

Slow Flowers JOURNAL

By Debra Prinzing

NEXT UP: NEW STYLES FROM INSPIRING DESIGNERS

Three emerging floral artists share their influences and inspiration.

As part of the progressive floral design community, I'm on the lookout for inspiration and ideas that challenge my assumptions and point of view. And as I reflect on what I've learned during 2018, I find myself being drawn to three design talents whose Instagram feeds I can't stop watching. Their stories, voices and creativity shine a refreshing new light on local and seasonal floral aesthetics.

Let me introduce them to you: **Whit McClure**, of Los Angeles-based **Whit Hazen**; **Jessica Gring**, of Seattle-based **Odd Flowers**; and **Brandon Scott McLean**, of Homer, Alaska-based **East Hill Floral Design**.

Their work is stimulating and unconventional. They use botanical ingredients that are both common and familiar, mixed with the unexpected and quirky. All three have charted a personal path, drawn from influences outside of conventional floral mores. I love what these emerging talents represent, and I see them as the future of our Slow Flowers community and ethos.

Here are my Q&As with each, edited for length.

Using flowers and produce from his Homer, Alaska, greenhouse, Brandon Scott McLean pays homage to 18th-century Dutch painters he admires.

Who: Whit McClure

What: Whit Hazen

Where: Los Angeles, Calif., by way of Washington, D.C.

Find her at: whithazen.com; @whit_hazen

Background: Studio floral designer **Whit McClure** moved to Los Angeles three years ago, and she has been designing with flowers ever since. Her introduction to flower farming and floral design is rooted in connections made through food justice and the local culinary community in Washington, D.C. Whit spent years after college working on farms, in community gardens and in the nonprofit world, teaching people of all ages and walks of life how to grow their own food. Eventually, she found floral design as the perfect blend of working with plants, crafting beauty, and collaborating with others while remaining committed to social justice in her free time. Ever-inspired by nature's abundant beauty and driven to respect and protect its resources, **Whit Hazen** is motivated to bring more beauty to the world for others.

How did your journey lead you to flowers? After working in the nonprofit world, I took on a side job working for **Sidra Forman**, a chef and floral designer in Washington, D.C. Because of my background around local food and growing food, I also started to become interested in flowers. I was asking questions about where flowers are being sourced. I found it interesting that there's been such a large movement in the last decade around local foods, but it hadn't shifted to flowers as much. Even though Sidra's style is more classic than mine, I was just always drawn to the fact that she made it a priority to use local products and that she never uses flower foam. Another influence is Los Angeles floral designer **Felisa Funes**, whose studio is called **Of the Flowers**. She's become a dear friend and mentor. From her, I've drawn a lot of understanding around recreating things that are in nature and how to manipulate flowers in a different way. I'm also influenced by graphic design and funky color combinations I see on buildings in Southern California.

How do you describe your design aesthetic? It's whimsical, bold and seasonally inspired. Another thing that makes my work different is that I'm not sold on always using "luxe" products, mixing the "dos" with the "don'ts," so I think that makes people reconsider flowers they may not like, flowers considered homey or rustic. For my studio practice, it's important that I can merge my passions of art, flowers and politics. I often think about how flowers bring so much joy to people's lives and how there's still so much work to be done so that more people can experience that joy (like access to economic opportunity, education, healthcare, etc.). I create beauty while at the same time expressing my strong opinions, using my voice and resources to speak truth to power. My hope is that my artwork encourages others to do more of both in their lives.

What is the craziest design you've made this year? For Amara Kitchen, a restaurant in L.A.'s Highland Park area, I created a geometric wall hanging that is also reflected by a ceiling mirror. It created a fun, optical illusion in a small space.

What's on your horizon for 2019? I am planning to make some of my Instagram posts into prints because I've had a lot of interest from followers. In the next year, I want to do more work around defining my personal style and aesthetic. By doing more (styled) shoots, I think I can show what I'm capable of doing.

