



Restlessness from a topsy-turvy year results in staid but sophisticated design preferences.

BY KATIE HENDRICK

2017 FLOWER TRENDS FORECAST

Mimosa, Turquoise, Honeysuckle, Tangerine Tango...

The perky, punchy hues so popular in the early part of the decade feel like distant memories.

"There's been a huge color shift," said **Michael Skaff, AAF, AIFD, PFCI**, shown above. "The bright pure tones have become more muted."

He credits the palette cleanse, in part, to political surprises, which have been numerous as of late (2016's highlight reel: Great Britain's vote to leave the European Union, Colombians' original rejection of President Santos' peace treaty with FARC, South Korea's impeachment of President Park Geun-hye and, of course, the election of Donald Trump).

"These changes leave us uneasy because we don't know what's going to happen."

In response, he explains, we cling to hues "that are aren't loud or bold."

Today's "it" colors all have gray undertones, he said: "Some describe this as 'muddy' but I prefer 'complex.' These are mature shades with depth that help create very sophisticated designs." (For his part, Skaff was not surprised with the

Pantone Color Institute named Greenery the 2017 color of the year. While it's been called a "springtime" shade, the color is surprisingly complex and flexible. Read more on p. 35.)

For months, Skaff, a freelance designer in Savannah, Georgia, was on a mission for International Floral Distributors to identify emerging trends and curate them into four distinct styles for their 2017 Flower Trends Forecast, which he debuted a few weeks early in a presentation at SAF Maui 2016.

"It all starts with color," he said. From there, it trickles into fashion, interior design and consumer goods, from lipsticks to smartphone cases.

In his research, Skaff conferred with The Color Marketing Group, which has members in North America, South America, Europe and Asia, as well as The Trend Curve, an organization tuned into the home furnishings industry. He attended every trade and gift show that his schedule allowed, including Ambiente in Frankfurt, Germany; Maison & Objet in Paris; AmericasMart in Atlanta; High Point Market in High Point, North Carolina; and NY NOW in New York City.

He studied glossy publications dealing with weddings, home décor and fashion — Grace Ormonde, Martha Stewart Weddings, Better Homes and Gardens, Elle Décor and Vogue — and subscribed to websites such as Fashion Snoops and First Dibs for trend updates. And he made frequent trips to major retailers, from Bergdorf Goodman and Neiman Marcus to Williams Sonoma and Anthropologie.

"It was all window shopping," he said. "It was about looking at objects with a consumer perspective."

He also nonchalantly inspected the apparel of women he passed on the street or stood behind in line for coffee.

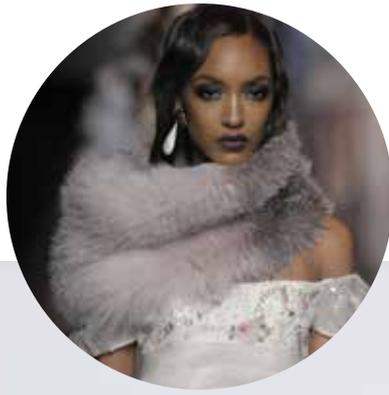
"I look for trends constantly," he said, with a laugh. "They're always evolving."

Staying abreast of trends is essential for a profitable flower shop, he insists.

"It helps you keep your employees inspired and energized, for starters," he said.

Furthermore, though, "it earns customers' trust. If they know you are on trend, they will follow you on social media and turn to you to help them look good."

Without further ado, here are four looks dominating 2017.



THE FRENCH CONNECTION

In a nutshell: A romantic style with a muted palette, feminine texture and French accents.

What inspired it: "Around the world, this is an unsettling time, politically and economically," Skaff said. When people feel anxious or stressed, they gravitate to classic aesthetics, such as soft, ruffled flowers and antique containers. "They're familiar, so they make us feel comfortable and safe." Meanwhile, colors have shifted from vibrant, cheery tones to vintage hues tinged with gray. In fashion and interior design, "consumers have shown a preference for micro floral prints, rather than big, sweeping flowers popular in recent years," Skaff said.

Who will love it: Brides, of course! "This trend is a natural fit for weddings because it's all about romance," Skaff said. "Picture lush, loose bouquets with movement." Beyond the matrimonial realm, French Modern will appeal to anyone who appreciates traditional beauty. Skaff anticipates many customers will choose this style for Mother's Day arrangements and holiday décor.

Essentials: Luxurious, multi-petaled flowers such as garden roses, peonies, dahlias, hydrangeas, poppies, ranunculus and stock paired with berries and pods "evoke impressions of the French countryside," Skaff said. Weathered con-

tainers, stained glass, velvet ribbons and "anything with a fleur de lis" help communicate the theme.

Try this: Create a wedding window for your shop. Work with local vendors to develop a vignette with props like a tiered cake, French lace dress, Eiffel Tower replica and antiques. "It's a great opportunity for other businesses to cross advertise, and it keeps your costs low," Skaff said. Then, to celebrate its installation, host an open house and be sure to invite your partners' customers too. "Collaboration can help you create something spectacular and will get your brand major exposure," he said.



FORCES OF NATURE

In a nutshell: A serene, nature-inspired theme in harmonious shades of blue and green

What inspired it: "A technological-driven society means we're always connected. Our workdays are getting longer and longer, and we're feeling fatigued from staring at screens," Skaff said of this trend that has been growing steadily in recent years. "There's a desperate desire to relax. Thus, people are interested in ways to bring the outdoors into their homes and offices."

Who will love it: "The millennial population really understands this trend," Skaff said. "They love nature and handcrafted products." Its soothing, coastal appearance also helps create a tranquil ambiance at spas and hotels.

Essentials: "Succulents, birch, moss, variegated foliage and ferns give arrangements a natural, organic vibe," Skaff said. Irises, delphinium and hydrangeas pop next to green cymbidiums, dianthus and roses. Hammered copper containers lend an artisan feel. For accents, look for river rocks and shells — "I saw them at every design show this year!" Skaff said.

Try this: Educate consumers on the calming power of flowers. Write a blog post or pitch the story to a local reporter. Illustrate the point with photographs of Zen-inducing designs in oceanic-colors with natural textures. Create grab and go arrangements with lavender and sage and market them as "stress busters."



MODERN WONDERS



In a nutshell: Chic, modern designs with simple lines juxtapose with items of antiquity

What inspired it: “Our society thrives on history,” Skaff said. “We’re curious about the civilizations that came before us.” Consumers seek out one-of-a-kind items (“or items that *look* like they’re one of a kind!”) to convey that they’re cultured and have an appreciation for the past. “Consumers are more cautious with their spending than they used to be, but they will shell out big money on things they regard as special,” he said.

Who will love it: “This style resonates with sophisticated clients, especially those in urban environments,” Skaff said. “It’s for customers with modern homes who want to ‘soften’ the look a little. This makes a room feel warmer and more palatable.” Modern Wonders would work well with corporate clients, particularly

at law firms and financial institutions — places that want to exude erudition and prestige. Organizations hosting events in a contemporary venue, like an art museum, would appreciate it, as well.

Essentials: The Modern Wonders palette is rich: brown, gold, burgundy. “Copper is huge here,” Skaff said. It blends beautifully with all those shades, he said, as well as their softer iterations (pinks and beiges). Bromeliads, anthurium, orchids, sunflowers, ginger and callas fit swimmingly here. Look for accessories with Asian influences, such as folding fans, Buddha and elephant statuary, china with Oriental patterns and paper lanterns.

Try this: Fill a metallic container with chocolate-colored cymbidiums and ‘Mango’ callas for a simple but chic design. “It looks delicious and has a high-perceived value,” Skaff said.



INTO THE JUNGLE

In a nutshell: Animal and tropical prints are back, but in more grown-up, subdued colors

What inspired it: Chalk it up to the increasingly long workday — or maybe friends' and celebrities' Instagram photos inspiring wanderlust — but people are craving adventure. "There's a sense of the wild that we want in our lives. We're called to the mystery of the jungle and its lush offerings." But don't expect a revival of the neon leopard prints popular with Kim Kardashian circa 2009 and prom dress designers in the early part of this decade. "Again, the uncertainty in the world has muted the color palette," Skaff said. "We're seeing earthy blues, greens and oranges. They're vivid, but also camouflaged. They blend into the natural environment."

Who will love it: "This trend will be strong with prom goers, who are wearing shorter, more whimsical dresses than are bridesmaids that call for fun, playful designs," Skaff said. Miniature orchids fit the bill perfectly—and are user-friendly in corsages, necklaces and hairpieces. "They hold up really well, which is critical when you're prepping dozens of pieces in advance." The style suits any celebratory occasion, be it a birthday, anniversary or retirement party, or company luau.

Essentials: "Tropical foliage are an easy way to achieve this look and add value to a design," Skaff said. "They come in great colors, have impressive longevity and make a big impact." Linear flowers, such as callas, anthurium and bird of paradise, add structure, while celosia and proteas "deliver the 'wow' factor," he said. Bamboo, cork and raffia impart texture that conjures a vacation to a far-away island.

Try this: Teenage girls love being on trend. You have an opportunity to inform them of the hottest looks (and your skillset) with an arresting window display. "Start with a bamboo curtain," Skaff said. "It gives you a clean background and suggests exotic lands." Set up mannequins, dress them in current dresses and tuxedos ("that match!") and add complementary floral accessories. "You could even spell out PROM in flowers and attach it to the bamboo," he said. In direct mailings and e-marketing messages, include high-resolution photographs that depict Into the Wild and show designs in different styles and price points. "Young customers are very impressionable and likely to spend more than you think," Skaff said. 🌿

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