



TOP TIP “The bride needs to form a personal relationship with her florist. It’s important that she feel comfortable calling with questions and expressing her dislikes. I’ve found it to be most helpful when a bride can tell me what she does not like as well as what she does like. And when you meet with the florist, make sure that she’s the one who will be working on the wedding, the one you’ll be dealing with the whole time.”

Virginia Wolff (yes, her real name!) has spent the last 30 years artfully arranging flowers—and making sure her clients are happy. She once convinced a group of striking teamsters to take a break from the picket line so she could deliver flowers to an event.

them even a few years ago. They’re looser, more flowing, and have room to breathe.

Are you seeing noticeably more interest in eco-friendly flowers?

Yes, some people ask about options that aren’t grown with pesticides, but these blooms can be twice as expensive. I do my own version of recycling: When there are flowers remaining after an event, I take them to a nursing home.

What are your favorite spaces to work with?

I love Chicago’s landmarks because they have so much character and history. The Cultural Center has an impressive Tiffany glass dome, for example. And I’ve had several beautiful events at the Botanic Garden, the University Club, the Rockefeller Memorial Chapel—it has one of the longest aisles in the city—Old St. Patrick’s Church, and the Fourth Presbyterian Church. The city also has some amazing museums with lots of space for decorating. There’s a new modern wing of the Art Institute of Chicago that overlooks Millennium Park, and the Museum of Contemporary Art has giant white walls—a blank slate for lighting and color.

Do you have any suggestions for stretching your flower budget?

Reuse the bridesmaid bouquets as part of the arrangement for the head table, or reuse the pew swags on the tables. Selecting a flower that’s in season will also save money. If you want to do the flowers yourself, you can buy them from Costco and get all the bridesmaids together the night before to assemble arrangements. I’ve even helped brides buy flowers wholesale and showed them how to assemble them.

How should a bride broach budget concerns with her florist?

It’s not a problem to say that she has a certain budget and ask me what I can do within that figure. I don’t expect her to know what flowers cost. I can work within any budget, whether she has \$2,000 or \$150,000 to spend.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

VIRGINIA WOLFF

Floral Designer

KNOWN FOR Combining textures, colors, and blooms in unexpected arrangements

WHERE TO FIND HER Virginia Wolff Inc., 1332 West Lake Street, Chicago, IL 60607; virginiawolff.com

What do you need to know before you start designing flowers for a wedding?

I usually start with the date, so I know the season and flowers available. The setting is also important—a club, museum, and garden all inspire different moods. I’m interested in the couple’s favorite flowers and colors. And I find out what they want the wedding to look like. Are they going for a classic, romantic, or con-

temporary feel? Really, the most important thing, though, is for me to understand the couple and what they’re imagining.

What about the bouquet?

I need to see a photograph of the gown before I can start on it. The bouquet is an accessory—it should be part of the whole look.

Are there any new trends you’re seeing when it comes to wedding flowers?

I’ve noticed that the consciousness of the economy and reality of most people’s financial situation have led to more understated flowers at events lately. I haven’t had too many requests for over-the-top extravaganzas, even if people can afford it. Rather, my clients have been choosing elegant but understated designs. They want a simplified design that looks more like a dinner party. Since the grand gestures aren’t as in demand, lots of attention to detail is necessary to carry this off.

Are there any trends with bouquets, too?

They’re not as tightly packed as people wanted