

Floral designer to offer bouquet of ideas at benefit

BY MARTY FIGLEY
SPECIAL WRITER

No fooling! On April 1, award-winning floral and landscape designer J. Barry Ferguson will delight and entertain at the Meadow Brook Theatre with his presentation of flower arranging.

This special show is in conjunction with The Artful Garden, a benefit for ROPARD, a subcommittee of the Beaumont Foundation. A continental breakfast will be served at 9:30 a.m., followed by Ferguson's demonstration at 10:30 a.m.

As Ferguson demonstrates his craft, he promises to share botanical lore and a tidbit or two about some of his famous clients and his personal adventures. There will be a drawing for the arrangements he creates during the presentation.

"Flowers are vitally important, rather like the quote from the Song of Solomon, 'Flowers appear on the earth,'" he said.

"They are not stock food, nor traded for money, but are there to be enjoyed. Naturally growing things are wonderful, constantly renewing as the seasons do, so you can never be bored with them."

Admission to this special event is \$20 and includes entrance to The Artful Garden at the Shotwell Pavilion. Advance reservations are required. Early registration is recommended, as seating is limited. Send a check made payable to ROPARD, with a self-addressed, stamped envelope, to The Artful Garden, 1381 Cedar Bend Drive, Bloomfield Hills 48302, or call 855-9071.

Background

Born in New Zealand, Ferguson came to the United States in 1969 and worked as a designer and horticulturist in the East before establishing his own business in 1973.

This multi-talented man is interested in the history of plants and gardens, flower and plant hunters, botanical illustrations, theater, arts, music and wandering out-of-doors, wherever he is.

His other activities include landscaping, garden design, lecturing, leading tours and working in his gardens that surround his home in Oyster Bay, N.Y. He serves as horticultural adviser to the W. Alton Burpee Co.

Ferguson has planned and installed parties for Malcolm Forbes, Steven Spielberg, Geoffrey Beene and many other notable people. For the past 20 years, he has been responsible for the floral decorations at the East Side House Benefit Winter Antiques Show in New York City.

Fantastic flowers

His huge, dramatic arrangements, sometimes 15 feet tall, incorporate objects such as watering cans, beehives and abandoned wasp nests along with exotic blooms. His creations for galas are often recognized by his use of candle cups, small bowls designed to fit into the sockets of candelabra that hold florist's foam, into which tiny bouquets are arranged and combined with candles.

At the present time he is working on a tropical orchid dinner at the New York Botanical Garden, the first time this greenhouse has been used in this manner. He said he will remove some of the huge tropical plants, and follow the color scheme that the present blooms dictate.

Then there will be the Art Show at the Armory, and a gala for the New York Zoological Society at the Bronx Zoo. Scheduled in between this hectic schedule is a vacation to Nassau and the Bahamas for a week.

Special day

April 1 promises to be a special day at Meadow Brook Theatre. For this occasion, long-stemmed tulips from France and other spring flowers will be used, perhaps with an unusual natural object incorporated into a piece.

Emberant, passionate about flowers, and fun describe this artist, who creates simple bouquets, as well as large floral fantasies. He has access to a full array of flowers from world-wide markets, but prefers to use those flowers that are in season, often gathering materials from his own garden and along the roadside.

Ferguson prefers to follow the seasons and use flowers in their prime for that particular time of year. Variety in his garden and in his arrangements, and the beauty and architecture of foliage please him.

Creativity is encouraged. He wants people to believe they can arrange flowers as he does. Vegetables, herbs, roadside plants, nuts, berries and branches are all candidates for arrangements.

The container isn't as important as the flowers, but can enhance the beauty of the whole. Flowers are the focus. If you can have just one flower, it should be enjoyed for its own beauty.

Ferguson has no favorite flower, but has chosen the purple primrose (Primula auricula), an alpine flower, for his signature plant. This primrose was a trademark of an early weavers guild in England in the 16th century and were the first florists.

His primrose apron, his book and other products of his choosing will be available for purchase.

Book look

Ferguson will autograph his beautiful and inspiring book, "Living With Flowers" co-authored with Tom Cowan (Rizzoli International, \$40), in which he shares his love of plants and what is special about them through each season.

Curator at BBAA gala

"An Evening with Laura Trippi," a benefit for the building and renovation project of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, will take place 7 p.m. Friday, April 2, at the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham.

Trippi, curator of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, will be in town to jury the Michigan Fine Arts Competition, taking place at the BBAA April 10 through May 8.

Tickets are \$200 (benefactor), \$125 (patron) and \$75 (friend), and may be bought at the BBAA, 1616 S. Cranbrook Road in Birmingham. For more information, call the BBAA at 644-0868 between 9:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday.

This gala event will give everyone a chance to meet Trippi at cocktails.



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