



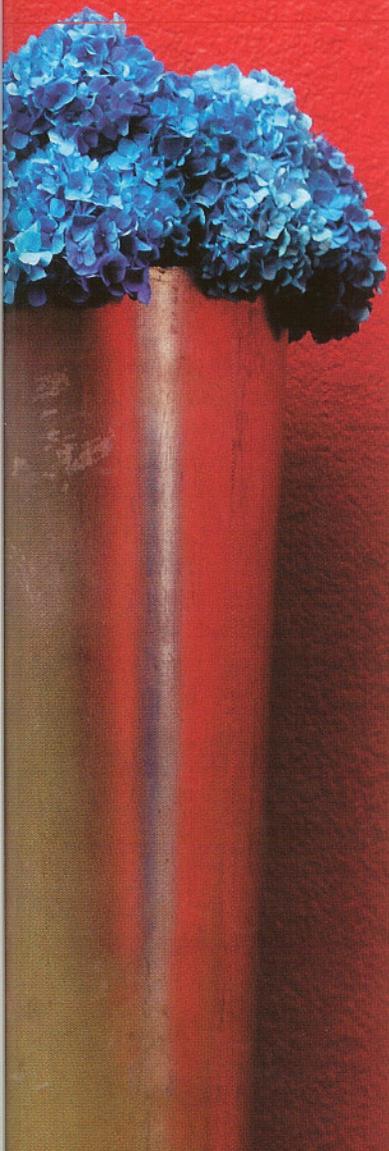
PEOPLE

# Come up roses!

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LOWERS AND TWIGS ARE ARTISTIC TOOLS for Dubai-based flower designer Cedric Amani. **Ritu Raizada** talks to him about the art of blending textures, scents and colours to make what he calls a 'stunning floral arrangement'.

Photos by **Arshad Ali**



**Left:** Cedric Amani seated next to one of his creations at his first floral boutique on Al Wasl Road in Dubai. **Below:** A few of his creations.

When you speak to flower designer Cedric Amani, don't plant overused quotes on roses or any flower for that matter in your conversation.

You know those worn-out misquoted famous words about a rose by any other name ... or other toe-curling stuff in a bid to show off your knowledge on floral attributes. They will probably be dismissed with a polite snort.

Just as well.

You see, for Amani, a flower is not a whimsical whorl of petals and sepals. Each lush petal is unique, and each flower's fragrance, special.

As a young boy, he would passionately look at the details of every flower. The art of learning to blend textures, scents and colours held profound appeal to him. The fact that his parents were florists, helped.

"To you [a bouquet] may come across as just another bunch of flowers, but to me, each element is important, unique. I feel the same way about each flower, whether I am designing an entire area [with flowers] or just a simple bouquet," says Amani in a distinct, hard-to-miss French accent.

His designs are classic as well as contemporary and are heavily influenced by his Parisian upbringing. He has designed floral arrangements on every imaginable scale and for every celebrated event from anniversaries to high-profile weddings. His client roster includes the Cannes Film Festival, Ritz Carlton in Cannes, Burj Al Arab, Bill Gates' Villa Marilyn in Mondeleux, next to St Tropez and House of Dior in Paris.

Amani is known for his exquisite and memorable designs across the world, including places like Japan, New York and San Francisco.

Interestingly, this France-born artiste compares his work to that of a painter. "When I work on an arrangement it feels like I am putting together a piece of art," he says.

Amani has dabbled with flower arrangements since 15. He is now in his early thirties. As long as he can remember he has always wanted to be a florist.

"Flowers are my life, my passion. Nothing else ever came close," he says.

A graduate of the Academie De Nancy-Metz in France, Amani recently opened his first floral boutique on Al Wasl Road in Dubai. There is something very special about flowers, he says. "We use them to adorn every special occasion in our lives from birthdays to anniversaries. At my boutique, you will find flowers for every event in your life."

#### **Bursting bouquet of work**

Amani moved to Lyon in 1999 from Paris, his birthplace. "I grew up there. It was in Paris that I took my flower arrangements seriously. I won several prestigious awards as a flower designer during my schooling years and after. I remember how expert florists would teach us about flowers, especially bouquet making techniques."

Two years ago, Amani moved to Dubai, where he started work as a floral designer at the Madinat Jumeirah - The Arabian Resort. "I worked with



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different concepts, which included floral arrangements in lobby and ballroom areas. I also worked with chefs to decorate certain dishes with flowers. It was a good experience.”

After one year at the hotel, he started work at the Burj Al Arab, where he was given carte blanche. “I had creative freedom and could function the way I wanted to. I sourced exotic flowers from different countries for many of the projects. It was the same kind of freedom I enjoyed when I worked in Paris.”

Yet, by his own admission, he doesn't have a blueprint for the designs he creates.

“My mind is blank when I start work on a piece, but at the end, it turns out beautiful,” he says.

**The world is his garden**

Amani loves to receive compliments either delivered in person or scribbled in guestbooks. However, it is the non-verbal or unwritten ones that give him that rare sense of satisfaction.

And the best form of compliment is when a guest asks to be photographed against one of his floral arrangements. “It is the best compliment I can expect!” he says. “Some take photos of the bouquet. Sometimes they stop to smell the flowers, other times, they touch the flowers assuming they are artificial!”

he says.

The fact that guests do this or stop by to admire doesn't come as a surprise. After all, his arrangements are recherche, often made with exotic,



PHOTO COURTESY CEDRIC AMANI



beautiful flowers. He uses flowers from places such as Ecuador, Thailand, Ethiopia, France, Colombia, India, Zimbabwe and Kenya.

“Different countries offer different varieties of the same flower,” he explains, adding, “for example, I get some of the most beautiful roses from Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Kenya and India; and orchids from Thailand.”

The quest to find the perfect flower is directly linked to creating a unique arrangement. “I love to find the perfect flower depending on the occasion,” he says.

**Design a floral space**

Like every designer, space is an important consideration. But if floor space isn't available, walls and ceiling will do just as well.

“If the area I am decorating doesn't have floor space, I create space for my flowers on the walls and ceiling,” he says, smiling.

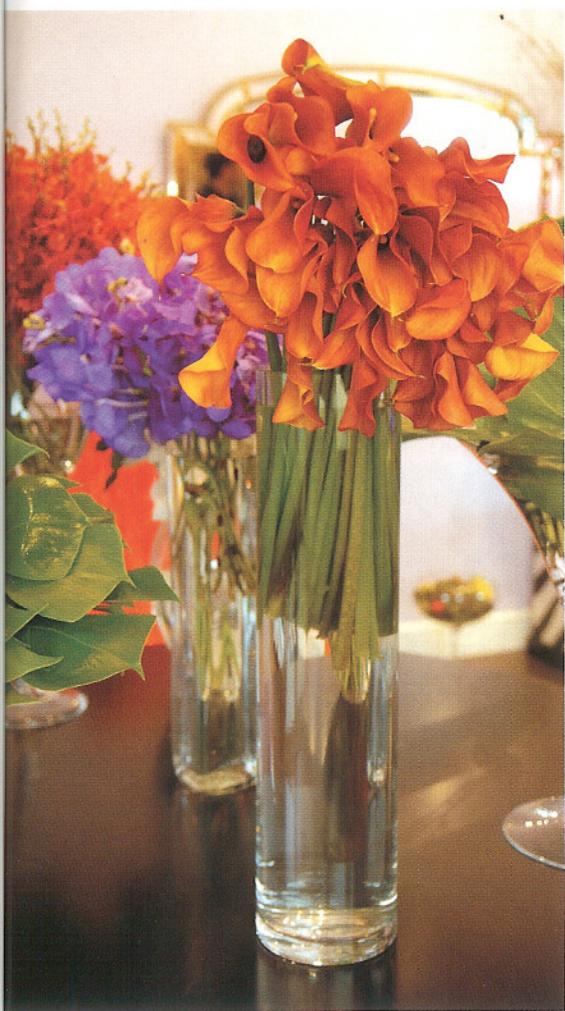
The best way to ensure that an area's architecture integrates with the floral arrangement is to look at it when the place is empty. Every client has a different set of checkboxes to be ticked. The best way to find out what the client wants is to understand his requirements, he explains.

“Factors such as space, budget,

**Art revisited ...  
Decorative table flower displays**  
by Cedric Amani.



**Art reinvented ...** Left and below: Glass vases display the full flower, bud, stem and leaves, all created by Cedric Amani.



## ADD LIFE TO CUT FLOWERS

**Nothing enlivens a room** as wonderfully as a vase of fresh flowers. Extending the life of cut blooms requires some basic preparation and care.

Amani prefers clear glass vases for his floral arrangements. "I don't like metal buckets or baskets as they mar the beauty of an arrangement. Glass vases display the full flower, bud, stem and leaves. In a flower arrangement 80 per cent of its appeal is the flower's beauty and 20 per cent the appeal of an accessory like a vase," he says.

While he promotes the use of clear glass vases in offices as well as in homes one should never buy them based on their shape, he says. "Buy one with a heavy and stable base, a tall one preferably. Ensure it will be able to take the weight of the water and flowers. Clear vases also create the illusion of space.

There are four factors that

affect the life of fresh flowers. "When properly conditioned, cut flowers can last a week or longer, depending on the type of flowers and maintenance they receive," says Cedric Amani, flower designer and proprietor of Cedric Amani, the floral boutique on Al Wasl Road in Dubai.

Generally speaking, Amani explains, there are four factors to consider: cutting, stem tending, maintenance and watering.

Here he gives a few tips:

- Cut stems at a 45° angle. This facilitates water absorption and removes any excess foliage that could drain the water supply.
- Remove the leaves below the water level. (These cause bacteria to breed and reduce the lifespan.)
- Avoid smoking near flowers as they absorb the smoke and this affects them adversely.
- Change the water every day and add the required amount of flower food. Bulbs such as daffodil, crocus, grape hyacinth and tulip have trouble drawing

water. Dip the cut stem in warm to hot water for no more than one hour to open the stem.

- Flowers such as daisies are sensitive to dirty water, which cause them to bend at the neck. If this happens, re-cut stems and place in fresh water.

- Keep flowers away from direct sunlight as well as from heating or cooling vents or surfaces.

- If you place flowers in a clear vase, add a drop of Clorox to keep the water clear.

- Fill the vase up to three-fourth capacity.

- Don't use tangerines, lemons, limes and cranberries to add variety to an arrangement. Fruits and vegetables cause bacteria. Instead, add green foliage to add texture, height and volume.

- Buy flowers that last longer, more so for those who like fresh flowers at home every day.

- When selecting flowers, look for flowers with upright, firm petals and buds beginning to open. Yellow, spotted or drooping leaves are signs of age.

- When using woody stems and branches (such as quince, forsythia or lilac), cut the stem with pruning shears. Place in warm water containing fresh flower food to promote flower opening.

- Certain flowers like amaryllis and iris last longer.

- Remember, the cost of a flower depends on its freshness and seasonality. For instance, a rose is available all year round.

- You can lay blooms and petals on a decorative plate in a bed of pot-pourri in order to let them dry naturally.

## WHAT DOES THAT FLOWER SIGNIFY?

**Flowers represent different emotions.** Here is a quick reference guide of some popular flowers:

- Red roses: passion and love.
- White roses: innocence and purity.
- Red roses and white roses combined: unity.
- Pink roses: lasting friendship.
- Peach roses: desire.
- Yellow roses: admiration and jealousy.
- Calla lily: magnificent beauty.
- White Calla lily: purity.
- Orchids: ecstasy.
- Purple tulips: royalty
- Yellow tulips: hopeless love.
- Red tulips: true love.
- White tulips: worthiness and forgiveness.
- Pink, magenta or white peony: happy marriage.
- Lavender: devotion.
- Lilac: first love experience.
- Gypsophila (baby's breath): everlasting love.

**Flowers arrangements also have emotional nuances.**

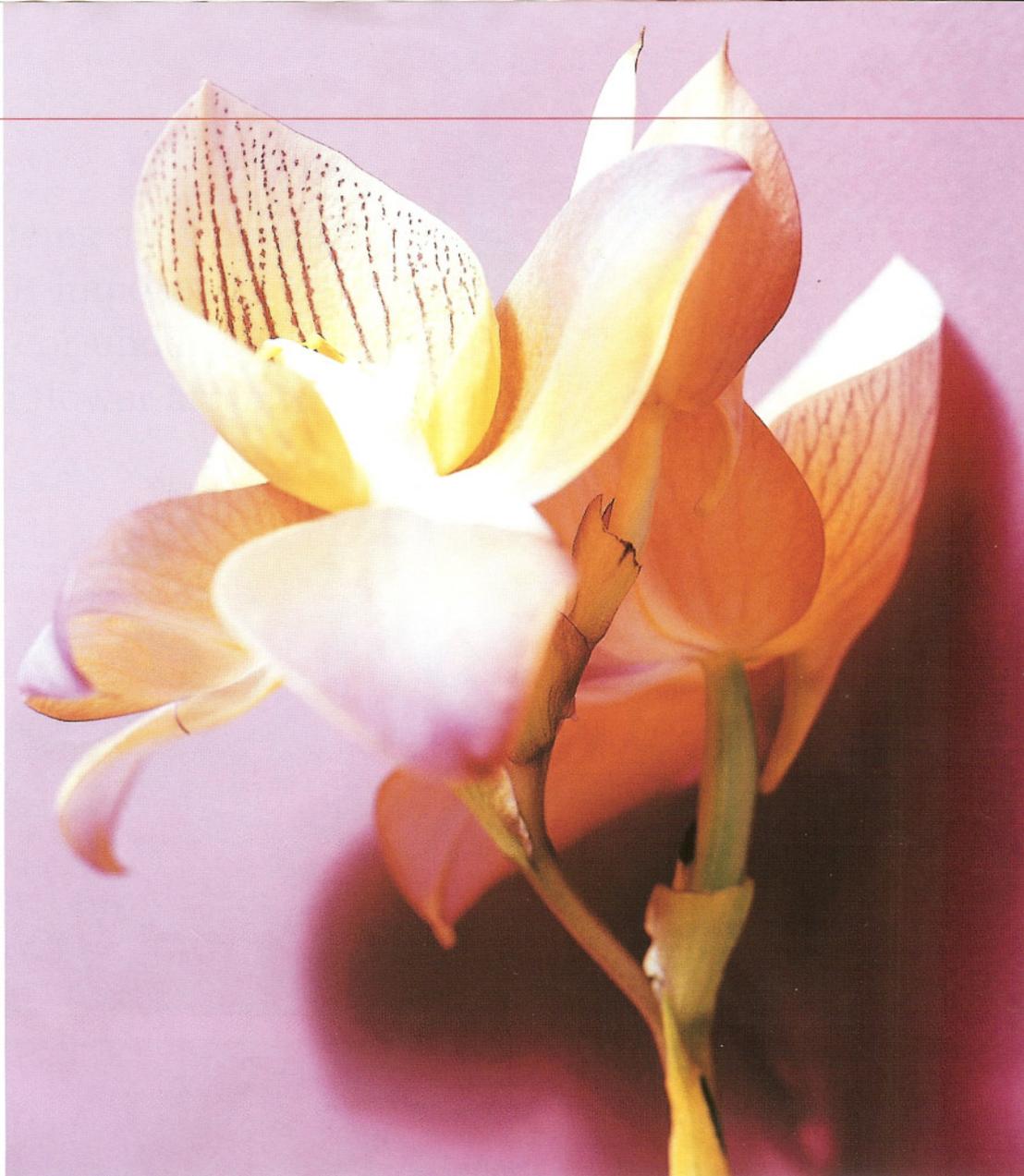
Here's a basic guide:

- Artistic: roses and phalaenopsis.
- Casual: roses.
- Classic: roses and calla lilies.
- Contemporary: roses and tulips.
- Formal: roses and orchids.
- Romantic: roses.

nature of the event, and most important, how flexible the client is in the usage of flowers, are considered. I want to know if the client wants one type of flower or if he is open to the idea of working with a mix of them. The mission is to create a look that will leave the guests spellbound," he says.

### Creating the perfect bouquet

The best way to understand the harmony expected from a bouquet is to compare it to an orchestra.



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"A floral arrangement is like an orchestra. Even a single instrument going off-key ruins the entire symphony. Quite the same way, if you place a flower in the wrong manner, it detracts from the final aesthetics," he says. There are many other factors that can ruin a floral arrangement.

On one occasion, Amani remembers when he was pouring water into a vase. Unfortunately, he did not realise that the base wasn't stable enough. Result? The vase toppled, spilling water and scattering the flowers. "There were five minutes for the show to start. It was chaos! We had to clean and re-set the table very quickly," he says.

Balancing aestheticism is important, and over- or under-decorating can kill a flower arrangement. "We have to be careful not to add too many accessories or place undue emphasis on the container. Proportions are vital. The more simplistic the creation the more beautiful it is. Also, more often than not, the occasion dictates the arrangement. If it is for your wife, it should look like it is for her!" he says.

### Give flowers without an occasion

Amani believes that one shouldn't wait for an occasion to present flowers. "Give them without a reason!" he says. But when there is a reason, ensure you know what to give.

"White roses on a graduation ceremony or calla lilies on a marriage anniversary. They [calla lilies] also happen to be the safest flowers to gift to a guy (apart from orchids). Gift long-stem flowers since you may not know in which part of the house the recipient intends placing the bouquet or what is the length of the vase he or she owns," he says.

In general, he says, colourful roses and tulips for birthdays; scabiosa, amaryllis or hydrangea for corporate gifts; roses for romance; daisies, amaryllis and freesia for new parents; and carnations and orchids for condolence visits.

Expensive, luxury flowers are much sought after in Dubai, orchids in particular. "Most of them are expensive, ranging between Dh45 and Dh185 per stem," he says. "If looked



**Know your flowers ...**  
 Clockwise from left:  
 orchid, calla lily,  
 crocus, hydrangea,  
 and daisies.

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## FLORAL FAVES

**These are 25 of Cedric Amani's all-time favourite flowers:** amaryllis, calla lily, ecuador rose, hyacinthus, phalaenopsis, hydrangea, lily, cymbidium, ornitogalum, birds of paradise, tulip, peony, ranunculus, anemone, camellia, moccara, eremurus, narcissus, iris, Japanese rose, gloriosa, casablanca, viburnum, lilac, lily of the valley, orchids and roses.

### Here in the UAE, Amani lists top 10 flowers:

Phalaenopsis orchid, cymbidium orchid, peony, amaryllis, calla lily, casablanca, hydrangea, tulip, rose and anthurium.

For bridal bouquets he recommends these:

- Cascading: roses, lilies, calla lilies, stephanotis.
- Nosegay (round bunch of flowers): roses, ranunculus, freesia, asters, mini carnations, tulips.
- Hand-tied bouquet: roses, scabiosa, tulips.
- Contemporary bouquet: calla lilies, orchids, roses, tulips.

after correctly, they last for two to three weeks.

"Exotic flowers come with their own limitations. "I find it both difficult and challenging to work with them [exotic flowers]. For example, Birds of Paradise is a straight flower and isn't easy to use. You cannot bend or stretch

it, and you need to know how to create a design with it."

### But a bouquet withers ...

"As a kid, it hurt to watch flowers wither. Today I deal with a dead flower in a matter-of-fact approach," he says.

This brings us to the subject of

dried flowers. Some dislike the idea of using dried flowers (pot-pourri) in their living space as it reminds them of flowers that were once in full bloom. Amani puts it this way: "Once the flower is dead, it has to be discarded. I don't like to work with dead flowers." **15**



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