



Above: An Angular-style arrangement
Below: "California, Here I Come"



Above: A Synergistic-style arrangement
Below: A Transparent-style arrangement



THE GIFT OF BEAUTY

WHEN EAST MEETS WEST:

ENDURING JOY OF ROSE ARRANGEMENTS

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In The Beginning: Passion for Beautiful Roses

After retiring at the end of 1999 from a 7-year assignment in market and sales in China for Raychem Corporation, I returned to our California home and started taking care of our small, neglected rose garden. With thorough pruning and spraying followed by nourishing and mulching under the San Francisco Bay Area sunshine, I was happy to see most rosebushes revived to normal growth. Knowing that the World Federation and American National Rose Convention would be held in Houston mid-April 2000, I decided to attend the convention and enter a simple arrangement just to get involved. Since I had never made a serious rose arrangement, I borrowed an *Ikebana Sogetsu Book No.1* and studied the lines and angles of the basic vertical design. Two days before the show, I cut five stems each of 'Double Delight' and 'Altissimo', packed them in a carry-on ice chest and flew to Houston. It was already hot there. I cut a few colored daylily buds from my sister's garden for the lines of the Oriental Manner design and entered it in the Novice Class. Overwhelmed by winning the Best Novice Award, I knew then it was a beginner's luck and only by serious learning would I ever absorb this profound knowledge.

Learning the Very Basic: Practice with Mind and Hands

Barbara Gardon taught me the very basics of traditional arrangement. When I was frustrated by recutting and re-inserting the rose stems into an almost crumbling oasis, she always kindly said, "Just practice, and you will be there." With hope, I made progress but still brought an extra oasis to shows just in case. Earl Parsons showed me in the lines of many rhythmic modern

arrangements that the stems were leaning toward the sun or bent by the imaginary wind. Ed Yesan always demonstrated perfectly balanced centerpieces by his attention to details and proficient skill. I also took Ikebana lessons from Katsko Thilke, an inspiring teacher with the touch of magic design.

To make beautiful rose arrangements, I started from the basics of growing beautiful and healthy roses. Admiring the perfect hybrid tea roses exhibited at the winning table of the horticulture section, I decided to choose whenever possible the queen quality HT roses for my arrangements, which means following, in a timely manner, every step from the selection of show rose varieties to pruning, culture, disbudding and cutting them, and from packing for airplane transportation to placing the final arrangement on the show table. Bob Martin Jr.'s book *Showing Good Roses* has been my bible of "searching for excellence."

Broaden Views to Uplift Standards: Exhibit to Get Involved

On September 21, 2001, my husband Chi Ning Liu and I flew to Cleveland to attend the Fall National Rose Show. I was very inexperienced in transporting roses long distance for exhibition, but I deeply felt we had to support the event by exhibiting, enjoy-

ing the show and learning from the masters to show appreciation to the Cleveland Rose Society for holding a large national show shortly after the 9/11 crisis. In the show, I met Steve House, who won the Harry B. Overesch Trophy. His pink roses in two column containers reflected a dancing party in vivid, rhythmic, happy movement. There was a sense of life in that design. Steve encouraged me to practice with mind and hands. It is important to form a plan in your mind first and then translate it in your hands. Steve's encouragement and suggestions have been most valuable to me, and I usually spend a great deal of time practicing my arrangement before any formal exhibitions. In 2002, shortly after the Philadelphia National Show, Steve passed away, and I could not believe that we no longer could see the Master of Art. Now, whenever I think of his creativity, giving and teaching, he is immortal.

In Cleveland, I also met Glenda Whitaker, who sang "America the Beautiful" in memory of those who perished on 9/11. I was most touched by the mood and spirit. The Rose is America's National Floral Emblem and represents love, beauty, appreciation, growth and patriotism. This inspired me to grow more roses. I wanted to arrange roses to show their characteristic meaning and beauty. In the spring of 2002 at the San Jose National Rose Show, Glenda gave me the most encouraging praise: "It seems that there is always light shining on your arrangement!" I hope that I'll live up to it. Glenda, thank you very much. You are guiding me all along.

At the New Orleans National Show in the spring of 2003, I did not know exactly what a modern line-mass arrangement was. So, I made a traditional crescent line-mass using

Traditional crescent line-mass arrangement with 'Double Delight' and 'Olympiad'



courtesy Cynthia Chuang



Bronze Certificate Winner at the 2008 Denver Spring Show

'Double Delight' and 'Olympiad' and put a bold black wood grid frame in the background (p. 17). Happily, the arrangement won the Nora Katherman Trophy for my very first time. Whether the combination of traditional and modern elements is considered “modern” might draw some debate among judges. Nevertheless, it was my own creation stimulated by “Just Do It and See.”

Accept New Ideas and New Looks: Eventually Establish a Routine

It took me a long while to break out of my cocoon — a comfort zone to stay put. Dr. Lew Shupe, with his great sense of humor, had been patiently suggesting for me to change, and I knew I should, but hesitation delayed action. At one of our NCNH District Arrangement Workshop, Kathy Leonardi read from the ARS Arrangement Guidelines for Judging Rose Arrangements. (Revised 1997, the third paragraph of Foreword) “New ideas are forever overtaking the old, and when they become part of the practice, then they become the standard.” I felt an alarming wake-up call. There was no excuse to delay further — I should keep up with the trends, try new things and arrange roses as wild and bold as I can.



“China Town”

In the spring of 2004, I entered a modern line arrangement titled “California, Here I Come” (p. 16) at the San Diego National Rose Show. Inspired by the theme “Bowers of Flowers,” I lifted three black open frames (made by my husband) of different heights and angles to reflect the diversified culture of California. Then, four pieces of apricot branches were connected through the frame in an up and downward open loop, and seven stems of brilliant pink 'Signature' in three clusters were arranged along the loop. Overall they represented the rich culture, fertile land and cheerful, sunny weather. The judges awarded me the Nora Katherman Trophy for the second time. What a boost of confidence! Yes, I can change. Thank you, Lew and Kathy.

After practicing several styles of modern arrangement, for example, Transparent, Angular and Synergistic (p. 16), I learned that the open space created by lines or loops offers the viewer the opportunity to see different emphases from different angles, which in turn gives the designer more choices to stage the arrangement at different positions in a room.

Achieve Personal Style: From Oriental Manner to East Meets West

The traditional oriental manner, for example, the Sogetsu School, calls for three main lines: the Heaven, the Earth and the Man, specified by their relative heights and angles in reference to the container size. The container can be flat or tall. The choice of line material and flowers follows closely with the seasonal change and folk festivities. The versatility is that each line may change position to transform a vertical look to a slanted version or vice versa. However, the overall look is always asymmetric yet balanced — an artistic appreciation of nature’s beauty.

One example of this is my arrangement that won the Oriental Award and Bronze Certificate at the 2008 Denver Spring National Show (above). In this arrangement, for the line material, I chose pine branches bearing new cones to reflect the spring growth, and for the flower, I chose the pink blend 'Gemini' luring for attention.

Oriental free style lifts most rules but requires more effort to focus on the design. At the 2003 Fall National Show in Washington, D.C., I entered an arrangement in this category titled “China Town” (p. 18). Four sticks of fresh bamboo of different heights were



*Left: “East Meets West”;
Above: “Reflections of St. Paul”;
Right: An example
of Oriental Free style but
similar to the modern an-
gular design because of the
sharp bending foliage*



vertically hammered into pin frogs in two flat containers. One additional stick was supported by the leaf origins in a diagonal fashion as a linkage. Only red roses were used to emphasize the festival atmosphere. Chinese people love bamboo for its beauty, fragrance and practicality and admire its strength and straight upward growth as a symbol of human integrity. That’s why wherever there is a Chinese settlement, there will be bamboo bushes around. Judges awarded this arrangement an Oriental Award and the Silver Certificate. Lew Shupe gave me the most constructive critique: “unique design, avoid using fuzzy background (fern) and artificial craft (the hanging tassel).” Lew’s comment taught me to focus on “Making the Point” and then stop.

At St. Paul’s Spring National Show in 2007, the arrangement schedule of the challenge class called for an Oriental Manner Design in two containers, one flat and one tall, but one should be put inside another or side by side. I had arranged flowers in two flat containers or two tall ones but never one flat and one tall. Puzzled by the requirement, I started to focus on the design principle, Balance with Harmony. Thus, a slender bamboo column inside a big round flat container was the basic design frame,

then tall spiky iris buds were chosen for the lines in the flat container to balance the tall column. Furthermore, iris foliage was used in a slanted manner to shade the bamboo and soften the extreme. The rest become reasonably easy. Five stems of ‘Gold Medal’ were arranged in the containers as if they are admiring each other. The iris buds with yellow tint joined with nodding smile. This arrangement titled “Reflections of St. Paul” (above) won me the Nora Katherman Trophy for the third time. I smiled too.

Interpreting the title and connecting with the theme of each show has become a fun part in my arrangements. It is like writing a pre-specified story, not by words but with flowers and greeneries. The fun part is in the suggestive rather than the explicit.

The 2006 Dallas Fall Show listed the title “From Sea to Shining Sea” for the National Challenge Class. Initially, my thought was on the “Vast Land” from Atlantic to Pacific, but I got stuck. One day, a cheerful picture of a sailing boat gliding toward sunset came to my view, and that led me to the arrangement. Finally, I won the Harry B. Overesch Trophy for the first time after five years of trial. This arrangement had an Oriental feeling but

really followed a modern line. I named it “East meets West” (above).

Challenge Ahead: Lure All Rose Lovers to the Arrangement Show Tables

“Gold Queen” was the title of the June 2008 Denver National Challenge Class. It called for a traditional line-mass. “Jewels in the Rockies” was the theme of the show. To connect with the title, my arrangement (p. 20) started with an old teapot in metallic gold. Seven stems of ‘St. Patrick’ were arranged to a Hogarth line (S-curve) with the large bloom of exhibition form at the middle as the focal point and gradually reducing in bloom size toward the top and bottom ends. Then four blooms of ‘Marilyn Monroe’ were added to surround the middle ‘St. Patrick’ to a line-mass shape. In doing so, the apricot hue in the center of the middle ‘St. Patrick’ was accentuated by the surrounding apricot ‘Marilyn Monroe’. To enhance the color further, cobalt blue statice were used as the filler to give a jewel-like brilliance. To finish the arrangement, two pre-bent redwood branches were firmly pushed into the oasis. This fine redwood extension defines the entire Hogarth curve arrangement. The arrangement won



all photos courtesy Cynthia Chuang

me the Nora Katherman Trophy for the fourth time.

I feel very fortunate to live in a country of roses and even more fortunate to be associated with so many members and friends in the ARS. Through the many shows in which I have participated over the past nine years, I have learned so much from many enthusiastic friends. They have taught me to bring additional value to the beautiful roses and have guided me to a level of satisfaction beyond my expectation. I would like to extend my sincere invitation to all rose lovers, especially horticulture exhibitors, to visit the arrangement exhibits and seminars to discover how roses can be presented in many different ways to enhance their beauty.



Above, left: My interpretation of "I lost my heart in San Francisco." Welcome to the Bay area. We are blessed to be able to grow beautiful roses. Artfully landscaped rose gardens across the state attract many visitors during the blooming season. People come not only to see the colorful roses of abundant varieties but also to enjoy the environment by walking under arbors of climbing roses or just sitting on a bench to smell the sweet air. Of course, there is also the Golden Gate Bridge, which adds that unique, unforgettable identity. Above, right: A parallel design constructed by three vertical lavender stems and nine mauve roses of 'Paradise' and 'Stainless Steel'. Does the arrangement resemble an English cottage garden? Right: An example of a Hogarth curve arrangement.



About Cynthia Chuang

Cynthia Chuang was born in China, grew up in Taiwan and came to the United States to pursue graduate studies, earning her PhD degree in Physical Chemistry from Purdue University. During her 33 years of professional career, she has pursued academic research, industrial application, and sales and marketing. She started growing roses in the mid nineties and became really involved from year 2000 to present. She admires the beauty and vitality of modern roses, in particular the unique spiral exhibition form and the repeat blooming habit. Cynthia is a rose horticulture and arrangement judge, since 2006. She received the ARS Bronze Medal from San Francisco Rose Society in 2007 and Santa Clara County Rose Society in 2008. She has actively exhibited in the local, district and national rose shows since 2000. Cynthia is married to Dr. Chi Ning Liu who enthusiastically supports her love of growing and exhibiting roses.