

by Megan Sullivan

Capturing the Imagination

A look at innovative designs from AIFD Southern Conference

The American Institute of Floral Designers' (AIFD) Southern Conference in Puerto Rico in April showcased inspirational design work and encouraged florists to think outside the box. From the influence of pop culture, Art Deco and the beauty of orchids, to personal touches that can be added to wedding and sympathy designs, the event covered a wide variety of topics in a synergistic learning environment.

"I think all of the stage designers shared the same belief that our industry is changing and we must step up our game with new products, trendy concepts, and innovative designs to encourage consumers to invest in flowers," says Sharon McGukin, AIFD, AAF, PFCI. "Each presenter shared creative ways to design, display, and market beautiful flowers to capture the imagination (and wallet) of potential customers."

Sandy Schroeck, AIFD, PFCI, CFD, owner of Trend on Design in Eden Prairie, Minn., helped backstage with Sharon's wedding celebration presentation and also assisted Tim Farrell, AIFD, CFD with his theme events program.

Among the designs presented at AIFD Southern Conference were floral themes inspired by popular TV programs such as *Hawaii Five-O*, *Once Upon a Time*, *Mad Men*, *Vampire Diaries*, and *Downton Abbey*. Each set was introduced by playing the show's theme song and asking the audience to guess the program. The *Hawaii Five-O* table highlighted black carbon-like containers from which bright flowers burst forth like lava. Pave and shadowing techniques were also displayed in this colorful table. "The tangerine tango tablecloth

shows that orange will still continue in the color palettes," Sandy says. "This energetic color will infuse any party setting."

Once Upon a Time is a fantasy drama series that transports fairy tale characters to the "real world" in a small New England town. The floral design inspired by the TV show featured a contrast of rustic wood and elegant floral products to capture the two sides of the story. The dynamic lines created by the midollino sticks represent the many twists and turns the plot takes in the show. "Natural wood products continue to grow in sales," Sandy says. "They are a textural element that connects us to nature with added interest in a floral design."

Sharon's trend-forward wedding program featured a wide range of floral varieties, including dendrobium, mokara, arachnis, vanda, phalenopsis and cymbidium orchids. "You could really see a European influence in her designs," Sandy remarks. Sharon showcased creative mechanics and new styles that will be emerging. Thanks to the recent release of *The Great Gatsby* film, iconic Hollywood influences are forecast to be strong. Other popular floral trends represented in her vignettes included classical Spanish, 1930s Parisian, and Thoroughly Modern. Sharon's presentation helped the audience connect these popular trends with the Aesthetic, Romantic, Natural and Modern on-trend bouquet styles she revealed onstage.

Several years ago, while designing in Europe, Sharon fell in love with floral cuffs. These vertical bouquets are eye-catching and different from the typical U.S. wedding bouquets. For the program,

she created floral cuff structures using decorative wire from Smithers Oasis and attached the fresh flowers with UGlu and Oasis cold adhesive. "While popular in Europe and Asia, this graceful style is often overlooked by American brides," Sharon says. "These bouquets can be used as elegant bridal bouquets for ceremonies or they can be first introduced to brides as reception bouquets to get the trend started in a particular area."

Miguel Figueroa AIFD, CFD, conference chairman, says the event was very successful. Educational events such as this one allow florists to learn new trends and techniques, share ideas with colleagues and see new products that are available in the marketplace. "Some people think they know everything. I try to show them they are wrong," Miguel says. "You have to learn something. Education is what will make any florist succeed in this industry. We also need to share our passion to inspire others." 

The 2013 AIFD National Symposium is slated for June 28-July 2 in Las Vegas. See page 5 and visit www.aifd.org/upcoming-events/2013symposium/ for info.



Among the floral show-stoppers at AIFD Southern were imaginative designs, created by **Tim Farrell, AIFD, CFD**, that were inspired by popular television shows (*Once Upon A Time*, top left, and *Hawaii Five-O*, top right) as well as trend-forward wedding designs (bottom) created by **Sharon McGukin AIFD, AAF, PFCI**.

