

Petal perfect

Flowers bloom in designer's imagination

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

FLOWERS ARE the single most important accessory in a room. They add life, texture, color . . . a dimension no other accessory can provide. The best decorated room in the world is unfinished if it contains no flowers. The speaker of these impassioned words, Earl Elliott, should know.

His life has been non-stop flowers for a decade now, since the time he sold fresh flowers for a living and discovered a huge need for the silk variety.

Eight years ago he started Elliott's Floral Interiors, now one of the largest importers, manufacturers and wholesalers of silk foliage in the country.

We're talking 25-foot ficus trees, dozens of them, slated for one of Elliott's largest jobs, the elegant Marriott Marquis Hotel in Atlanta. This job preceded simultaneously with the Marriott Marquis hotels in New York City that Elliott readied for the extravagant Statue of Liberty celebration over the fourth of July.

Trees of silk 25 feet tall are not that astonishing for a man who is constantly stretching beyond the creativity of nature by designing his own iris and lily. His intricate shapes and delicate styles of imagination are transformed into fantasy flowers through the skill of Asian artisans.

Trees, however, never receive



ROD NEED/Hall photographer

Elliott's touch of fantasy. "The emphasis on them is for the foliage to be as botanically correct as possible."

ELLIOTT BUYS his flowers and leaves from manufacturers in Europe and the Far East. "The best silk flowers in the world come from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the best silk trees in the world come from Germany and Czechoslovakia."

It has taken him years of effort to locate suppliers of what he considers to be the finest in silk reproductions. Normally he imports the foliage and leaves, manufacturing the final product himself with American employees.

The realism of his end product, the beauty of his bouquets and

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trees, have served Elliott well. He supplies all silk accessories for such major furniture retailers as Englander's, Gorman's and Art Van.

He provides the same service for Winckelman's and he recently installed more than 250 trees in 36 National Bank of Detroit lobbies.

The durability of Elliott's product results in cost effectiveness for the customer and this, he feels, is the primary reason for the success of his business.

The normal life of a silk creation is anywhere from three to 10 years, depending upon care. Maintenance consists solely of an occasional light dusting.

The cost of an average floral arrangement begins at \$75. Three-

foot trees begin at \$150. Spread that cost over the life of an arrangement and it amounts to a very small initial investment on the part of the customer, Elliott said.

SILK REPRODUCTIONS of nature have been crafted for nearly 200 years, originally made as ornaments for women's clothing and millinery. When that fad gave way to changing fashion trends nearly a century ago, artisans looked to new markets for their product.

They hit upon home decor. But it has not been until this past decade that silk accessories in home furnishing caught on with a passion among interior decorators in the United States.

Elliott believes this is because the quality of the product has improved significantly the past 10 years. He defies anyone to tell him his silk foliage is not quality perfect.

"I'll match my chrysanthemums to live ones any day and then have you tell me which looks better. And I don't mean right now. I mean ALL the time."

Most days Elliott can be found wandering amidst his warehouse of silk wonders — flaming Hawaiian protea, fantasy orchids of muted gray, sun-colored roses, and much more — deciding the perfect combination for his latest arrangement, and Elliott one-of-a-kind.

Aios, the warehouse on Morriam Road in Livonia is open only to interior decorators and other professionals.

New day dawns for lunch wagon

It's nearly 100 years later and hot dogs still top the menu at the Owl Night Lunch Wagon in Greenfield Village. When the wagon operated in Detroit in the 1890s, Henry Ford could be found munching one there while on break from the Edison Illuminating Company.

Originally the popular horse-drawn eatery parked nightly from 6 p.m. until daybreak at Michigan Avenue and Griswold. Later it was moved to the Port Street side of City Hall where it continued to thrive until 1926. The Owl and other wagons

like it served the night-shift factory workers and newspaper reporters who had no place to eat after 6 p.m. when city restaurants closed.

The idea of a mobile restaurant, such as these lunch wagons and the diners that followed, is a uniquely American phenomenon. In 1927 Henry Ford acquired the Owl Night Lunch for Greenfield Village to preserve that aspect of his own and America's past. The wagon was refurbished and parked in the village where it served as the sole refreshment stand for visitors through the rest of the decade.

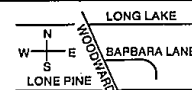
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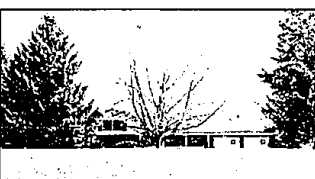
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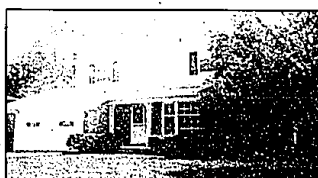
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