



Designer's Dilemma

by Bob Green

When working on a particular interpretive arrangement, at times, we may find our attention drifting from the arrangement at hand. We may not realize soon enough, the break in our attention, and find that we have lost control of the arrangement. I call this designer's dilemma. When you find yourself in this situation, try the following:

Reassess your materials. Think back to your very first intuitive feelings about your plant materials, accessories, background material, etc. A reassessment might help revive those very first intuitive feelings; or it may point out errors made in selecting your materials.



Ask yourself, "What was the stimulus, what was my intention at the very beginning, why did I choose these particular materials, have I failed to utilize the unique qualities of my materials?" The longer we look at our materials, the less we can see and experience them. While you are working on an arrangement, look away frequently; look at other shapes, textures, and colors so that you are better able to see and remain sensitive to the materials in your arrangement.

Readjust or remove material. Does each piece of material contribute to the arrangement? If not, remove some of the material or readjust it until it plays a vital part in the arrangement. When you are not satisfied with your arrangement and are not certain as to how to improve it, try removing material rather than adding more. Remove material until the strength of the arrangement, as originally perceived, can be seen and felt again. Then add other materials sparingly and judiciously. If materials are added aimlessly, without purpose, control over your materials has been lost. When this happens, it is best to make a fresh start.

Stop for awhile and do something else. When you feel uncertain as to what to do next, stop working on your arrangement and go back to it later – later may be an hour or even days. Then, when you do go back to it and you still don't know what to do next, try holding up different colors and shapes at various points in the arrangement. Often-times, this will inspire the needed idea. Also, try looking at your arrangement from different angles and at different distances. Consider, also, that something that appears wrong may be the result of other materials in the arrangement. Look above, below, across, and beside the area of the arrangement that bothers you. You may find that by correcting or adjusting other materials, you have solved the problem.

Reconsider relationships. A problem area in an arrangement can be of great value. It can stimulate you to find new, fresh relationships you otherwise might not even consider. When an arrangement comes to a standstill, it sometimes helps to place a piece of material so completely out of balance that your imagination literally leaps to find a counterbalancing agent. You should always force yourself to reevaluate the importance of each relationship in an interpretive arrangement. Ask yourself, "Have I made the most of the materials and relationships in my arrangement, could I adjust them to increase interest without adding other materials and other relationships; if I add new directional movements, will they clarify the expression of my entire arrangement, or will they conflict?" These are important questions each designer should ask as the arrangement evolves. Without this constant check, there is no way of knowing when to stop

working on a particular arrangement. When you feel the arrangement has life, and is expressive and stimulating, stop – your arrangement should be completed, and pass the “hand test” and the “mirror test.” Once your arrangement is completed, the most common way of checking it for non-essentials is the “hand test.” Stand a little away from your arrangement, and cover various parts with your open hand. If any part you conceal with your hand does not spoil the arrangement, then it is non-essential and should be taken out.

Another way of checking your arrangement for non-essentials is the “mirror test.” When the last item has been placed in your arrangement, turn your back and look at the arrangement in a hand mirror. Any unnecessary materials will stand out in sharp detail, and elimination will be easy.

