually links 2 or more physical points together.

- **Broken:** a line which is interrupted in its path or direction.
- **Continuous:** an uninterrupted succession of lines.
- **Contorted:** a line which bends severely; a twisted shape or expression. (e.g. curly willow)
- **Curvilinear:** a continuous line consisting of bends and arcs that flow in more than one direction.
- **Diagonal:** a line on an angle that is not vertical or horizontal, but slants.
- **Dynamic:** an energetic line that visually creates a feeling of motion and force, in contrast to static line.
- **Hanging:** a cascading line that appears to be weighted. (e.g. fruit bearing branch)
- **Helical:** a curving, coiling line that spirals as though on a surface of a cylinder or cone, creating a three-dimensional configuration.
- **Horizontal:** parallel to the horizon (earth) or the baseline.
- **Implied:** an imaginary or invisible line created in the mind’s eye by connecting two or more physical points within a composition.
- **Interactive:** lines that reciprocate, which usually play off or respond to one another, creating a sense of activity.
Design creation
When creating an abstract design there is a sequential process to consider when starting the development of the design. This step by step process is essential in creating any type of floral design. It is not required to follow these steps one right after another but to make sure each of these steps is included in the process of floral design development. These steps are as follows:

- **Determine the Form**
- **Selecting the Color Palette**
- **Gather the Flowers**
- **Applying Techniques**

Step one: Determine the Form

**Form:** is the shape or configuration of an individual component of the composition the overall, three-dimensional, geometric shape or configuration of a floral composition.

**Geometric:** shapes; structures, decorative patterns or designs based on geometric forms.

An abstract design can be any number of geometric shapes but keeping in mind the use of line and space. The geometric forms that are applied are either a:

- **Circle**
- **Triangular**
- **Square**

**Circle:** a closed-plane curve consisting of points that are equally distant from a center point. A ring.

Design forms can follow the design style shape suggested below:
- **Round:** a planned composition in the form of partial sphere using radial stem placements.
- **Mound:** a raised mass on a horizontal plane.
- **Sphere:** a three-dimensional round design; a globe, orb or ball.
- **Oval:** a broadly elliptical, egg-shaped design.
- **Fan:** a semi-circular, radiating design in which lines emerge from a center point much like spokes from the hub of a wheel.
- **Crescent:** a narrow curved shape that tapers to a point at each end.
Hogarth: an elegant, elongated “S” shaped curve, often interpreted in design that is also known as the “line of beauty”. Named for the 18th century English artist William Hogarth.

Conical: a three-dimensional geometric figure having a circular base and sides that taper evenly to an apex.

**Triangle:** *a plane figure with three sides and three angles.*

Design forms can follow the design style shape suggested below:

- **Symmetrical:** *an equilateral or isosceles triangle.*
  - Equilateral: a design form in the shape of a triangle with all three sides of equal length.
  - Pyramid: a solid figure having a square base and four triangular sides meeting at a point.
  - Isosceles: a triangular form where two sides are of equal length and the third side is a different length. Has symmetrical balance.

- **Asymmetrical:** *without symmetry; not having a mirror image on both sides of a plane, axis or point.*
  - Right: an asymmetrical triangle-shaped arrangement with a vertical line perpendicular to a horizontal line forming a 90-degree angle within the triangle. Sometimes referred to as a L-shaped design.
  - Scalene: an asymmetrical triangular design in which all three sides are unequal in length.

**Square:** *an elongated four-sided parallelogram consisting of equal sides and right angles.*

Design forms can follow the design style shape suggested below:

- Cube: a form having six equal square sides.
- Rectangle: a planned composition in the form of a rectangle.
- Vertical: a tall narrow design that does not extend beyond the width of the container.
- Diagonal: a design pattern in which the primary axis lies on a slant of approximately 45 degrees.
- Horizontal: A composition in which the predominant line(s) are parallel to the plane of the horizon or the surface base.
- Obelisk: a planned composition in the shape of an obelisk.


**Step two: Select the Color Palette:**

**Color** *(the visual response of the eye to reflected rays of light)* is probably the most influential element when it comes to choosing your flowers. Depending upon the occasion, the environment and the personality of the recipient also plays into the application. Color terminology that is important to understand is as follows:

- **Value:** *the degree of a color’s purity relative to the gray scale.*
- **Warm/Cool**: aggressive (red, yellow and orange) and recessive (blue, green and violet) colors
- **Monochromatic**: a grouping of different values of one hue which may include achromatic colors (black, white and gray)
- **Analogous**: a grouping of three adjacent colors on the color wheel: one color dominates
- **Complimentary**: a pair of hues directly opposite on the color wheel.


**Step three: Gather the Flowers**

Choosing flowers for the bouquet is a combination of factual information regarding time, place, conditions, etc., the best choices for the style and colors chosen. Professionalism and a strong knowledge of flowers, varieties available, characteristics of each variety and care and handling will help make the best selections.

See Flower Identification Chart – The Guide, page 140


In selecting your product you must keep in mind the principles of **unity** (oneness of purpose, thought, style and spirit, the organization of components into a harmonious whole resulting in a cohesive relationship of all parts) and **proportion** (the comparative relationship in size, quantity and degree of emphasis between components within the composition. It is the relationship of one portion to another portion or the relation of one portion to a whole).

Also pay attention to the elements of **texture** (the surface quality of materials as perceived by sight or visual or by touch or tactile) and **fragrance** (a sweet or pleasing order, perceived by the sense of smell).

The **form** of the flowers as well as the overall bouquet is also very important. Flower and foliage form is observed by the predominate dimensional qualities with regard to its shape, structure and usage within a composition. The **inflorescence** or the arrangement of the flowers on the axis determines the categories of the forms. Some examples of these forms are:

**Filler flower**: any open form inflorescences that is branched or clustered and used to fill space.
- (i.e. Gypsophila, wax flower, limonium)
- (foliage i.e. tree fern, smoke tree)

**Form Flower**: any inflorescence having shape as its most distinctive characteristic.
- (I. e. iris, heliconia, calla)
- (foliage i.e. monstera, silver dollar eucalyptus)

**Line Flower**: any inflorescences having a spike-like or linear form or featuring an elongated stem.
- (i.e. gladiolus, liatris, larkspur)
- (foliage i.e. scotch broom, equisetum)

**Mass Flower**: any closed form inflorescences having a single, dense, rounded head at the top of the stem.
- (i.e. carnation, dahlia, chrysanthemum)
- (foliage i.e. camellia, aspidistra)
Renegade Flower: a term sometimes used to describe an inflorescence which may fall into more than one flower form.
(i.e. bird of paradise)
(foliage i.e. ti, flat fern, myrtle)
See Flower Form Glossary – The Guide, page 139 -144

The end result of your product choice must be a pleasing composition that compliments the design style and occasion.

**Dominance:**
*Primary Principal of Design:*
The visual organization within a design that emphasizes one or more aspects. When one element is emphasized, others are subordinate.

Abstract design contains a focal area. It is your choice on where it is.

**Focal Area/Point:**
*Secondary Principal of Design*
Areas of greatest visual impact or weight, centers of interest to which the eye is drawn most naturally. Emphasized are within the area of dominance.

Focal areas can be selected to draw that attention to any part of the composition.

Below container    In the container    Above the container    Beside the container

**Emphasis:**
Area(s) in a composition given special attention. They create attention by Importance, Stress, and Weight. The foundation of the design is where the emphasis of detail is applied. Basing techniques accomplish this task.

The application of detail creates an interesting completion to a abstract design.
**Accent:**

*Secondary Principal of Design:*

Detail added to a design to provide additional interest, affecting the totality of the design.

**Detailed Design Techniques:**

- **Tying:** securing or fastening materials together with cord, rope, straps etc…
- **Wrapping:** covering a single stem or bundle of stems from end to end with decorative materials such as ribbon, raffia, wire, etc…
- **Structuring:** something composed of interrelated parts forming an object or structure.
- **Bunching:** a gathering of several similar materials together and inserting them into an arrangement as one. Labor-saving technique.
- **Piercing:** using a sharp, pointed material to pierce the tissue or fiber of another component in a design.
- **Sewing:** fastening or gathering materials together using wire, thread, staples, straight pins etc… Threading decorative string, ribbon or wire for decorative purposes.
- **Binding:** tying together materials, primarily mechanical.
- **Baling:** compressing and tying plant material into an overall geometric shape, simulating a bale of tied grasses or hay.
- **Detailing:** making precise and refined placements to complete a composition.
- **Leafwork:** the process of creating a surface by applying foliage in an overlapping manner to give texture and/or form to a container or surface by sewing, gluing, stapling, etc…
- **Petaling:** the covering of a surface with petals using a floral adhesive.
- **Bundling:** firmly tying similar materials together forming a radiating pattern above and below the binding point.
- **Braiding or plaiting:** a decorative technique of interweaving strands of fiber, ribbon, foliage, etc…by braiding, folding or pleating.
- **Weaving:** the interlacing of materials to create a new dimensional or sculptural form.
- **Constructed:** the building of a structure as an integral part of the design.
- **Hair pinning:** mechanical attachment of materials by using a “U” shaped wire at the binding point.
- **Air taping:** wrapping tape to itself without wire and attaching to the composition.
- **Banding:** ornamentally encircling material in concise and consecutive ring drawing attention to a particular component.

**Insertion position:** the stem placement into the composition directly affecting the dominance of the composition.

**Shadowing:** the close placement of one material directly behind the primary material, giving a three-dimensional appearance. Resulting in a shadow or echo affect of the primary.
Facing: the turning or directing of a flower head in a certain way in order to increase interest and visual movement within a design.

Mirroring: the placement of materials in a composition such that one appears to reflect the other.

Sheltering: placing one or more materials over or around another, lightly enclosing the materials within, to create an impression of protection.

Veiling: layering light materials over more solid forms creating a light, almost transparent screen. Often used in the waterfall design.

Spiraling: to circle around a central point in a flat curve that is constantly increasing or decreasing in size; to coil in one plane.

Gradation: a design technique of placing flower or foliage in an ordered progression, from largest to smallest or darkest to lightest.

Sequencing: placing flowers and materials in an orderly succession.

Framing: using branches or flowers to enclose or showcase the material within. Defines space and may bring special attention to the focal area of a composition.

Physical application

Abstracting: removing parts or pieces so as to distort; to alter the surface. To place plant material in unusual ways.

Airbrushing: applying paint from a pressurized source.

Detaching: removing a flower’s petals to give the flower a new shape.

Massaging: bending or curving of a branch or flower stem by applying gentle pressure and warmth with the thumbs, fingers and hands. Working with plant materials at room temperature facilitates this process.

Reflexing: rolling back the petals of a flower to create a more open look.

Pruning: selectively removing branches, foliages, florets or petals to create a designed negative space and produce materials that appear to be more sculptural. Pruning reveals a stronger line and more interesting shape.

Tailoring: the modifying or altering of a material’s appearance by trimming, gluing, or stapling.

Tipping: painting the edges of flower petals or leaves.

Hana-kubari: the use of natural mechanics such as twigs, branches and rocks. This creates a design that has an aesthetically pleasing mechanical alternatives to foam.

Composite: plant materials wired and or glued together forming a new flower. Reassembling detached plant parts to form a new interest.

Reference: AIFD Guide to Floral Design