

Principles and Elements of Design

Flower Arranging is the art of organizing the design elements of plant material and other components according to artistic principles to achieve beauty, harmony, distinction, and expression. The terms flower arrangement, design or composition are synonymous.

Components used in creating a design are plant material, container, background and mechanics. Optional components that may be added to the design include accessories, featured objects, and bases.

The principles and elements of design guide arrangers in creating and judges in analyzing flower arrangements. It is imperative that all flower arrangement judges be thoroughly familiar with these concepts.

Principles of Design

Balance, dominance, contrast, rhythm, proportion and scale are the basic standards used to organize the design elements and an arrangement is judged on how well these principles are applied.

1. **Balance** is visual stability achieved by placing equal visual or actual weight on opposite sides of an imaginary central axis.
 - a. **Symmetrical balance** is achieved by placing equal amounts of similar materials on either side of a central axis.
 - b. **Asymmetrical balance** is balance without symmetry achieved by placing approximate equal visual weight of different elements on each side of a central axis.
2. **Dominance** is control of a design by one or more of the elements. It implies the presence of primary and subordinate elements within the design.
3. **Contrast** is the use of opposite or unlike elements to emphasize differences and add interest.
4. **Rhythm** is a dominant visual path through a design. It is achieved by the use of gradation and repetition in a linear direction.
5. **Proportion** is the relationship of one area of a floral design to other areas of the design and to the design as a whole.
6. **Scale** is the size relationship of the individual component parts of a design to one another and the size relationship of the arrangement to the surrounding area.

Elements of Design

Light, space, line, form, size, pattern, texture and color are the visual qualities used in creating a design and are common to all art forms. An arrangement is judged on the effective use of these elements.

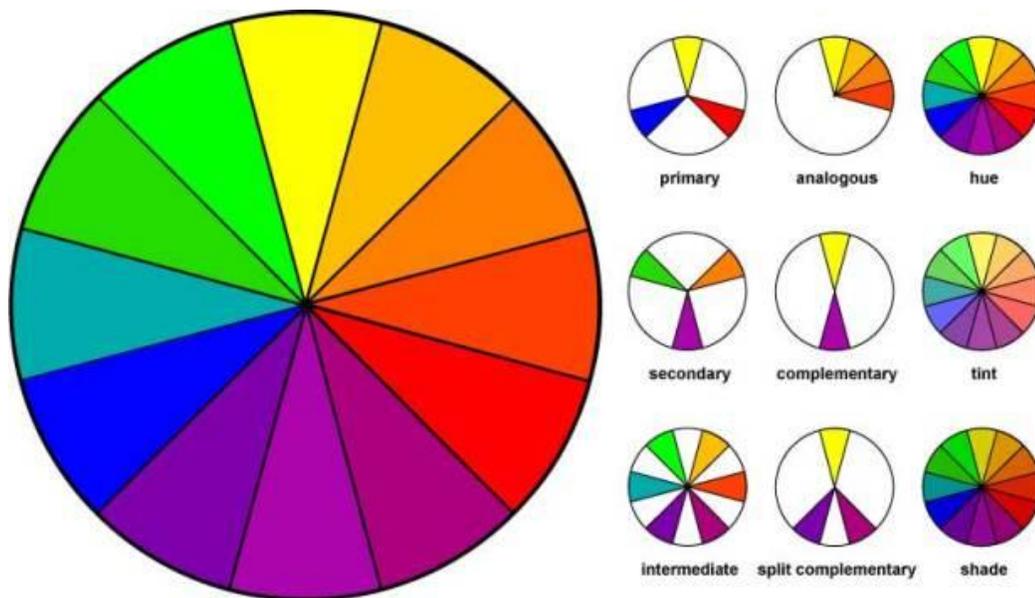
1. **Light:** Illumination (natural or artificial) is necessary for vision. It affects color, shadows, and the visibility of a design.
2. **Space:** The open area in and around the arrangement. It includes the space in which the design is placed.
3. **Line:** A visual path that leads the eye through the design and establishes the structural framework of the design. It carries the rhythm through the design.
4. **Form:** The contour of two-and three-dimensional material. It applies to individual components within the design as well as the contour of the design as a whole.
5. **Size:** The visual dimension of line, shape, form and space.
6. **Pattern:** The visual quality created by a combination of lines, forms, colors, textures and spaces in the design. It is dependent on illumination.
7. **Texture:** The visual surface quality of the components, e.g. rough vs. smooth, dull vs. shiny.
8. **Color:** The visual response of the eye to light waves. There is a corresponding relationship between the principles of design and color. Warm colors (yellow, red, orange) seem to move forward. Cool colors (blue, green, violet) recede and seem farther away. An area of cool color will seem smaller than an equal area of warm color. The qualities of color are:
 - a. **Hue or Chroma:** The specific name of a color such as red, green, etc.
 - b. **Value:** The lightness or darkness of a color. Pink is a light value of red obtained by adding white. It is called a tint. Maroon is a dark value of red obtained by adding black and it is called a shade.
 - c. **Intensity:** The brilliance or dullness of a color.

Color Wheel



Relationships between colors are described by the color wheel. Used by artists of various expertise, the color wheel introduces primary, secondary and tertiary colors as well as color complements. The primary colors are red, blue and yellow, and cannot be created by mixing other elements. However, any two primary colors mixed together will yield a secondary color - orange, green or purple. Tertiary colors are created by mixing a secondary color with a primary color. For example, yellow-green is made by mixing the secondary color green with the primary color, yellow.

Color Complements are color opposites and contract each other, creating a vibrant, active color palette. They are located on opposite sides of the color wheel from each other. An example of a pair of complementary colors is purple and yellow.



Color Terms

Primary Colors	Red (carmine), yellow and blue (phthalocyanine) from which all other colors may be mixed.
Secondary Colors	Orange, green and purple, made by mixing adjacent primary colors on the color wheel.
Tertiary Colors	Colors located between primary and secondary colors on the color wheel, created by mixing any adjacent primary and secondary color.
Hue	The clearest form of any color, without the addition of black, white or its complement.
Chroma	The intensity, strength or saturation of a color. The intensity of a hue can be reduced by its complementary. For instance, the intensity of green can be reduced by adding red -- the eventual result being a neutral gray.
Value	The lightness or darkness of a color, e.g. light or dark blue.
Shade	A color darkened by adding black.
Tint	A color lightened by adding white.
Complementary Color	Colors opposite each other on the color wheel. Mixing complementary colors will produce gray.
Monochromatic	A color scheme using values of only one color. Sepia (reddish-brown) is a common choice in illustration.
Analogous	A scheme using two or three adjacent colors on the color wheel. Example: yellow, yellow-green, green or blue, purple, violet. This scheme is equally useful in creating a simple palette for an illustration or a garden design.
Warm colors	Generally thought of as yellow, orange and red, which seem to advance toward the viewer. However this distinction may also be made of blues and greens. Example: ultramarine blue is 'warmer' than cobalt blue. Willow green is 'warmer' than sage and Cadmium red is 'warmer' than carmine.
Cool Colors	Generally, blues, greens and violets, which appear to recede.

Additional Study Materials

Clevett Principles and Elements Workshop Lecture

The following information was written by Julia A. Clevett for the Garden Club of Virginia Judges' Workshop held March 23, 2009 and is used with the author's permission. "I am in my element, working on my principles."

Introduction

Floral Art, Flower Arranging and Floral Design are synonymous terms used to refer to the art form in which plant material is a required medium. It is defined as the art of organizing the Elements of Design according to the Principles of Design, to attain the Attributes of Design, which are Beauty, Harmony, Distinction, and Expression.

Elements and Principles, what are they and what effect do they have when applied to the art of Floral Design? Basically, the elements are physical characteristics of components that make up a flower arrangement (Design). Principles are the ways in which the components are brought together within the Design. This concept can be compared with a cooking recipe in which we have the ingredients (i.e. The Elements) for making the dish and the method by which we bring the ingredients together (i.e. the Principles) for a successful result.

The Elements of Design

The eight Elements of Design are: Color, Light, Space, Line, Form, Pattern, Texture and Size. These are the tangible or physical characteristics of all matter, plus space and light. All of these are, in some way or another, interrelated, so when a component is selected you will no doubt have several Elements combined in one component (e.g. an orange). You will have the color orange, a round form, a patterned skin, with a rough texture. In addition, you will have size, because the orange can be large, medium or small. This analogy could also be used for non-plant material. For example, a tennis ball would have exactly the same Elements as an orange, except they are all uniform in size due to the fact that they are made that way. They can also have differing textures. Note the Elements are a given factor; they are always present. You will have some of them in some shape or form, no matter what component is selected.

Review of Elements of Design

Color: Visual results of the eye transmitting and the mind interpreting the wavelength of light from the surface of the object being viewed. Each perceived color is of a certain wavelength. The properties of color are Hue – the name of the color, Chroma – the degree of purity of color, Value – the pure color may be diminished by the addition of black or white, Intensity – pure color may be affected by the addition of grey or a complementary color. This will also affect the Tone of the color. Advancing colors (or warm colors), for example, yellow-green, through orange-red/violet will hold the eye, while Retreating colors (or cool colors) for example, green through blue/violet do not hold the eye as forcefully and tend to retreat.

Light: There are two types of light, Natural (sunlight) and Artificial (manufactured). Any type of light will have an effect on a Floral Design. It may change the colors of the components, enrich the textures of components, or create shadows. A concentration of light in one area of a design will affect depth causing the eye to move through the design.

Space: Space is the open area/s in and around a design. In Creative Design, space is a main component of the design. Creative designs are of space, where Traditional Designs are designs in space. It should be noted that space is always three-dimensional in floral design.

Line: Line is the one-dimensional visual path through a design. It may be long, short, weak, strong, thick, thin, straight or curving. The techniques of creating line are twofold – Actual Line is created through very linear materials. *Applied Line* is achieved through the repetition of color, texture, form and size in a linear direction.

Form: A three-dimensional object has form. It should be noted that form differs from shape. Form, being three-dimensional, while shape is two-dimensional. Therefore, flowers have form, while leaves have shape. A closed form is a solid mass, compact, more solid than the space used. An open form spreads out providing spaces within the design. Therefore, any object or the whole design itself will appear to be visually lighter.

Pattern: There are three kinds of patterns, Color/Texture Pattern formed by placement of shapes of differing colors and textures. Growth patterns create solids and spaces, as seen in a flower, Silhouette, which is pattern of clarity (uncluttered).

Texture: A surface quality of a component. It should be noted that texture will always modify color. A smooth, shiny surface will advance, whereas a rough, dull surface will retreat.

Size: In Floral Design, size is a visual dimension of a component, rather than the actual dimension.

The Principles of Design

The six Principles of Design are: Balance, Contrast, Dominance, Proportion, Scale and Rhythm. The Principles of Design are the basic art standards by which all visual art is judged and are common to all types of visual art. They are intangible and can only be visualized or sensed through their application to the tangible and physical characteristics of the components within the design.

Review of the Principles of Design

Balance: Is usually the first Principle noticed. Stable Balance within a design is achieved by placing equal weight (either actual or visual) on opposite sides of an imaginary central axis. An imaginary vertical axis through the center of a design will help to determine the actual or visual weight from top to bottom. Most Traditional designs are organized with this type of Balance in mind.

Symmetrical Balance, sometimes referred to as Formal Balance, is created by similar components being placed in a mirror image of each other, on either side of the imaginary axis. Asymmetrical Balance, sometimes referred to as Informal Balance, is achieved by an equal visual weight comprised of different materials NOT organized in a mirror image, but are so related that there is a satisfying sense of equilibrium. Most Creative designs are organized in this manner.

Dynamic Balance is not the third type of Balance but rather a creative technique of component organization resulting in Balance, tension and Rhythm in a creative design. This implies Balance and Counter-Balance through placement of components that follows the principle that when opposing forces neutralize each other and stand in equilibrium, Balance is achieved. When elements are placed in opposition to each other, tension and Rhythm are achieved and this, in turn, will create Balance.

Plastic organization, Penetration of Space, and Interpenetration of Space are terms used by artists in association with Dynamic Balance. (These are discussed in detail in the next section.)

Contrast: Contrast is achieved by placing unlike or opposite characteristics of a single element together in order to emphasize their differences. Contrast will provide interest in a design. It exists only within a physical characteristic, for example, line may be long or short, color may be light or dark, size may be large or small, texture may be rough or smooth. Equal amounts of contrasting textures, colors sizes, etc. will divide attention and dominance will be lost. However too many contrasts in a design will result in a busy, confusing design having erratic Rhythm.

Dominance: Defined as the greater impact within each of the physical characteristics of a design. Dominance provides control, for example, more straight lines than curved, more of one hue than another, more round forms than angular ones, etc. Dominance implies Subordination of one characteristic of an element such as line, color, or texture. Bear in mind that repetition does not necessarily result in dominance. A small area of bright, pure hue will appear stronger than a larger area of a lighter value hue.

Proportion: this is a comparative relationship of areas and mounts. The ratio of color, form, etc. as they relate to each other in a design, also the ration between the area that is occupied by the design and its allotted space. In other words, does the completed design fill its Frame of Reference? Is it too large or too small?

Rhythm: Rhythm is created by a dominant visual path of line/s, color/s and/or form/s throughout a design.. Rhythm brings life and the illusion of movement to a design. It should be noted that Traditional designs, particularly Mass and Line-Mass depend on gradation for pleasing Rhythm, where Creative Designs will achieve Rhythm through areas of interest carefully equated over the entire design and seldom rely on gradation for Rhythm. The push/pull of tensions create eye movement from one area of interest to another.

Scale: Defined as the size relationship of one object compared with another in a design. Scale differs from Proportion in the Scale deals with individual components in a design on a one-to-one basis, where Proportion is the pleasing ratio between overall areas and amounts in a design. Note the word Scale is always singular, it cannot be made plural otherwise the meaning of the word changes completely, hence the one-to-one relationship of components within a design.

Terminology of Creative Floral Design

The following is an explanation of the terminology used primarily when discussing the attributes of Creative Design. It involves the three-dimensional placement of components with a volume of space thus shaping and molding space, through the placement of physical components. Juxtaposition, Penetration of Space and Interpenetration of Space are techniques for achieving Plastic Organization. It is important to understand and become familiar with this terminology because space is a major element of Creative Design.

Plastic Organization: A designer will organize the components by means of Plastic Organization. This term is used in the art world and refers to the thoughtful placement of components within a three-dimensional area (height, width and depth) in order to mold space/s within that area. If this has been handled skillfully, the eye will move through the design. The design will have Rhythm and Movement from the foreground, middle ground to background and back again.

Juxtaposition: What do we mean by Juxtaposition? It is the placement of components in a design side-by-side, front-to-back or above and below, in such a manner that depth and three-dimensional unity are enhanced.

Penetration of Space: This is defined as placing plant material and/or other components to create a strong diagonal thrust through a volume of space, usually from foreground to background, in order to enhance visual depth, rhythm and dynamic balance.

Interpretation of Space: This is defined as the presence of space in and around and about the tangible components within a design.

Judging According to the Elements and Principles of Design

It is all very well to know what the Elements and Principles of Design are, but we must know how to apply them when judging floral designs. This is easier said than done. As judges, you are, no doubt, familiar with the Elements and Principles. The skill comes in being able to apply this knowledge when judging. Elements and Principles are utilized in both Traditional and Creative Design, but as we are aware, these design styles are significantly different. Traditional Design has a set format, handed down from Oriental and Early European design. A Traditional Design type is created for a set space, such as a table, fireplace mantel, etc. This is why such designs are called "Designs in Space". Consideration of enclosed space is of little importance. A Creative Design is a "Design of Space". For all Creative Design types, the relationship between form and space is a vital consideration. As we are aware, on the Artistic Point Scoring Sheets for Design, the category "Design" is worth a total of 42 points of the total number value (100points). This is why it is so critical to understand the Elements and Principles of Design.

In what way do we break down this number of points (42) by applying the elements and Principles of Design? This can be handled in the following manner. There are six Principles of Design; therefore each Principle is worth a maximum of 7 points. Points should be deducted when applying the Principles of Design to the Elements of Design. For example, how well was the Element Color used in the design? Was it too dominant, or was it not dominant enough? Was the color balance in the design well handled? Or was there too much of one color on one side or other of the design, which will create a Balance problem? It will be dependent upon the degree of infraction as to how many points will be deducted out of the total.

Artistic Point Scoring for Floral Design

Conformance to schedule	20
Design (elements and principles)	42
Artistic Concept	12
Expression (selection of materials and interpretation of class by exhibitor)	10
Distinction (marked superiority in all respects)	16
Total	100

Principles of Design

Balance

We all like a sense of order and a feeling of stability in life and generally avoid anything that upsets this. When we arrange plant material we want it to balance and *look* balanced. The *GCV Flower Shows Handbook* (at www.gcvirginia.org) describes balance as “visual stability achieved by placing equal visual or actual weight on opposite sides of an imaginary central axis.”

Balance in flower arranging takes two forms – physical and visual. Actual balance means an object stays up and does not fall over, but it is also crucial in flower arranging for that object to appear balanced and not top or bottom heavy or lopsided. This is visual balance.

There are two fundamental types of visual balance – symmetrical and asymmetrical. Whatever their style, arrangements need to be balanced vertically and horizontally.

Symmetrical balance means that the weight and *outline* of the plant material are the same each side of a vertical axis rising from the center of a symmetrical container. This kind of balance is restful, stately and dignified. Western art, architecture and the human body are based on symmetrical balance. While symmetrical balance is the basis of most traditional arrangements, most arrangements are what we would call “near symmetrical” since the placement of materials on both sides of the center line might not be identical but would appear symmetrical in shape.

Asymmetrical balance means that the plant material is not similarly arranged on both sides of an imaginary vertical axis. The two sides may or may not have equal amounts of plant material. Oriental art is based on asymmetrical balance and from the Chinese and Japanese we have learned much about asymmetrical or informal balance in flower arrangement. Asymmetrical balance is subtle, creative, emotional and stimulating. Although more difficult to achieve, it can be more personally satisfying than formal symmetrical balance. Although there may be an unequal distribution of materials on either side of the vertical axis, visual balance can be created with varying sizes, colors, shapes, and textures of materials.

Whichever type of balance you wish to achieve the following information on the apparent visual weight and actual weight of plant material is relevant. The visual weight of plant material increases:

- the further the materials are from the central axis.
- the higher they are in the composition.
- the more solid, rather than airy, the form.
- the stronger they are in color.
- the darker they are in color value.
- the warmer they are in hue.
- the more advancing the colors.
- the greater the luminosity of the color.
- the larger the form.

Also take into account that:

- round flowers have more weight than linear ones.
- shiny surfaces have more weight than dull ones.
- enclosed space is more compelling than open space.
- large and shiny plant material is more dominant than rough and small plant material.¹

¹ Judith Blacklock, *The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design* (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 28-29.

TIP: Balance in some arrangements can be achieved by placement, by positioning the design in the right relationship with its base or site.

All the material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable references:

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006).

Katherine Kear, editor, Elements and Principles of Design (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007).

David Coake, Shelley Urban, and Terry Lanker, Florists' Review Design School (Lansing, MI; The John Henry Company, 2003).

Contrast

The *GCV Flower Shows Handbook* describes contrast as “the use of opposite or unlike elements to emphasize differences and add interest.” Good use of contrast is exciting and relieves boredom. Opposites emphasize and intensify contrast to give interest and avoid monotony.

Contrast is opposition, and it adds vitality to a floral design by including some components that contradict the main effect. There can be contrast between different flowers and foliage or contrast within a bowl of flowers of one variety, where the buds and flowers are at differing degrees of development. Contrast may be subtle or strong depending on the style of the arrangement. Contemporary designs tend to use sharper contrasts. With the amount of contrast available to the flower arranger careful selection is needed. If the design is intended to be restful, then the amount of contrast should be small but definitely included lest the arrangement be lifeless. An exciting, startling design demands great contrast in all aspects, especially form and color, as these are the most apparent. Textural contrast can be less dramatic but equally effective. Any of the elements of design can be used to create contrast in a design in its immediate surroundings.

Contrast in color adds life to a design. It can be achieved by simply using darker and lighter shades of one color, or by selecting complementary colors, which make the strongest possible contrast. Although there should be variation in the quantities of each color, one color should dominate.

Contrast in form is necessary to prevent monotony. In traditional designs this involves the use of round or spherical shapes together with more elongated ones. In modern designs one strikingly different form may be used to create emphasis, or alternatively, a mass of closely packed similar forms used together will create impact.

Contrast in textures will intensify their qualities, a small amount of smooth texture will emphasize a larger amount of rough textured material. Blacklock says that the inclusion of smooth textured material is essential to many successful designs.

Contrast is a vital part of our lives. We have a greater appreciation of our environment due to the natural contrasts of day and night, summer and winter, wet and dry. Nature displays an unending variety of textures and forms creating beautiful contrast in our natural world. Similar contrasts are needed in our floral designs to maximize their beauty.

All the material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable references:

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006).

Katherine Kear, editor, Elements and Principles of Design (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007).

Dominance

Dominance is emphasis. It is the ruling, prevailing or most influential part of a design and will help to produce unity.² The *GCV Flower Shows Handbook* describes dominance as “control of a design by one or more of the elements. It implies the presence of primary and subordinate elements within the design.”

² Katherine Kear, editor, *Elements and Principles of Design* (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 48-50.

To achieve unity and harmony, the floral designer must apply the principle of dominance where one of the following plays the major or commanding role: line, color, shape, characterization, direction, idea or texture. Maintaining dominance of the elements establishes order and character.³ Equal attractions in a design compete for attention, and the result is a lack of unity. When you have only one feature in a design that is dominant, competition for attention is removed, and cohesion is created. Dominance of one feature brings a sense of order to the design. The dominant feature in a design is sometimes known as the “focal point,” “center of interest” or the “emphasis point”. Whatever name you call it, dominance is an essential feature and without it a design is like a “face without a nose”.⁴In traditional arrangements, the dominant area or “focal point” is the grouping of the largest and/or brightest flowers and foliage in the central area. This is usually located where all the stems of the plant material converge, because attention is naturally drawn there. Solid areas are dominant over voids as well. In contemporary and abstract work, the focal point can appear anywhere. The chief function of this area of strongest interest is to draw together the separate parts of the design. In modern work the dominance can be achieved by lines, but don’t have too many crossing lines, or there will be confusion and the dominance lost. A dominance of voids over solids is characteristic of modern and abstract work. Judith Blacklock suggests that dominance can be created in the following ways:⁵

1. By dominant movement – the emphasis must be chiefly on one kind of movement, in order to have rhythm in an arrangement. A rhythm of radiation is the most common movement in traditional flower arranging; however, in garlands and wreaths there is a focal line, often broken, running along their length.
2. By dominant texture – strong dominance in one kind of texture is advisable in most arrangements so that unity in texture results. Even when textural contrast is sought, one kind of texture should predominate. Shiny foliage is more dominant than rough.
3. By dominant color – Dominance of either warm or cool colors in an arrangement is far better than equal quantities of each.
4. By dominant form – Round flowers are more dominant than line and spray plant material. Large form is more dominant than small. A grouping is more dominant than one flower. In most arrangements the flowers used for the focal area dominate by virtue of their size and color.

In traditional arrangements, flowers are usually dominant over the container, but sometimes in more contemporary work, the container may well dominate the flowers. The important point is that one should be dominant and that dominance of flowers over container, or vice versa, is most often in the ratio of 3:2.

All the material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable references:

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006).

Ester Veramae Hamel, The Encyclopedia of Judging and Exhibiting (St. Ignatius, Montana: Ponderosa Publishers, 1976).

Katherine Kear, editor, Elements and Principles of Design (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007).

David Coake, Shelley Urban, and Terry Lanker, Florists’ Review Design School (Lansing, MI; The John Henry Company, 2003).

Proportion

Proportion in floral design refers to the comparative size relationship between the various parts of an arrangement —the flowers, foliage and accessories to each other as well as to the container. It is the ratio of one area or one part of a structure to another and to the whole.

³ Hamel, Ester Veramae, *The Encyclopedia of Judging and Exhibiting* (St. Ignatius, Montana: Ponderosa Publishers, 1976) 328.

⁴Katherine Kear, editor, *Elements and Principles of Design* (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 48-50.

⁵ Judith Blacklock, *The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design* (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 35.

While many variables affect proportion, most experienced designers can simply sense good proportion and instinctively use the naturally occurring *golden ratio* or *golden section* proposed by Euclid around 300 B.C. This ratio is 1 to 1.618 (approximately equivalent to a 3 to 5 ratio) and has been considered the most aesthetically pleasing proportion in art, architecture and human form since the time of the Greeks. It is the division of a line or area in such a way that the small part is in the same proportion to the greater part as the greater part is to the whole.

Proportion as described in the *GCV Flower Shows Handbook* is the relationship of one area of a floral design to other areas of the design and to the design as a whole. It deals with areas, spaces, and their relative size to each other.

Judith Blacklock describes how this ratio is related to flower arranging. Blacklock writes that “It simply means that if the flowers are too wide, too low or too high for the container, or the arrangement is too small or big for the background, then the total effect will be lost.” The generally recommended height proportion of flowers to container is 1½ to 2 times the height of an upright container (above the container) or 1½ to 2 times the width and/or length of a shallow container.

In deciding whether or not to use a ratio of 1½ to 1 or 2 to 1, Blacklock suggests the designer remember that:

- Containers that are dark in color, or constructed of strong material, can support much larger arrangements.
- The weight of plant material affects the proportions. Airy plants may extend much further than strong ones.
- A strong base permits the arrangements to be taller or more volumetric than usual. When the base is larger than the container, the height of the material should be one and one half times the length of the base, rather than the length of the container. The Chinese, however, often arrange their flowers so that the container is more dominant than the plant material. You will also notice that some of the contemporary containers are more dominant than the flowers. But the proportions of the modern designs still hold true —the proportion of container to plant material is 1½ :1 rather than traditional 1:1 ½ .

It is difficult to lay down set rules about proportion as the effects of components can affect the final presentation of the design. Sizes and quantities of materials must be proportional to each other in a design. When combining large or heavy-looking materials with small or lightweight materials, there must be more of the small materials than the large. Similarly, it is suggested that there be more light colors than dark, more cool colors than warm.

Ultimately achieving good proportion in a flower arrangement is dependent on the talent and skill of the individual designer.

All the material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable references:

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 14.

Katherine Kear, editor, Elements and Principles of Design (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 60.

David Coake, Shelley Urban, and Terry Lanker, Florists’ Review Design School (Lansing, MI; The John Henry Company, 2003) 39.

Rhythm

In floral design, **rhythm** is the visual flow or movement within an arrangement created by the skillful placement or use of color, material, form, line, texture and/or space.⁶ The *GCV Flower Shows Handbook* describes **rhythm**

⁶ David Coake, Shelley Urban, and Terry Lanker, *Florists’ Review Design School* (Lansing, MI; The John Henry Company, 2003) 40

as “a dominant visual path through a design. It is achieved by the use of gradation and repetition in a linear direction.”

If good rhythm is present in an arrangement, the attention of the viewer will be captured. The eye will move through the arrangement from top to bottom, from side to side and from front to back finally resting on the focal area. The lack of rhythm in any design leads to a static, lifeless arrangement. “Rhythm is found in all plant material. Flower arrangers should respect growth habits and arrange their flowers and foliage so that they follow their natural rhythmic lines, appearing comfortable rather than awkward.”⁷

So how do we achieve good rhythm in our flower arrangements? As an element of floral design, **rhythm** is one of the more elusive design principles; however, it can be created by a thoughtful use of several techniques. Judith Blacklock states that “it is the employment of line, form, colour, and space in such a way that the observer achieves the effect of motion, even though the components are static.”

Judith Blacklock further describes ways that rhythm can be achieved.

Rhythm created by the use of line

1. Rhythm can be achieved by radiation of line, when all lines of an arrangement converge in one place. Radiation is apparent in nature in growing plants. This is what you see in many traditional arrangements. Direct lines, such as a straight or curved branch, allow the eye to move smoothly from one part of the design to the next.
2. Indirect lines, which provide more irregular rhythm, can be created by repeating the form of a flower or leaf or by the use of variation in color and size...smaller, lighter buds closer to the outside of the arrangement and larger, more open, brighter flowers at the focal area. These are called lines of continuance, invisible lines linking a series of similar shapes or forms, filled in by the eye of the viewer.⁸
3. Lines can be repeated.
4. Repetition and radiation of plant material are perhaps the easiest way to create good rhythm.

Rhythm created by form

1. Repeat of form, such as the repetition of a leaf by overlapping leaves of the same variety to get a patchwork effect. Often seen in parallel and sculptural arrangements.
2. Repetition of the form of the container in the form of the arrangement and the form of the base.

Rhythm created by color

1. Using adjacent colors and placing them in their correct sequence on the color wheel.
2. Use gradations in color value, with darkest flowers lower down, medium colors in the middle, and lighter colors on the perimeters.
3. Repeated use of a color in several areas in different amounts, causing the eye to move from one area of the same color to another.

Rhythm created by contrast

1. Using components that have contrasting advancing and receding colors or shiny compared to rough textures creates eye movement.

Different movements that create rhythm

1. Vertical movement – seen in tall arrangements, often flowers are overlapped and placed in a sequence of heights.

⁷ Judith Blacklock, *The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design* (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 37.

⁸ Katherine Kear, editor, *Elements and Principles of Design* (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 67-70.

2. Curvilinear movement – such as Hogarth curves, crescents, the curve of cushion arrangements, tied bunches and other round designs. Can also be seen in manipulated leaves to form new contemporary shapes.
3. Horizontal movement – creates a calm and restful rhythm.
4. Diagonal movement – A strong diagonal line requires a strong horizontal base to support it. Diagonal may have minor rhythms of circular forms at focal area but rarely has straight horizontal or vertical lines within it.

Creating rhythm makes use of **transition**. By the graduation of color (from dark to light), texture (from rough to smooth), flower size (from small to large), flower facing (from front facing to sideways), etc., the arranger employs the technique of placing materials in a gradual and systematic sequence of change. This gradual change allows the eye to move smoothly from one area to another coming to rest at a focal point. In arrangements where flower colors are dramatically different, a transitional color or an intermediate (or tertiary) tint, tone or shade can be placed between them to aid in the transition.

Skilled use of rhythm in floral design gives the eye patterns to follow; it leads the viewer seamlessly from one important area to another. These patterns may be made by lines both continuous and implied, by a series of shapes or forms, through linked areas of color or texture and by the exciting use of radiation and transition.

Note: Exceptions to these rules may be seen in certain contemporary designs.

All the material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable references:

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 14.

Katherine Kear, editor, Elements and Principles of Design (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 67-70.

David Coake, Shelley Urban, and Terry Lanker, Florists' Review Design School (Lansing, MI; The John Henry Company, 2003) 40-43.

Scale

In design for floral art, the definition of scale concerns the relationship in size between the individual components of a design to one another. Scale is another word for size, and it refers to the overall size of an object compared with other objects: a flower, container, or accessory is only large or small when compared with something else.⁹ If the scale is correct, then the design appears harmonious.

As an element of floral design, scale is closely related to proportion. Proportion is the relationship between the amount and quantity of one thing to another or to the whole. Proportion is the visual relationship of color, texture and form areas, while scale deals in size alone, although it affects every other principle.¹⁰ Scale, however, depends on the size of each different component, as opposed to proportion, which is concerned with quantities. To give an example of scale, scale is the size of a flower in relation to the space allowed, but proportion is the amount of plant material in relation to the space allowed.

Note: Parts of a floral arrangement need to be in scale with one another, and the size of the entire arrangement needs to be in scale with its surroundings.

Scale as described in the *GCV Flower Shows Handbook* (online) is the size relationship of the individual component parts of a design to one another and the size relationship of the arrangement to the surrounding area.

Judith Blacklock describes scale in flower arranging as “the relationship between the size of each part of the composition.” Blacklock writes that it is important to consider:

⁹ Norah T. Hunter, *The Art of Floral Design* (Albany, NY; Delmar Publishers Inc., 1994) 67.

¹⁰ Hamel, Ester Veramae, *The Encyclopedia of Judging and Exhibiting* (St. Ignatius, Montana: Ponderosa Publishers, 1976) 319.

1. The relationship of the size of the plant material to each other. Very tiny flowers do not sit well with very large ones, unless they are in a tightly massed spray or group. As a general guide, do not incorporate flowers that are more than twice the size of the ones next to them in size. Sizes of various components can be linked together with intermediate sizes, so that all comes together as a group to produce an acceptable whole.
2. The relationship of the size of the plant material to the container. If you have a large, heavy vase use long stems with large flowers. For small containers use more delicate flowers and foliage.
3. The relationship of the arrangement to the room in which it stands. A tiny arrangement would be inappropriate for a sparsely furnished church hall and a large pedestal would be out of scale in a small house. Remember as you go up in scale, use larger plant material rather than just more plant material.

Scale is particularly important in miniature and small arrangements. In the *Flower Shows Handbook*, the GCV recommends that the largest bloom should not exceed one-third the size of the container and the arrangement should be approximately one to one-and-a half times the height or width of the container. Remember that plant material may be separated into smaller parts. GCV rules permit altering plant material unless the schedule states otherwise. You can cut a flower down to insure proper scale. In small designs, even one flower out of scale can be distracting. If using a base, be careful as they are often too large or too thick for a small design.

Note: Sometimes in contemporary design, an exaggeration of the scale of components within an exhibit will give greater emphasis to the interpretation.

It helps to remember that scale is *singular* and refers to individual components of the design.

All the material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable references:

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 14.

Katherine Kear, editor, Elements and Principles of Design (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 60.

David Coake, Shelley Urban, and Terry Lanker, Florists' Review Design School (Lansing, MI; The John Henry Company, 2003) 39.

Elements of Design

Light

Many descriptions of the elements of floral design omit the element of light. Quite often light or illumination is only mentioned in a minor way under the element of color; however, light has a very strong effect on the way your design will be viewed. In fact, obviously, light must be present to view the design, and the type of light that that illuminates your arrangement will greatly influence the appearance of the design, especially the color and the texture. The *GCV Flower Shows Handbook* says that light or illumination (natural or artificial) is necessary for vision. It affects color, shadows and the visibility of a design.

So what do we need to know about light that will be important in our planning of floral arrangements? First, what kind of light will our arrangement be viewed in? Light may be either natural (sunlight) or artificial (manufactured). In daylight or natural light, blues are enhanced; but remember that the varying intensity of natural light affects the perceived color of an object. Compare the colors in the garden on a foggy day with the intensity of colors on a sunny day. Also as twilight progresses, colors will begin to gradually change and fade away until little color remains.

Artificial lights may be incandescent or fluorescent, black or strobe, floodlight or spotlight, etc. Each of these has a different effect on flower arrangements, with the color palette affected more than any other element. Most homes use either incandescent or fluorescent lighting. While incandescent light emphasizes warmer colors (reds, oranges, yellows), cooler colors (blues, violets, greens) are subdued and tend to become grayish-green. Older fluorescent lights had a bluish green cast that grayed warmer tones, but today's newer technology is producing light similar to filament lamps. As a consequence, fluorescent as well as LED lighting can vary

considerably, and you need to check the labels to find out if the light tends to be warm white or cool white. Warm bulbs tend toward a yellow white, while cool bulbs are a bluer white.

In candlelight, yellow, pink or peach colored flowers are ideal. Receding colors such as blue and violet will nearly disappear. The darker they are the more they will disappear, so that you appear to be left with black holes in your design. Any tint (colors with white in them) can be seen more vividly in dim lighting than those of a pure hue.

When creating a design for a public building or flower show, it is useful to know, if possible, the type of lighting to be used in the area where the design will be staged. There might also be spotlights or floodlights on the intended site or display area. However, for flower shows, most often we make decisions about our arrangements without knowing anything about the lighting that we will be displaying our arrangement in and have to hope that the venue will provide adequate illumination. Occasionally you may have the option to bring in lighting yourself in the form of spotlights or floodlights. Experimentation of lighting placement can produce a variety of effects. The best way for the flower arranger to figure out what will happen under different lighting is by trial and error; cut samples of various colors of plant material and view them under different types of light to see how the samples are changed and which remain effective. Dried plant material can even be painted with fluorescent paint to glow under black lights.

In 2010, GCV added to our handbook an arrangement category of illuminated design, in which lighting is integrally incorporated within the arrangement, not just a design with a light focused on it.

All the material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable references:

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 25.

Betty Belcher, Creative Flower Arranging (Portland, OR; Timber Press, 1993) 55.

GCV Flower Shows Handbook

Space

Space is not a void, but rather an important design element.¹¹ Space, the opposite of solid, is either limitless or bounded, without its form cannot be seen clearly. Good design depends on the clever balancing of solids and space, some parts of a design require a greater density to create a focal point or an area of interest, and the proportions and placement of these spaces determine the type of design.¹²

Space as described in the *GCV Flower Shows Handbook* is the open area in and around the arrangement. It includes the space in which the design is placed, spaces within the plant material, and the spaces created within the design.

Of these three types of spaces, the flower arranger has varying amounts of control over each. In flower shows, the schedule determines the total space allowed for each exhibit, so there is little control over that space. Spaces in plant material and other components can be altered to a greater degree. Plants can be pruned and choices of containers can introduce more or less space. However, the spaces within the arrangement are in the complete control of the arranger. The spaces within the design must be planned and organized by the arranger to maximum effect.

The use of space in flower arranging has changed over the years...compare the Victorian era of clutter and mass to the importance of space in today's arrangements. While traditional arrangements still use very little space within the design and still rely on silhouette for effect, we see a trend toward looser, softer designs. By using contrasting textures, colors and/or shapes to recede and advance, depth and recession can be created thereby creating an illusion of space within the design, which gives depth and clarity to a mass design. Remember that space and depth are closely related.

¹¹ Betty Belcher, *Creative Flower Arranging* (Portland, Oregon; Timber Press, 1995), 56.

¹² Katherine Kear, editor, *Elements and Principles of Design* (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 31.

Classic designs often utilize space more uniformly than their contemporary equivalents, which use space to a bolder effect.¹³

Creative designs use space as a major feature, and it is often as much a part of the design as the solids. They are an inherent and vital part of the design. Space can be used to balance and contrast other dominant areas, and it can be used to divide, enclose, or it may be completely absent. When space is used to balance solid placement in contemporary design, it is often enclosed by manipulation of leaves, or loops of cane or other plant materials, such as broom.

Another definition of space in floral design says that space refers to the three-dimensional area between and around the materials in a design *as well as the areas those materials occupy*. If we use this definition, there are three types of spaces that should concern us when arranging: positive space, negative space, and voids.

Positive space is the area within a composition that is occupied by flowers, foliage, or other materials. In a flower arrangement, a flower occupies a specific space; that area is *positive space*. The arrangement occupies positive space in the room as well.

Negative space is the empty or open areas between materials, which is the space the GCV definition is speaking of in a design. It is just as important as positive space because it makes the floral materials appear more important and interesting and adds distinctiveness to a design. A design with no negative space seems crowded and compact.

Voids are sometimes referred to as connecting spaces. Voids are usually large bare spaces on stems between leaves, blossoms, etc. Stems, which are naturally clean, or those from which all the leaves have been removed, are called voids. Most often used in contemporary designs, voids connect one positive space with another. An example of a void is the area connecting a flower atop a clean stem with the container in which the flower stands. Voids allow designers to create impact and drama, and they enhance both positive and negative spaces.

Space is powerful and can lend a sense of order and beauty to something that would otherwise not be noticed en masse.

Using Space

Generally speaking, the negative space in a design should gradually increase from the focal area of a design to the design's edges in order to create rhythm. Areas with little or no space between them draw the viewer's eye and become focal areas. A greater density of plant material is needed at the focal area with more slender plant material at the outer edges of the design.

Add space beneath a container by using a base to give a sense of lightness to the arrangement and to avoid its looking solid and over-heavy.

Enclosed space has a greater attraction to the eye than open space.

Filling the back of a design can help to create depth, which in turn helps create a three-dimensional effect. Be sure and complete the back of your arrangement, no need to use the best flowers and foliage but green and a bit of color will help create the illusion of space and depth in the arrangement.

If space is completely missing, it sometimes creates a calm or static effect.

All the material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable references:

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 14.

Katherine Kear, editor, Elements and Principles of Design (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 60.

David Coake, Shelley Urban, and Terry Lanker, Florists' Review Design School (Lansing, MI; The John Henry Company, 2003) 39.

¹³ Judith Blacklock, *The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design* (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 15
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Line

A fundamental element of design, line provides a visual pathway for a viewer's eye to follow when looking at an arrangement. It also creates the structural framework and shape of a design.¹⁴ Line is the feature that most often gives rhythm and direction to a design; it gives movement and allows the eye to pass smoothly from one area to the next. Additionally, space is also a necessary feature for line to be seen within the arrangement.¹⁵

Line as described in the GCV Flower Shows Handbook is a visual path that leads the eye through the design and establishes the structural framework of the design. It carries the rhythm through the design.

Lines can either be direct or indirect. Direct lines are clearly seen in plant material such as arching sprays, branches, trailing plant material, sinuous stems and in the straight lines of blade-shaped leaves, stiff stems and sticks. Indirect lines can be created by using a repetition of shapes, one leading to the next, or by sizes of the same shape increasing or decreasing, as seen in the flowing line of flowers in a traditional design, from buds at the outline to fully open flowers at the focal point. Direct and indirect lines are ways of providing movement, and this movement will have a direction that can be vertical, horizontal, or diagonal, straight, curved or manipulated.

The five main types of line on floral design are: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, and zigzag. Each type of line can also be static or dynamic. Different moods and feelings can be expressed by the type of design selected.

Vertical Line These are the strongest lines in floral design, sometimes thought of as masculine. They create height, suggest strength and stamina, and have a formal, dignified feeling. Considered a static line.

Horizontal Line Creating width, usually near the surface of the container, horizontal line provides a sense of stability to an arrangement. Also thought of as relaxed, restful and/or feminine. Considered a static line.

Diagonal Line: Diagonal lines suggest motion, dynamic energy and excitement adding drama to the design. Considered a dynamic line.

Curved Line: Curved lines also suggest motion but in a gentler, softer, more fluid way. They lead the viewer's eye smoothly through an arrangement and add interest, especially when combined with other types of lines. Considered a dynamic line.

Zigzag Line: Zigzag lines can be subtle or obvious, the most subtle being a line created by alternating flowers back and forth along a simple vertical line, descending from small at the top to large at the base. The more obvious zigzag line may dart back and forth or cut through the center of a design on a sharp angle. Considered a dynamic line.

STATIC OR DYNAMIC LINE

Static lines are characterized by a lack of unusual movement, visual energy, and vitality. They can appear regimented and motionless, unless they're exaggerated. Dynamic lines oppose static lines and give arrangements movement, energy, and vibrancy.

CONSIDERATIONS

To create tension and interest in an arrangement, two or more types of lines are sometimes combined, such as a vertical line intersected by a diagonal line.

Lines may be thick or thin, straight or broken, curved, complicated or simple, crossing, bent, firm or delicate, strong or weak, stiff or fluent. Movement can be fast or slow depending on the line chosen. All types of line are a design feature and have great possibilities for interpretive work.

All the material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable references:

¹⁴ David Coake, Shelley Urban, and Terry Lanker, *Florists' Review Design School* (Lansing, MI; The John Henry Company, 2003) 56.

¹⁵ Katherine Kear, editor, *Elements and Principles of Design* (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 20-21.

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006).

Katherine Kear, editor, Elements and Principles of Design (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007).

David Coake, Shelley Urban, and Terry Lanker, Florists' Review Design School (Lansing, MI; The John Henry Company, 2003).

Form

Form is the three-dimensional shape or configuration of your floral design, i.e. sphere, cone, cube, cylinder, pyramid or portions of these geometric shapes. Form is a vital element of design because any flower arrangement is a collection of forms. A combination of forms can create design interest, and can emphasize the form chosen for the overall design.

Form is loosely represented at times in two-dimensional terms, in which we view these three-dimensional shapes as being horizontal, vertical, triangular, or radial designs, but the term form usually relates to three-dimensional impact, while shape is the two-dimensional outline or contour. For example, form can describe a three-dimensional object, such as a fresh flower, as opposed to shape, which refers to a two-dimensional object, such as a pressed flower or a leaf.

When we talk about form in flower arranging, we can be referring to the overall form of the flower arrangement itself or to the individual forms of plant material that make up the arrangement. The GCV Flower Shows Handbook (revised 2002) states that "form is the contour of two-and three-dimensional material. It applies to individual components within the design as well as contour of the design as a whole." Three-dimensional geometric forms based on the cone, sphere, cube and cylinder are basic to all flower designs. Floral designs are created through the manipulation of these geometric forms and are made up of forms within a form. Composition is the art of combining forms to make a complete and well-balanced overall design.

In Traditional designs, the shape or (again loosely used) form, whether triangular, vertical, spherical, diagonal, horizontal, spiral or S-curve, is easily identifiable. Even if manipulated, the form in Traditional design involves only the reduction of one of these forms to one of its parts; for instance, a crescent form is used rather than the whole sphere. The most common form in Traditional arrangements is the typical massed form with a strong focal area and a rhythm of radiation.

The same geometric forms are used in Creative designs, but the manipulation of forms is more dramatic or extreme, making it harder for the viewer to identify the forms. Here forms may be elongated, compressed, divided or combined. Form is employed very differently in contemporary design, it is stronger, more dramatic and more dominant and the majority of styles do not use radiation or transitional material. Centers of interest can be anywhere, and they are often produced by a tight massing of similar types of plant material, creating new shapes or forms.

There are two types of form, open and closed. An open form has space between its parts and appears lighter in weight than a closed form of the same size and color. For example, a lily is an open form with space between the spreading petals, while the carnation is a closed form, solid and compact with little space between the petals. The carnation will feel heavier than an open form of the same size. The form of the entire design may be open or closed as well. A Line design is an open form while a Traditional mass has closed form.

Depth is a critical third dimension of form. It makes the difference between a flat and a three-dimensional arrangement, thus heightening interest and giving a more natural feel to the design. The easiest way to create depth is to fill in the back of an arrangement. Some other ways to create depth are 1) by turning flowers or leaves at different angles, particularly at the sides of an arrangement to lead the eye around to the back of the design, 2) by overlapping leaves or half-hiding a flower with a leaf, and 3) by placing receding colors behind advancing colors to give greater depth. Remember that smooth and shiny textures advance, dull and rough recede and placed next to each other will give a greater illusion of depth.

Forms are the strongest visual symbols in a design. Within the design, the eye always goes first to large round forms, which is the reason that round flowers are the principal players and most dominant form in most flower arrangements. Their circular form draws the eye and gives it a focal point on which to rest before it moves on to

absorb the rest of the design. Judith Blacklock recommends when mixing flowers, always include at least one round form, such as a sunflower or open rose. Form can stabilize a design when well used and can upset balance if wrongly placed.

All the material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable references:

Betty Belcher, Creative Flower Arranging (Portland, OR; Timber Press, 1993), 58.

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 8-14.

GCV Flower Shows Handbook (revised 2002)

Katherine Kear, editor, Elements and Principles of Design (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 25.

Size

Another of the elements of design that you may not see mentioned in some references is the element of size.

The GCV Flower Shows Handbook (online) states that size is the visual dimension of line, shape, form and space.

Size does not have to be defined but an understanding of its visual effect is necessary. Although each floral component has both visual and actual dimensions, size as it relates to design is only concerned with the visual or apparent. Unlike actual size, visual size varies with the distance from the viewer, in comparison to other objects viewed simultaneously, and according to the color and texture of the component. A large object seen from far away is apparently small in size; when a small object is seen next to a large object, the small object appears smaller and larger object even larger. Advancing hues and white or very light values of color make an object appear larger in size. Remember that dark colors reduce visual size. A coarse texture, by breaking up the light reflections, makes an object appear smaller; smoother, shiny textures make an object appear visually larger.

Actual size may be small and delicate or large and bold, but the importance of a form in a design is most dependent on its visual size. However, a very large specimen will always be more important than a smaller specimen of the same flower, whatever the design. A small miniature rose would be beautiful on a bedside table, but lost on the altar of a church. Size is closely related to the design principles of proportion and scales as well.

The material for these notes has been gathered from the following valuable resources:

Betty Belcher, Creative Flower Arranging (Portland, OR; Timber Press, 1993).

Judith Blacklock, The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006).

Marie S. Miller, New Dimensions in Floral Designs (North Bend, OR; Wedferd Publications, 1981).

Pattern

The elements of design are the basic visual components used in producing your flower arrangement. The elements are the ingredients of your design: the objects to be arranged, the constituent parts used to create the floral composition itself. They are the visual qualities used in creating the design.

However, while several of the elements we have studied are included in most lists of design elements, many others vary according to each list's author. In researching elements of design, I found that Color, Texture, Space, Line and Form appeared on most lists. Pattern and Light, both found on the GCV list, are included less often.

Whether included or not in an element list, it is useful to understand the part that pattern can play in flower arranging. Pattern can be vital in achieving rhythm in a design by the repetition of color, form, or line as well as by harnessing the pattern in the floral material itself.

Pattern as described in the GCV Flower Shows Handbook is "the visual quality created by a combination of lines, forms, colors, texture and spaces in the design. It is dependent on illumination".

Other descriptions of pattern are:

1. a repeated combination of line, form, color, texture and/or space.

2. the interplay of solid, spaces, and color evoking repetition. Pattern may be found in plant material (petals, florets, stems, veining, foliage, etc.) or within a design (repeating an element).

Pattern also applies to the contour of a composition as well as the grouping of materials within the design.

An additional pattern to consider is that of the natural material itself. Think of the patterns created by stems, petals, and foliage in your plant material. For example, notice the similar tubular shape of some palm spates and the calla lily or the linear pattern of a gladiola stem and bamboo. These examples are but two of many plant materials having similarity of pattern, which may serve to unify a design although the materials may be unrelated in other ways. The related harmony of shape and texture in container and floral material also shows imaginative selection of materials.¹⁶ Try to use patterns you see in your materials to repeat in your overall design.

Being aware of the patterns in your materials and your overall design help you to create a design with harmony. Pattern relates to continuity, since the distribution of lines and forms can proceed logically, creating good rhythm or be disjointed, disrupting unity in the design. So you see that the pattern of the arrangement and the pattern of the individual materials influence each other. Consistency is desired, and the patterns within the body of the design should repeat the outline.

Additionally, the arrangement of colors within the design determines the color pattern and establishes color rhythm.

Patterns are of different kinds—intricate, bold, open, dense, regular, irregular. The pattern of the materials often identifies the style as traditional, contemporary, or Asian.¹⁷ In contemporary design pattern can be irregular and unpredictable

The material for these notes has been gathered from the following references:

Allied Florists of Houston, Principles and Elements of Floral Design. <http://alliedfloristsofhouston.org>

Amalie Adler Ascher, The Complete Flower Arranger (New York, NY; Simon and Schuster, 1974)

Betty Belcher, Creative Flower Arranging (Portland, Oregon; Timber Press, 1998)

Esther Veramae Hamil, The Encyclopedia of Judging and Exhibiting (St. Ignatius, Montana; Ponderosa Publishers, 1976)

The Little Garden Club of Rye, Understanding Flower Design. <http://lgcofrye.com>.

Texture

As an element of floral design, texture refers to the tangible and visible surface quality of plant and arranging materials. Texture can be coarse or fine, smooth or rough, shiny or dull, and it can be either physical (noticeable to the touch) or visual (noticeable to the eye) or both.

Texture as described in the GCV Flower Shows Handbook is the visual surface quality of the components of flower arranging, e.g. rough vs. smooth, dull vs. shiny.

Considerations

Contrast of texture is vital for good design. When designing an arrangement, successfully incorporating a variety of textures will increase visual interest. Contrast of textures can provide a dynamic factor, contributing excitement, attracting attention and relieving monotony. However, using too many textures or combining some textures that are extremely different can detract from the arrangement; a balance must exist. When more than one texture is being incorporated into the design, it is necessary to include a form that is plain and smooth, to give a calm contrast to the other texture(s) in the design. This smooth texture is particularly found in leaves,

¹⁶ Esther Veramae Hamil, *The Encyclopedia of Judging and Exhibiting* (St. Ignatius, Montana; Ponderosa Publishers, 1976), 348.

¹⁷ Amalie Adler Ascher, *The Complete Flower Arranger* (New York, NY; Simon and Schuster, 1974), 34.

such as ivy and hosta; many single-petaled flowers, such as dahlia and Rudbeckia; as well as in houseplant leaves and some fruits and vegetables. Always include a smooth texture in every design.¹⁸

One texture should be dominant with the others being of less importance in order to encourage the eye to travel through the design. Repetition of textures can achieve a rhythmical sequence. Rough textures hold the attention longer than smooth and appear to advance while smooth surfaces seem to recede. This can be used to create depth in a design. The manner in which texture is distributed through a design can affect balance as well. Coarse textures appear visually heavier than smooth or fine textures. A shiny leaf can be placed centrally for strong interest in a traditional design where more visual weight is required. When combining textures in traditional floral design, the coarse or rough-textured materials are best placed in and near the focal area while the fine or smooth-textured materials are best placed away from the focal area.¹⁹

The impact of texture is greater in monochromatic arrangements because it is not obscured by the color scheme. Texture can also be used as an expressive means of communication by capturing a mood or eliciting a response. Plant materials should have characteristics related to the idea they are intended to convey to interpret a theme or further the atmosphere implied. Materials with smooth, shiny, fine or velvety textures, such as glazed ceramic or polished silver containers, Astilbe or roses, lend a formal feeling to arrangements as well as a more female persona. Rough, dull, or coarse textures found in weathered crocks, mosses or Proteas, usually impart a casual feeling and create a more male feeling.

Combining materials with similar textural qualities creates comfortable, pleasing harmony and unity while combining materials with contrasting textures increases visual interest and typically results in more contemporary, adventurous design.

Exaggerated contrasts in texture are often played against each other in abstract design.

Flowers and foliage should be chosen with the textures of the container and accessories in mind so that the desired harmony or contrast is achieved.

Color

Of all the elements of floral design, **color** is undoubtedly the ingredient that draws the most immediate attention and causes the strongest response from the viewer. The human eye experiences color physically, mentally and emotionally, and color relationships present a compelling and exciting element in flower arranging.

Color preferences vary greatly from individual to individual, and there is no definite right or wrong with color. Any color scheme that makes an expressive statement is valid.²⁰ However, knowledge of the theory of color and awareness of the effective use of this powerful element of design are invaluable to the flower arranger.²¹

The Flower Shows Handbook from the Garden Club of Virginia uses the following definition of color. "The visual response of the eye to light waves. There is a corresponding relationship between the principles of design and color. Warm colors (yellow, red, orange) seem to move forward. Cool colors (blue, green, violet) recede and seem farther away. An area of cool color will seem smaller than an equal area of warm color. The qualities of color are:

Hue or Chroma: The specific name of a color such as "red," "green", etc.

Value: The lightness or darkness of a color. Pink is a light value of red obtained by adding white. It is called a tint. Maroon is a dark value of red obtained by adding black and is called a shade.

Intensity: The brilliance or dullness of a color."

¹⁸ Judith Blacklock, *The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design* (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 14.

¹⁹ Katherine Kear, editor, *Elements and Principles of Design* (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 67-70.

²⁰ [1] Judith Blacklock, *The Judith Blacklock Encyclopedia of Flower Design* (Bournemouth, UK; The Flower Press Ltd., 2006), 14.

²¹ Katherine Kear, editor, *Elements and Principles of Design* (Cheltenham, UK; Quorum Print Services, Ltd, 2007), 14.

A complete discussion of color can involve textbooks and college courses; however, I have listed a few practical considerations that may help you in designing your arrangements. See color wheel information in this handbook.

1. Ideally colors should be proportioned so that one color dominates while others subordinate the color scheme. A popular rule of thumb is to use 65% of the dominant color, 25% of a secondary color and 10% of an accent color. Equal amounts of two strong colors can confuse the eye by vying for attention.
2. Colors should be balanced in the arrangement by placing those with the greatest visual weight (usually darker or higher-intensity colors) at the center or base of the design. Lighter colors should be toward the design's perimeter.
3. A color mix can be unified by adding a few darker colors near an arrangement's perimeter and a few of the lighter colors near its center. Also, the container color should be unified with the flowers by repeating it with a least one matching flower type.
4. Consider the effect that lighting will have on the design. In muted or dim light, colors will be greatly subdued. Cool colors and dark shades of warm colors all tend to fade away in dim light. Some colors can be seen more easily than others. Any tint can be seen more vividly in dim lighting than those of a pure hue.
5. Although black and white are considered neutral, green is nature's neutral color. It will bring together flowers of a multitude of forms and colors. Dark green gives depth to pastel colors and light green can bring life and vitality to darker flowers.
6. White is dominant – if using a white container, use white, green or pastel colored flowers so that container and flowers work together rather than in competition.
7. Remember that color does not exist in isolation and interacts visually with the other colors in the arrangement. Proximity to another color may alter the perception of that color; for example, yellow flowers placed beside purple ones appear lighter and more brilliant and the purple appears darker and richer.
8. Color can contribute to the development of rhythm with repetition by encouraging the eye to travel through the design.
9. Color can be used to convey the spirit of an age in period arrangement. Strong contrasts provide immediate visual impact in modern design, and unbroken areas of color are a strong design feature in contemporary designs. Pure color is often used in abstract designs to create movement or drama.