



NEW BALANCE The asymmetrical arrangements are as much about the blooms and branches as they are about the empty spaces

Flower empowerment comes to those who practise the ancient art of ikebana, writes **Jackie May**

Peace is in a vase

In a Victorian-style house next to Newlands cricket stadium in Cape Town a small group of women sits quietly at tables in front of vases, branches, blooms and cutting tools. There's more greenery than flowers, most of which has been foraged, not bought. Vases vary in shape and size; many are old ceramic bowls and platters. It's a weekday morning, and the teacher, Cathy Clayton, guides the class in the techniques of ikebana, a Japanese flower arranging style.

"This is an antidote to our fast, noisy lives which are focused on instant gratification," says student Bea Sobiol. Practitioners of ikebana spend years, even decades perfecting arrangements. Like a martial art, you'll only improve the more you do it. It's usually practised in a silent and meditative state as a sign of respect to what the Japanese believe is the sacred relationship between man and nature. Ikebana, recognised as a traditional

Japanese art form, has been practiced for more than 600 years. According to the Ikebana International website, "It developed from the Buddhist ritual of offering flowers to the spirits of the dead. By the middle of the 15th century... ikebana achieved the status of an art form independent of its religious origins, though it continued to retain strong

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symbolic and philosophical overtones."

Clayton encourages her class to think of how things grow naturally. "Take out the extraneous," she says. This is in line with the school's philosophy of not being merely dec-

orative. It's about taking a life form and recreating patterns to show off nature's beauty in a limited space. The asymmetrical arrangements are as much about the flowers and branches as they are about the empty spaces.

Student Cynthia Fan, a florist, is practising a landscape style of arranging. She has a shallow bowl and is placing branches and twigs into a floral frog to recreate a very delicate illusion of a landscape. There is more empty space than plant life in her bowl.

Clayton makes it clear that there's no one right way. "Everyone has her or his own idea of beauty," she says.

Sobiol, who's been practising for eight years says, "Ikebana tests your patience. I've been so frustrated but when you get it right, it gives you so much pleasure."

● To find out about classes e-mail Cathy Clayton on clayton2@mweb.co.za. Follow [_Cynthiafan](#) on Instagram.

Wabi-sabi, kemosabe, not wasabi

By **YOLISA MKELE**

● In the world of traditional Japanese aesthetics there exists wabi-sabi. For those hoping to impress their pretentious friends, it is a world view centred on the acceptance of transience and imperfection. Sexy, right?

Derived from Buddhist teachings about impermanence, suffering and the absence or emptiness of self-nature, it favours a design aesthetic that's in love with asymmetry, roughness, austerity, simplicity, and the kind of thing that reminds you of an old monk in the woods.

Author Richard Powell says "Wabi-sabi nurtures all that's authentic by acknowledging



CRACKPOT? You decide ...

three simple realities: nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect."

Naturally this makes it a favourite of design faddists with a taste for exotic ideas that are hard to pronounce and lend themselves to vague quasi-philosophical explanations (I'm looking at you hygge).

As with many visual representations of traditional Japanese art, it's incredibly beautiful but rather formal. One gets the impression that if you were to wabi-sabi your house one would only be able to entertain a confessional of monks. That won't stop it from being a hot topic at upcoming design events so brush up on your catchphrases and don't confuse it with the green stuff that accompanies your sushi.

Gems in the Durban rough

By **SIPHILISELWE MAKHANYA**

● Durban Bench Narratives, a group exhibition of contemporary jewellery design work, opened at the Tinsel Gallery in Risidale, Johannesburg, last Saturday.

Among the designers on show, Glenn Adendorff uses found objects from popular culture in his work. Songezo Baleni's woven works draw from traditional grass weaving techniques. Chantel Benson uses the organic gifts of the sea to create symbols of its beauty



A FINE YARN Jewellery lends itself well to stories, says gallerist Geraldine Fenn

and fragility. Christy-Anne Scholtz is intrigued by the ways in which memory imbues ornamental tokens with meaning. Chris de Beer's work explores the personally political, while Marlene de Beer combines semi-precious stones, porcelain and found matter to explore female subjectivity.



In Nomfundo Dlamini's work you'll recognise an interpretation of Zulu traditional beadwork techniques, re-imagining its simple geometric shapes in three-dimensional forms. Michelle Erlank playfully reworks personal artefacts to mine life's paradoxes.

Nick Rose experiments with the Japanese metalworking technique mokume-gane to laminate a mix of metals, creating layered patterns. Nicky Savage's creations match the wearer's tastes – whether understated, bold, or somewhere in-between. And the figurative imagery of sentiment, memory and childhood inspire Samantha Vincent.

"I think any kind of design is empty without a narrative element to give it substance, and jewellery lends itself particularly well to stories because it's so personal and gets worn on the body," says gallerist and designer Geraldine Fenn. "The stories add a warmth to the pieces that you just don't get with mass-produced, anonymous jewellery."

● The exhibition runs until September 8 at 11 Cecilia Avenue, Risidale, Johannesburg