



A Moody Tale

An autumn styled photo shoot reflects the place, flowers and palette of the season.

By **Debra Prinzing**

Photos by **Kestrel Bailey**

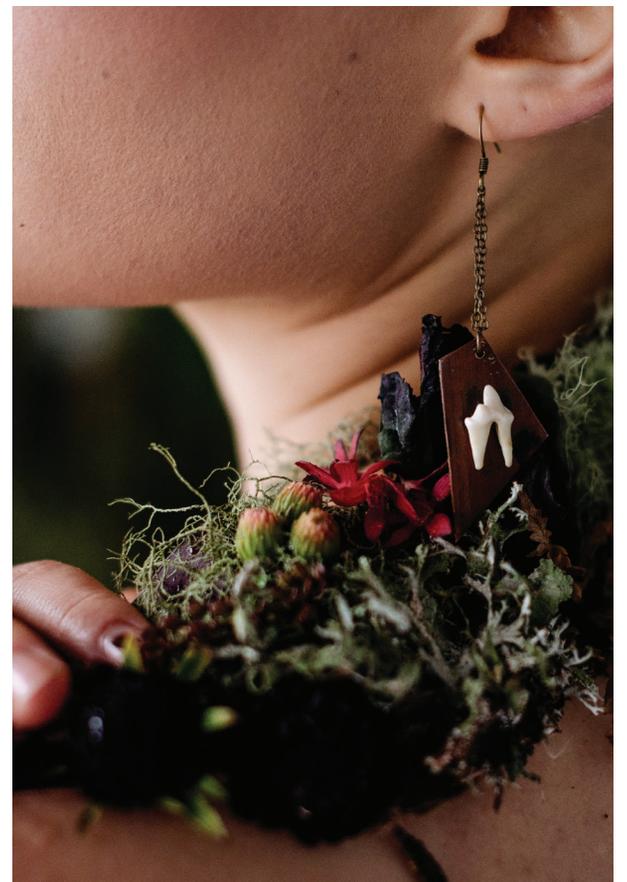
In search of a creative antidote after a long summer of pastel weddings, photographer **Kestrel Bailey** and floral designer **Erin Shackelford** collaborated on a styled photo shoot with a darker plot.

Both are based in the Pacific Northwest's San Juan Islands, where the weather and water are a constant influence, be they grey or sparkling blue, stormy or calm. And since both belong to a small cohort of vendors who serve San Juan Islands' destination weddings, it was natural that flowers by **Camas Designs**, Shackelford's studio based in Friday Harbor, had previously appeared at weddings photographed by Bailey.

Last fall, Bailey reached out to Shackelford and invited her to join "a photo shoot that's a little different," the florist recalls. "She told me it would be a moody project and added, "the model has yellow hair and she's going to be wearing a black wedding dress."

That was enough incentive for Shackelford, along with a small team of fellow creatives, to join the project. "It had been a season of whites and blushes," she recalls. "And I was ready to break the mold and have fun. The first thing I asked Kestrel was, "What do you think of me doing a floral tattoo?" Shackelford confides, "I channeled Passionflower Sue," referring to floral artist Susan Mcleary. "I had taken a workshop with her and had been wanting to try her floral tattoo techniques. I thought it would fit perfectly with the look of the model."

Inspired by model **Kat Lohman's** unconventional style, including frequent hair color changes, the photographer wanted a dramatic visual backdrop for her subject. She selected **Northern State Hospital** in Sedro-Woolley, Wash., a deserted institution with its own edgy, dark vibe. Until the 1970s, the location was known as Northern State Asylum; it was later closed by the state and abandoned for decades. "We didn't want to exploit mental illness or be disrespectful of the history that happened at this site, because it has a dark history," the





photographer observes. “Instead, we wanted to honor the fact that there was strength in the people who experienced life at the hospital and show someone who is strong and empowered.”

Not surprisingly, it was raining on the late autumn day scheduled for the photography. The team members met during the hair and makeup session with stylist **Brenda Tift**. “The color palette chosen by the makeup artist aligned perfectly with what I chose for flower colors and the ribbons I brought for the bouquet,” Shackelford marvels.

She ordered the herbaceous flowers from **Mayesh Wholesale Florist** in Los Angeles, Calif., and combined those fresh ingredients with elements foraged locally on the San Juan Islands. The botanical pieces -- the tattoo and bridal bouquet -- are as dark and pensive as the other design elements. Shackelford selected sultry purple-black tulips and roses with a muted patina, which are intertwined with dried ferns, burgundy and copper-hued orchids, plus lichen, moss, berries and seedpods.

Local artists **Grey Jays** created jewelry pieces specifically for the session, drawing from foraged and found objects, while **Alicia’s Bridal & The Formal House** provided a stunning black wedding dress.

Bailey created a sense of mystery through her lens, not only with her composition and selection of distressed buildings, but

also by infusing the setting with colored smoke bombs. The overall effect has a mysterious, fantasy quality to it, as if a dream.

For her part, Shackelford is hoping that by showcasing her designs in an unusual way it will convince a future bride to wear a floral tattoo.

“Oftentimes, we can get so busy in the wedding season that we don’t carve out the time to feed our own souls,” Shackelford says. “To be able to have the creative time to practice my craft without any expectation of outcome is really important to me. That’s when I remember why I got into floral design, why I enjoy the design process, the flowers and bringing creativity to life.”

DETAILS:

Photography: Kestrel Bailey, @kestrelphoto
Photography and lighting assistant: Evan Quon, @evan.explore
Hair/Makeup: Brenda Tift, @bltift; The Experience Salon @theexperiencesalon
Florals: Erin Shackelford, Camas Designs, @camasdesigns
Jewelry: Grey Jays, @greyjays
Dress: Alicia’s Bridal & The Formal House Tuxedos
Model: Kat Lohman, @katlohman ■