

Looking At Containers With An Open Mind

In July of 2002 I enrolled in a pottery class at a local community center, never realizing that my life was about to change dramatically. As an aspiring rose arranger I had been frustrated time after time by my inability to find containers that I liked *and* could afford. (Of course that wasn't the only problem that I had with arranging, but that is another subject. Let's just say it was a while before I started to "get it".) I just never could develop that knack for making plastic film canisters look like anything other than what they were. Invariably it seemed whenever I found a container that was "perfect" it was priced at \$80 or \$100 or even more. So I had the bright idea that I could make my own. I know many of you are laughing at me by this point, especially those who may have taken pottery with the same idea. I had probably spent close to \$1000 by the time I made something that I could actually use! However I realized very quickly that I loved doing it. Inevitably, the pieces started accumulating and I began selling a few here and there.

I want my pieces to be an asset to the arranger, but particularly the new arranger. I often tell new arrangers that all you have to do is put some stems in the container and you have an arrangement. We know there is a little more to it than that. I try to make some designs that "help" the newer arranger by suggesting flower placement so that they really do just have to add plant material. I also try to make pieces that lend themselves to use in different designs such as traditional *and* modern, which also makes them a better value. I encourage people to look for pieces that are versatile. I have found that placing one or two openings in only one side of a cylindrical or square container makes it appropriate for modern as well as traditional arrangements as the side with the opening can be turned to either be hidden or accessible. If the height is sufficient this same container may also be practical for Oriental style arrangements in a tall container. When I began making my arched containers I made them in varying sizes, primarily for use in synergistic style arrangements. However I have seen many people use only one of them for beautiful oriental free-style and modern designs. Containers that are very different from one another but have the same glaze may be combined for dramatic synergistic designs.

I also encourage people not to get locked into color. We all know that black, gray and brown containers, preferably with matte finishes, are "safest". Many blues and greens are also very versatile and can be successfully used by even novice arrangers. Although white containers are notoriously difficult to work with, cream or oatmeal colors are lovely choices. I have a chartreuse glaze that I thought would never work for containers but is absolutely gorgeous when used with red or mauve roses, especially if used in combination with touches of chartreuse plant material. I also use many gloss glazes that I believe work very well.

Making floral arrangements is by its very nature a creative process. Although we all find it helpful to have guidelines I encourage people not to get too caught up in them and not to think of them as rules. When you are considering buying a container look for one that "speaks" to you. Buy pieces that are versatile and don't be afraid to buy one just because it isn't in a matte black finish. If you are a new arranger, talk to the person that made it or get a more experienced arranger's opinion. Although you may be looking at the piece for

one type arrangement, they might be able to suggest other designs in which it would work.

I love it when people tell me they won a class with an arrangement they created with one of my containers. I love being a part of that person's excitement. I also appreciate all of the feedback I get from people. One of my favorite things to do is to spend time with arranger friends who will say something like, "I really like this design, but if you _____ it would work even better". It is incredible how much I have learned this way. I love the continually changing process of designing and creating the pieces as well as meeting and talking with the people that buy them.