

Slow Flowers JOURNAL

PRODUCED AND WRITTEN BY DEBRA PRINZING
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Field to Fashion

In its fourth year, American Flowers Week celebrates U.S.-grown (and foraged) botanicals with five fresh, inspiring and handcrafted couture looks.

American Flowers Week burst onto the floral scene in 2015, and its significance and influence has grown ever since, attracting participation across all channels of domestic flowers – from seeds to bouquets to beautiful floral fashions.

Social media engagement from florists, designers, retailers, wholesalers and flower farms posting on Instagram and Twitter generated more than 5 million impressions during the 2017 campaign, giving the hash tag #americanflowersweek top-of-mind presence, up from 1.2 million impressions the prior year.

Planning for the 2018 American Flowers Week floral fashion collection began almost immediately after the 2017 campaign ended. I was lucky to be on location in Homer, Alaska, last July, when floral designer **Kelly Shore**, of **Petals by the Shore** in Damascus, Md., teamed up with peony farmer **Beth Van Sandt**, co-owner of **Scenic Place Peonies** in Homer. Together, these creative women envisioned a styled shoot that reflected in-season, just-picked peonies and a story line to mirror the character and geography of Homer, which appears on Pages 66 and 67.

Producing this amazing collection of American-grown floral fashions continued through the subsequent months, including an October photo shoot celebrating *Dablias* in Sonoma County; a January woodland narrative reliant upon one designer's penchant for foraging from the forests of the Pacific Northwest; a March session on the Big Island paying homage to tropical flowers and foliages of Hawaii; and later that month, a tribute to the iconic *Iris*, straight from the greenhouses of Arcata, Calif.

It is a privilege and honor to present five compelling looks and the behind-the-scenes stories about the people and floral passions that fill these pages. The inventiveness and creativity expressed by the **Slow Flowers** community – flower farmers and floral designers alike – elevates American-grown botanicals to new levels. To learn more about these designs, the floral artists, the farms and their flowers, you can find bonus content at americanflowersweek.com and in the *Florists' Review* digital edition for June at floristsreview.com.

A Celebration of American Flowers

June 28 - July 4, 2018

Launched in 2015, **American Flowers Week** is the advocacy, education and outreach campaign produced by **Slow Flowers** to promote and commemorate domestic flowers, flower farming and floral design. Find free resources and promotional material at americanflowersweek.com.

The Allure of Dahlias

Appeal of Dahlias burns bright against Tubbs Fire background.

Against the backdrop of the October 2017 Tubbs Fire that decimated large areas of Northern California's wine country, *Dahlia* farmer **Kate Rowe**, of **Aztec Dahlias** in Petaluma, Calif., and farmer-florist **Hedda Brorstrom**, of **Full Bloom Farm** in nearby Sebastopol, produced a loving homage to Dahlias for **American Flowers Week**.

This story takes place at Aztec Dahlias, located just minutes from the local airport where a constant stream of fire-fighting helicopters took off and landed, lending noise and stirring up dust. According to both women, the decision to not cancel the photo shoot was a defiant act against the fires.

"It was the best thing that we could have possibly done, even though it was a crazy time, and smoke and ash filled the air," Hedda says. With a motivation to "make it work," despite the constant threat of being evacuated or worse, Kate and her business partner, **Omar Duran**, wanted to showcase Aztec Dahlias' flowers and support the American Flowers Week botanical fashion shoot.

"We pride ourselves on having the largest selection of high-quality Dahlias you can purchase in our area, so this project was a great way to share our flowers for something wonderful. Even with the fires, the timing was perfect. We had this abundance in the fields, and the idea of making a dress out of them was so much fun," Kate says.

The farm donated more than 350 stems to Hedda and a small team of volunteers who adorned the extraordinary skirt from waist to hem in a vibrant gradient of flowers. At the time, the farmers were close to wrapping up their first full season growing Dahlias as cut flowers, tubers and plants. Last year, Aztec Dahlias grew 5,200 plants, representing more than 400 varieties of Dahlias. This year, Kate has bumped the total to 7,800 Dahlias for cutting, with plans to sell most flowers direct to florists and also through the **Sonoma Flower Mart**.

Hedda has designed and made floral wearables in the past, so she knew that having a fitted bodice would be a flattering complement to the model's body. "Dahlias are so fluffy, so I made a top to fit snugly and covered it with lamb's-ear and dusty miller foliage, pieces of moss and ruffles of *Santolina* around the hem." She glued layers of leaves in an overlapping pattern, using the backside to show the veins of each leaf. The succulent "belt" was originally intended as a headpiece, fashioned from a strip

of soft leather. Its gray-green palette complements the smooth herbal leaves and helps define the model's waist.

To create the *Dahlia* skirt, Hedda laughingly says she began with an image of her favorite childhood birthday cake. "I had a Barbie cake growing up – you know how the cake is like a big dress and then there's this little doll coming up out of the middle?"

She re-imagined the stacked layers of a birthday cake with an exaggerated circumference (held in place with a hidden hula hoop attached to the gopher wire form). By the time it was finished, the skirt practically stood on its own, and model **Sophia Lane** was able to step inside.

The gradient *Dahlia* palette – from burgundy to blush to white – echoes "about six weddings I designed last summer," Hedda says. "It was such a big year for those colors, so I was used to playing with them and mixing them. The idea of starting with the burgundy-red Dahlias at the waist – an element that looked hot and smoldering and fiery – then moving into the peachy pink down into the whites, which look cool and softer, was inspired by what was going on in Sonoma County at the time."

Rather than photographing in Aztec Dahlias' fields where the dress might have disappeared against rows of flowers, Hedda and photographer **Becca Henry** chose a rustic barn as the iconic agricultural backdrop to silhouette model and dress. According to Kate, the barn is owned by her landlords and has "been in support of a flower farm for a very long time, since **Neve Bros. Roses** used to own it."

Both Kate and Hedda say they were deeply moved by the visceral response to flowers from people in their community who were threatened by the wildfires. "We decided that week of the fire that it felt kind of insane to be in business selling flowers, so we gave away everything we grew," Kate says. "At a core level, we learned how important the role flowers play in people's lives."

The *Dahlia* dress symbolizes creativity, collaboration and a celebration of community, Hedda adds. "There's this profound intimacy that you experience seeing an image of someone wearing an outfit made of plants," Hedda says. "We don't often interact with wild lands because we're so detached from nature. This project helps call that relationship into question and reminds us that we're not separate from nature but part of nature."



CREDITS

Floral Palette: 350 Dahlias, Aztec Dahlias (Petaluma, Calif.) aztecdahlias.com, @aztec_dahlias; herbs and succulents Full Bloom Farm (Sebastopol, Calif.) fullbloomflower.com @fullbloomflowerfarm

Designer: Hedda Brorstrom, Full Bloom Farm

Harvesting/Production Assistance: MaryAnn Nardo, 7 Petals Floral Design, San Rafael, Calif. @7petalsdesign Sarah Reyes, Unfurled Design, Hayward, Calif. @unfurleddesign; Dan'yell Powell @danyellily

Model: Sophia Lane (with assistance from Amanda Lane), @sophialane

Hair/Makeup: Sophia Lane

Photography: Becca Henry, beccahenryphotography.com, @becca.henry.photography

Location: Aztec Dahlias, Petaluma, California

