

# New Floristry Design Skills and Techniques and Sustainable Industry Practice



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ISS Institute/TAFE Fellowship

Fellowship funded by Skills Victoria,  
Department of Innovation,  
Industry and Regional Development,  
Victorian Government



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# Executive Summary

The Australian Floristry Industry is facing a number of important challenges at present. The most obvious is the ongoing lack of water resources, plus the increasing transportation and fuel costs for growers of cut flowers. The most significant issue for floral designers, as employers, is a lack of design skills in employees that would allow the designer and retailer to create smarter designs, using fewer materials and utilising non-traditional horticultural materials.

Straub's Fellowship took him to Germany and the Netherlands to develop a comprehensive understanding as to why these two countries are so innovative and successful on many levels within the industry. While European designers and growers do not have the water issues that face the industry in Australia, they are nevertheless faced with very high production costs and increasing competition from all over Europe from aggressive large firms with substantial budgets.

These factors have forced the European industry to develop new design ideas that require a high level of skills. These skills are not readily available to the large retail competition, and use more unusual floral products that are more cost effective to produce. The design ideas and techniques discovered at two seminars in Germany were a total contrast to the design ideas seen in Australia. The creative vigour experienced within the German industry is not so obvious in Australia. This German creativity is motivated by a real need, yet in contrast the industry in Australia is slow to embrace new design ideas. Straub believes that this Fellowship experience will be of great assistance in changing attitudes and demonstrating that positive outcomes can be achieved in the Australian industry.

The Floral Industry in Europe is well established and has a vast number of potential clients, which is quite different to the Australian experience. Consumer attitude towards floral decoration in Australia is changing due to decreasing land holdings in the suburbs, increasing numbers of people living in high rise high density housing, greater affluence and higher lifestyle expectations.

Straub believes that the experience in Europe addressed many questions facing the Australian industry. The study tour fostered new skills that may assist the improvement and sustainability of both the Floral Design and the Cut Flower Industries. The new skills, ideas and insights gained in Europe is already being passed on to industry through classes delivered through the TAFE institute where Straub is employed and more widely through trade magazines and newspaper articles. Furthermore, large scale floral demonstrations are being planned, together with meetings with various flower growing and marketing organisations.

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# Acknowledgments

Colin Straub would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who gave generously of their time and their expertise to assist, advise and guide him throughout the Fellowship program.

## **Awarding Body - International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)**

**We know that Australia's economic future is reliant upon high level skills and knowledge, underpinned by design and innovation.**

The International Specialised Skills Institute Inc (ISS Institute) is an independent, national organisation, which has a record of nearly twenty years of working with Australian industry and commerce to gain best-in-the-world skills and experience in traditional and leading-edge technology, design, innovation and management. The Institute has worked extensively with Government and non-Government organisations, firms, industry bodies, professional associations and education and training institutions.

The Patron in Chief is Sir James Gobbo AC, CVO. The ISS Institute Board of Management is Chaired by Noel Waite AO. The Board comprises Franco Fiorentini, John Iacovangelo, Lady Primrose Potter AC and David Wittner.

Through its CEO, Carolynne Bourne AM, the ISS Institute identifies and researches skill deficiencies and then meets the deficiency needs through its *Overseas Skill Acquisition Plan (Fellowship Program)*, its education and training activities, professional development events and consultancy services.

Under the Overseas Skill Acquisition Plan (Fellowship Program) Australians travel overseas or international experts travel to Australia. Participants then pass on what they have learnt through reports, education and training activities such as workshops, conferences, lectures, forums, seminars and events, therein ensuring that for each Fellowship undertaken many benefit.

As an outcome of its work, ISS Institute has gained a deep understanding of the nature and scope of a number of issues. Four clearly defined economic forces have emerged out of our nearly twenty years of research. The drivers have arisen out of research that has been induced rather than deduced and innovative, practical solutions created - it is about thinking and working differently.

### **A Global Perspective. 'Skills Deficiencies' + 'Skills Shortages'**

Skill deficiencies address future needs. Skill shortages replicate the past and are focused on immediate needs.

Skill deficiency is where a demand for labour has not been recognised and where accredited courses are not available through Australian higher education institutions. This demand is met where skills and knowledge are acquired on-the-job, gleaned from published material, or from working and/or study overseas. This is the focus of the work of ISS Institute.

There may be individuals or firms that have these capabilities. However, individuals in the main do not share their capabilities, but rather keep the IP to themselves; and over time they retire and pass way. Firms likewise come and go. If Australia is to create, build and sustain Industries, knowledge/skills/understandings must be accessible trans-generationally through nationally accredited courses and not be reliant on individuals.

Our international competitors have these capabilities as well as the education and training infrastructure to underpin them.

Addressing skill shortages, however, is merely delivering more of what we already know and can do to meet current market demands. Australia needs to address the **dual** challenge – skill deficiencies and skill shortages.

# Acknowledgments

Identifying and closing skills deficiencies is vital to long-term economic prospects in order to sustain sectors that are at risk of disappearing, not being developed or leaving our shores to be taken up by our competitors. The only prudent option is to achieve a high skill, high value-added economy in order to build a significant future in the local and international marketplace.

## **The Trades**

The ISS Institute views the trades as the backbone of our economy. Yet, they are often unseen and, in the main, have no direct voice as to issues which are in their domain of expertise. The trades are equal, but different to professions.

The ISS Institute has the way forward through its 'Master Artisan Framework for Excellence. A New Model for Skilling the Trades', December 2004. The Federal Government, DEEWR commissioned ISS Institute to write an Australian Master Artisan School, Feasibility Plan.

In 2006, ISS Institute Inc. set up a new ISS advisory body, the **Trades Advisory Council**. Members are Ivan Deveson AO; Martin Ferguson AM, MP, Federal Labor Member for Batman; Geoff Masters, CEO, Australian Council of Educational Research; Simon McKeon, Executive Chairman, Macquarie Bank, Melbourne Office; Richard Pratt, Chairman, Visy Industries and Julius Roe, National President Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union.

## **Think and Work in an Holistic Approach along the Supply Chain - Collaboration and Communication**

Our experience has shown that most perceive that lack of skills is the principal factor related to quality and productivity. We believe that attitudes are often the constraint to turning ideas into product and a successful business; the ability to think laterally, to work and communicate across disciplines and industry sectors, to be able to take risks and think outside the familiar, to share – to turn competitors into partners.

Australia needs to change to thinking and working holistically along the entire Supply Chain; to collaborate and communicate across industries and occupations - designers with master artisans, trades men and women, Government agencies, manufacturers, engineers, farmers, retailers, suppliers to name a few in the Chain.

## **'Design' has to be seen as more than 'Art' discipline – it is a fundamental economic and business tool for the 21st Century**

Design is crucial to the economic future of our nation. Australia needs to understand and learn the value of design, the benefits of good design and for it to become part of everyday language, decision making and choice.

Design is as important to the child exploring the possibilities of the world, as it is to the architect developing new concepts, and as it is to the electrician placing power points or the furniture designer working with a cabinet-maker and manufacturer. As such, design is vested in every member of our community and touches every aspect of our lives.

Our holistic approach takes us to working across occupations and industry sectors and building bridges along the way. The result has been highly effective in the creation of new business, the development of existing business and the return of lost skills and knowledge to our workforce, thus creating jobs - whereby individuals gain; industry and business gain; the Australian community gains economically, educationally and culturally.

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# Acknowledgments

## Fellowship Sponsor

The Victorian Government, Skills Victoria is responsible for the administration and coordination of programs for the provision of training and further education, adult community education and employment services in Victoria and is a valued sponsor of the ISS Institute.

Colin Straub would like to thank them for providing funding support for this Fellowship.

## Fellowship Supporters

### In Australia

#### **Impulse Flowers International**

John Tesselaar, Director

#### **Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT)**

Brian McDonald, CEO

#### **Sunraysia Institute of TAFE**

Win Scott, CEO

#### **Floral Art Judges Association of Victoria**

Glenda Neilson, President

### In Germany

#### **Gregor Lersch, Master Florist**

#### **German Florist Federation Examination Board**

Wally Klett, President, Master Florist

## Peak Organisations and Key Representatives Impacted by the Fellowship

#### **Service Skills Australia (National Industry Skills Council)**

Jeanette Allen, CEO

#### **Service Skills Victoria (State Training Board), WRAPS (Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services) Industry Specialist**

Louise McIntyre, Project Manager for WRAPS

#### **Victoria University**

Cheryl Bartolo, Curriculum Maintenance Manager

The following organisations are associated with the development and implementation of industry training in Australia:

#### **Floristry Training Providers National Network**

Jan Williams. This organisation is a national network of training providers.

#### **Australian Floral Artists Association**

Mary Sweeney, Secretary. This organisation is a national body representing floral artists in Australia.

#### **Floral Design Publications**

Tricia Legge, Editor. This organisation is a publisher of a high quality magazine on floristry, distributed Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States of America and Asia.

# Acknowledgments

**Australian Flower Industry Magazine**

Amanda McAuliffe, Editor

**Magazine for the Australian Cut Flower and Foliage industry**

This magazine highlights issues such as business development, product development, education and training for the industry.

**Impulse Flowers International**

John Tesselaar, Director. Impulse Flowers is a major wholesaler of cut flowers in Australia and internationally. John Tesselaar is a member of a well known and respected flower growing family, has a wealth of knowledge and is very influential in the Cut Flower Industry.

# About the Fellow

**Name:** Colin Straub

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## **Qualifications**

- Certificate III Floristry, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, 1998
- Certificate IV Floristry, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, 1999
- Certificate IV Workplace Training & Assessment, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, 2006
- Senior Educator, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, 2006
- Floristry Judging National qualification, 2004

## **Memberships**

- Floral Art Judges Association of Victoria
- Floral Art Society of Victoria
- Flower Design Australia
- Floristry Education Providers National Network

Over a career of more than thirty years Colin Straub has been involved in the Horticulture/Floristry Industry. Straub has been actively involved in industry development of training programs at a national level and has a broad range of qualifications and experience.

Throughout his career Straub has continued to build partnerships and strategic alliances within industry, education and training institutes, professional associations and community groups in Australia and internationally.

In addition, Straub creates floral designs for a number of high profile businesses and conducts seminars and floral demonstrations nationally and internationally.

Currently Straub is a senior educator at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT). Along with his colleague Jan Williams, Straub is responsible for initiating, developing and implementing all aspects of floristry training and education within NMIT. This also involves large scale display pieces at various horticultural events such as the Melbourne Flower and Garden Show.

Away from this, Straub's interests include travel, garden design and visual arts – ceramics and painting.

# The Fellowship Program

The purpose of the Fellowship was to undertake an overseas study program in Germany and the Netherlands, to gain new design skills and techniques and investigate the use of new and traditional horticultural materials in non-traditional, sustainable ways.

## **Aim of the Fellowship**

The aim of this Fellowship was to study and develop skills developed by German and Dutch master florists to enhance the skill level and creativity of the Floral Industry in Australia.

## **Specific Areas of Study and Development**

- Studied a variety of new design skills in detail and their potential application to the Australian Floral Industry.
- Investigated new products, (eg floral sundries and new cut flower hybrids) and how these products are being applied in the European industry.
- Investigated disposal of non-organic materials used in the industry.
- Investigated current floristry trends, as the industry is fashion driven.
- Identified horticultural material that is sustainable, given Australia's diminishing water resources.

## **Ongoing Areas for Development**

- Develop ongoing education programs through ISS Institute, NMIT, Floristry Industry organisations and other educational institutions.
- Develop strategies to nurture inspiration in floral design and creative direction.
- Promote innovation in the industry to the flower buying public.
- Investigate and collate information on emerging trends and development of new or improved floral material.
- Develop relationships with flower growers to educate and influence this area of the Floral Industry to the requirements of florists.

# The Skills/Knowledge Gaps

The Floristry Industry is fashion driven with influences and style directions closely linked with the homeware, fashion clothing and lifestyle industries. Fashion trends are directly influenced by European styles, and the Floral Industry is most strongly influenced by German and Dutch designers. By investigating the European master florists Straub aimed to return to Australia equipped with the knowledge, skills and ideas to enable him to advise, instruct, promote and improve the overall acceptance of new design styles and alternative material usage in this country.

There is an enthusiastic and interested core group of people and organisations in Australia who need direction, information and skills to ensure that the Floral Industry remains viable and is an attractive and exciting career option for those interested.

To obtain the necessary information and skills the following activities were undertaken during the course of the Fellowship:

- New design skills and techniques were obtained from two German master florists by participating in master classes and undertaking individual tuition. These sessions offered intensive design and skill development opportunities.
- Visits to various designers' and retailers' premises, major flower markets and production specialists in Amsterdam.
- Explored what is involved in the development of new or improved hybrid cut flower materials. Also explored production difficulties in relation to cut flower production costs, water requirements of any new hybrid blooms developed, and their suitability to the Australian market.
- Discussions with other master class participants and floral designers on a broad range of specialist areas of interest specific to the Floral Industry.
- Investigated how European floral designers generally maintain the level of creativity whilst maintaining successful commercial operations.
- Investigated a variety of horticultural and associated outlets in various areas of Germany and the Netherlands.

## **Current Education and Training Available in Australia**

WRF04 Floristry Training Package:

Qualifications for:

WRF20104 Certificate II in Floristry

WRF30104 Certificate III in Floristry

WRF40104 Certificate IV in Floristry

The Floristry Training Package was reviewed in late 2007. The review allowed training providers to examine the scope of the package and with the possibility of developing new modules, especially in Certificate III and IV.

Straub believes that the design based modules require constant review to fulfil perceived industry requirements in the future. In the past, a master florist qualification has been discussed, but because of a lack of current information debate has been suspended. ISS Institute has developed and is pursuing the implementation of its model for an 'Australian Master Artisan School' and related course framework to meet the master artisan pathway.

The Fellowship tour provided Straub with an opportunity to gain a comprehensive understanding of these qualifications. Meeting with Wally Klett, a master florist and President of the German Florist Federation Examination Board, produced valuable information

## The Skills/Knowledge Gaps

regarding current processes and strategies. All the information gathered allowed the training package review panel to examine the potential transferability of the German qualification content to develop a new post Certificate IV level qualification in Australia.

Discussions with various masters in Germany and the Netherlands also provided a valuable source of information for the Australian Floristry Trainers Network. Straub is a member of this group and therefore was able to discuss information gained to help establish a position on package development in the review.

Cheryl Bartolo, Curriculum Maintenance Manager (CMM) at Victoria University, indicated that the National Industry Skills Council was interested in having Straub address a national conference on training development issues. Straub's experiences are also potentially of value to a broad range of other related horticultural industries, beauty therapy and hairdressing, with regard to development of training packages. The profile of the Floristry and Horticultural Industries benefited greatly from this exposure at a national level.

# The Australian Context

As already established, the Floristry Industry worldwide is fashion driven with influences and style directives closely linked with the homeware, clothing and lifestyle industries.

Fashion trends are directly influenced, in this country, by European styles and in the Floristry Industry major influences come from German and Dutch floral designers.

German and Dutch designers have high standards of skills, as a master florist qualification is offered and encouraged. This training standard ensures that these countries continue to produce master artisans who constantly develop and enhance a vibrant industry.

The Floral Industry in these countries is very strong. The majority of the population has little or no garden space, therefore the sales figures of cut flowers and floristry design items are high. This is also directly linked to high levels of skills in the industry.

Housing trends in Australia are changing; land sizes are becoming smaller and apartment or cluster style housing models are increasing in popularity. The need for floral decoration in these circumstances is increasing but the design skills required to produce innovative, quality floral designs are not widely available. There is also some resistance from poorly skilled business owners to embrace change.

Australia's geographic isolation often contributes to European design influences being slow to arrive in this country, if indeed they arrive at all.

In the past, because of dominant influences from Great Britain, the industry in Australia developed in a very conservative manner and has largely remained that way. Large numbers of floristry stores continued to produce designs made popular in the 1950s and 1960s. The English style was obvious in all aspects of designs. As a large percentage of the Australian population were of English decent, or were born in England, Scotland or Ireland, the designers and retailers were obliged to cater for the design ideals of the majority. As the immigration policies of the Australian Government changed, so too did the floral requirements, to meet the needs of an emerging multicultural society.

Changes also began as international travel became less expensive and travellers returning to this country demanded a range of product that was similar to that seen in other countries, with Europe seen as the most progressive in all aspects of design, including floristry.

Most florists in Australia do not have the resources to gain the skills necessary to identify the potential of non-traditional horticultural materials suitable for use in the industry, nor do they possess the design skills required to utilise these materials. Floral designers in the past have been dependant largely on books of varying quality, accredited training (which was often very traditional), and rare visits by European master floral designers, to further develop floristry skills. These factors severely restricted and continue to stifle any significant design development. This is further linked to environmental changes experienced in the last few years.

Australia has a major water shortage crisis that has become extremely significant over recent times and the Floral Industry needs to reconsider traditional plant and cut flower usage. Many plants grown for the Cut Flower Industry in the past have already become victims of a reduced water supply, such as most of the lower cost summer flowering annual crops. Growers who have grown these crops, often for generations, have been slow to recognise crops more suitable for production in the drought affected environment.

Furthermore, there appears to have been little guidance from floral designers regarding alternative sustainable future crops that could be incorporated into contemporary design styles. Greater design skills will enable local floral designers to use European design styles, readily identifying and utilising drought tolerant Australian materials, or materials not

# The Australian Context

traditionally used by the Floral Industry. This will help industry sustainability and generate interest from the flower buying public. Clients often appear bored by repetitive design styles and overuse of standard horticultural elements such as water, and labour intensive and chemically dependent cut flowers such as roses, lilliums and carnation species.

Reduced availability of water is a major concern to all Australians, but especially individuals involved in various crop production activities. There are also other environmental concerns facing the Floral Design Industry. These concerns relate to sundry items used in the construction of floral articles and the wrapping and packaging of the finished designs. Polystyrene, now banned, was used as a base medium for funeral tributes in the past and caused major waste disposal problems. Many packaging materials used in the industry are high grade plastic, and like polystyrene, difficult to dispose of. Public pressure has seen a major reduction of such packaging and a blanket ban in many countries on all plastic based products, including synthetic ribbons.

The continued use of traditional floral foam as a base medium in the majority of available floral designs has become an issue as the foam material does not break down easily and is an environmental concern. Waste disposal in European countries attracts higher charges for the householder for this type of waste material and subsequently sales of floristry designs using this foam have declined rapidly. New design styles that do not require foam as a base medium, but take modified Ikebana techniques together with European styling, have been developed. This design style, together with new hand tie bouquet techniques, is becoming widely accepted. Advanced training in these innovative new methods is, at the time of writing, not available in Australia.

New techniques and styles have led to exciting product development, but in this country few practitioners are aware of the design application. New and improved design skills and techniques linked with the potential usage of non-traditional horticultural materials will inspire creativity and eventually boost the Australian Floral Industry.

As a teacher of floristry design, demonstrator and floristry judge, Straub believes he is in a pivotal position to develop training that is lacking in this country for both students entering the industry and present practitioners.

A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis provides a useful avenue for summarising the current situation and the implications of addressing, or not addressing, the need for ongoing skills associated with new floristry design techniques and sustainable industry practices.

## SWOT of the Australian Floral Design Industry

### Strengths

- This country has a vast range of unique, fresh floral materials, not seen in many countries except Australia. Most notable is the Proteaceae family, which includes many highly decorative and colourful blooms which last for long periods.
- There are large areas of land available for cut flower production close to the major distribution centres and high density potential consumers.
- Australia has a growing population consisting of a diverse cross section of people from many backgrounds, countries and beliefs, requiring a large variety of floral designs.

# The Australian Context

## Weaknesses

- Generally we have a lower level of contemporary design skills.
- Employers and business owners are not required to be qualified, but can employ apprentices.
- There are many cut flower growers that do not have the foresight or willingness to consider growing and marketing alternative horticultural materials that would enhance contemporary floral design styles.

## Opportunities

- To increase market share by offering better, more contemporary, cost effective design styles to a broader community.
- Develop a market that is more receptive to newer ideas and materials, especially Australian native varieties which are often ignored by many designers.
- Develop a design style that is unique to this country and gain respect and popularity similar to the Australian Food and Restaurant Industry.
- Further to the above item, develop an Australian aesthetic using native varieties together with introduced species to create new designs that reflect our uniqueness through shape, colour and texture into the export market.

## Threats

- Major chain stores aggressively market and promote non-floral products for occasions that traditionally had a primary floral focus. A good example of this is clothing, alcohol and sweets for Valentine's Day gifts.
- Decreased water availability for production of cut flower varieties.
- Reduced emphasis on design skills and product knowledge and a greater focus on retail skills being promoted by shortsighted industry members during training package reviews.

# International Context

The Fellowship Program encompassed a workshop, seminar, visits to large scale import/export flower growing operations and meetings with high profile individuals involved in the Horticulture and Floral Design Industry. Activities were planned prior to departure, however, upon arrival in Germany and the Netherlands, many contacts provided Straub with information that led to other significant opportunities.

During the workshop and seminar there was the opportunity to have meetings with highly skilled designers from 17 countries including the United States, Japan, Russia and France. These meetings were an unexpected source of knowledge, inspiration and new techniques. The designers from Japan, for example, created and discussed designs of immense beauty and sensitivity using few materials.

The masters from France demonstrated aspects of French taste and material usage, leaving all participants with a new understanding of colour technique.

All participants of the workshop and seminar presented numerous aspects of contemporary floral design as they see it from their experiences in the many countries represented, and the potential application throughout the world. The discussions with fellow participants during the seminar hosted by Gregor Lersch in Germany, provided an opportunity to establish a vast network of very valuable industry contacts for the future.

## Wally Klett

Straub's first workshop experience in Germany involved a week-long session with master florist, Wally Klett.

The experience was intense and very rewarding as tuition was private and one-on-one. This intense learning environment was initially a little daunting, but Straub felt extremely fortunate to have a teacher of Klett's calibre. Straub was also fortunate to stay with Klett in an apartment attached to her studio and home. Floristry discussions over meal breaks and beyond were common and Straub was able to gain a great deal of information and exchange many ideas during the week spent together.

Straub was first introduced to Wally Klett in 2000 and was impressed by her general floristry knowledge and design ideas for future development. Klett is very well known throughout Europe, the United States and Asia, as a very talented, innovative floral designer specialising in bridal floral design.

Klett demonstrates her skills and conducts workshops throughout the world for eight to ten months each year. Straub was extremely fortunate in that he was able to have a one-on-one experience with this master designer.

Wally Klett also heads the international examination panel for the German master florist qualification.

As an educator in floral design in Australia, Straub was particularly interested in Klett's views on education and the potential application of the German model for Australian training organisations. Whilst the masters qualification offered in Germany is not applicable to Australia, some elements of training could be applied to Australian requirements in relation to design development.

In Germany and most of Europe, the old style of apprenticeships are seen as very valuable as the employer must be fully qualified to be able to establish a floristry business. An apprentice is trained by the employer and staff as well as registered training colleges.

Klett's family has been involved in floristry and horticultural nursery production for three generations in the Dettingen-Erms region of southern Germany.

## International Context



*Triangular form using the crushed wire technique devised by Wally Klett. This shows the versatility of the technique, enabling the designer to create a vast range of forms. The style uses small quantities of a large range of fresh floral materials woven through the structure and is carried by a small length of fresh bamboo.*



*Wally Klett with an elongated cascade bouquet created on a coloured, decorative wire frame. Stems of all the blooms are dipped in melted wax to seal them and ensure freshness, then they are attached to the construction with contrasting coloured wire. The design incorporates a large range of blooms, seed heads, deconstructed succulent species, sheer organza ribbon and glass beads.*



*A delicate, elongated cascade of flowers designed to complement the current trends in fashion using an open wire form to create a very delicate, feminine bouquet.*

## International Context

Many of Klett's innovations in bridal floristry have been trialled in the family business. She also contributes articles to trade journals and has produced a number of very informative books on innovations in bridal floristry.

The Kletts' nursery operation produces cut flowers for the floristry arm of the business. The produce is grown organically and although water supplies are very adequate, the costs for the operation are increasing dramatically. Klett's elderly father is very active in the day-to-day operation of the business and adopted water conservation practices many years ago. He strives to plant crops that are far less reliant on water and Wally Klett has incorporated these materials in her design innovations.

Straub found this aspect of the operation very interesting and very applicable to Australian conditions. Klett uses a minimal amount of more traditional materials, but incorporates a range of succulents, blooms, vines and foliage which are not usually associated with wedding floristry.

In many Australian floristry businesses, wedding floristry is associated with bridal bouquets which feature large volumes of expensive blooms such as orchid species, hybrid tea roses and other species depending on the fashion of the day.

Discussions with German designers and observations of design constructions identified processes and practices that were distinctly different to those in Australia.

Straub studied many designs during the workshop that incorporated large volumes of coloured decorative wire in various forms. These new designs relied heavily on this coloured wire, in various gauges to create base forms to attach blooms. These forms retained a very delicate appearance, forming a living sculpture, a new concept in floral wedding design. The design ideas and concepts were entirely different to that of the Australian Bridal Floral Industry. Local practitioners may well be shocked, but careful development of knowledge transfer activities would elicit a design potential even more suitable for Australia's changing requirements.

### **Gregor Lersch**

The second seminar, also in Germany, was conducted by master florist, Gregor Lersch. Lersch, possibly one of the most influential floral designers in the world at this time, conducts master classes at his studio and attracts designers from around the world who are eager to learn. The Lersch family has been involved in the Floral Industry from this location for nearly three hundred years.

The Lersch design style is very expressive and the scale is generally larger than the work observed whilst with Klett. Lersch does not specialise in any one type of floral design. Lersch has been awarded the most prestigious floristry awards over many years in the industry, has his own publishing company writing numerous books on floral design, and demonstrates his techniques throughout the world. Together with his team, Lersch has produced amazing floral decorations all over Europe, including commissions from major hotel groups, the opening of the new German parliament building and for other numerous high profile clients.

The seminar focused on new directions in hand tied bouquet techniques, which included parallel stem placements instead of the usual crossed stem technique. The parallel technique allows the designer to create a very elegant, elongated, almost Ikebana style bouquet. It is then supported by a wire foot which is constructed from heavy gauge wire and attached to the bouquet, and then displayed in a shallow bowl.

## International Context



*Heavy gauge black wire was used to construct this abstract caterpillar style form. Glass tubes provide a strong contrast of form whilst providing a water source for the floral materials. This design is a very adaptable alternative to more traditional style arrangements, to meet corporate, banquet or function floristry requirements.*

Another technique was a very open construction of fine branches of birch sp or similar, in a conical or spherical form, to support many varieties of delicate field blooms that are not often used because of their weak stems. The blooms are supported by the twig form and attached by fine decorative wire. This design takes its inspiration from country styled bouquets of decades ago, but is given a contemporary feel by Lersch.

## International Context



*A tall hand tied bouquet style, designed to be self supporting. Non traditional bouquet styles and influences of age old ikebana techniques are obvious in this design.*

Innovations in contemporary design included the use of glass tubes (test tubes) to contain blooms. These tubes are placed high in the design to increase the height of the piece and also to supply a water source. Lersch also shredded linear leaf forms such as Phormium tenax and Typha latifolium to alter the form from a rigid upright leaf blade to a cascading mass of fine wispy line. This dramatic change of form can be incorporated into designs in any base medium, hand tied or wired floral forms.

The seminar covered a large number of design innovations. Some were quite minor but valuable to improve floral design skills for the skilled floral designer.

The group consisted of twenty-seven designers from thirteen countries and as Lersch speaks seven languages he was able to translate ideas and thoughts from all participants. The designers and floral educators, all with varied areas of special interest in design, possessed very high levels of skill and Straub was very interested to see their interpretation of the techniques and ideas expressed throughout the week. Some participants from India and Russia sought new skills for their work with major corporate clients, whilst others who worked from studios in various countries needed to develop the skills to retain 'hard won' reputations within the Floral Industry.

Straub found that this group of highly skilled designers also shared similar industry concerns, irrespective of their country of origin. Issues raised included concerns with better and smarter design, and issues of finance, environment and aesthetics.

The major issue raised was primarily the concern with better and smarter design. Smarter design is best described as the analysis of a design form and asking how can this be improved. It also entails being more cost effective and using a range of horticultural material that has not been considered in the past as being suitable for floral design. Lersch explained that better design is a style of fresh floral constructions that are more in tune with current lifestyle trends and attitudes. Better design is not basing design decisions on previous floral fashions, but devising and promoting a distinctive look that appeals (with some consumer education) to a broad range of flower buyers.

The participants also raised concerns regarding the sustainability of the Cut Flower Industry due to increased fuel costs, transport costs and competition from non-traditional retailers.

Straub was exposed to a broad range of new and exciting skills and the potential they offered in Australia. Some floral designers consider Lersch's work as being quite rustic in appearance. He will not include any commercially produced items such as beads, coloured wire or decorations in his work. He insists on his creations being purely floral. He prefers structures created from natural materials, or black, heavy gauge wire teamed with clear glass in simple forms, creating very sophisticated designs. These designs rely on the beauty and simplicity of the selected florals to be successful. He also creates wonderful textural contrasts of both containers and fresh horticultural materials, using ceramic forms and delicate and fragile meadow blooms.

Lersch spent two days discussing and demonstrating his sources of inspiration and explained his many influences, which included modern architecture and natural objects. The German master florist explained how many iconic buildings created by design legends of the past century such as Gaudi, Lloyd-Wright and lesser known designers from Asia have been a major source of inspiration in the development of floral design ideas. Architects have often based their designs on natural forms and have abstracted and enhanced these quite simple forms to create structures that are instantly recognised throughout the world. Lersch stated that some of the construction methods and ideas used by architects – such as a steel frame structure on the outside of a building – becomes a design feature rather than being hidden or disguised. This has inspired Lersch's work and he has translated these concepts into floral forms.

## International Context

As already mentioned, the Lersch family has been involved in the field of horticulture, flower growing and floristry for over three centuries, but the designer confesses to be constantly fascinated by new plant discoveries, unusual blooms, seed capsules and irregularities of nature.

His fascination often leads to the creation of many floral designs which begin with a series of basic sketches. Some of the sketches are ultimately discarded, but the balance of the drawings form the basis of an exciting design development process. The design ideas are fine tuned. Lersch explained the technical aspects involved and how an idea can be both creative and commercially successful.

Lersch considers the strengths of an idea he has sketched and asks questions of himself such as: Has it been developed by another designer? Does it meet the limitations imposed using fragile fresh materials? Is the design aesthetically pleasing? Can a market be found or developed for this design style?

Construction techniques are selected on the basis of the form Lersch wishes to create, or they are developed by experimentation if there are no suitable techniques in use. Lersch will often use materials available to the building trades, such as heavy gauge construction wire or commercial glues, and modify them to suit his purposes.

In commercial floral design, the completed design should be transportable, possibly prefabricated for large installations, stable and time effective to install if the design is to be successful, both visually and financially. In the development of any design idea in any creative field the finished product is often quite different from what was initially devised. The solving of design defects and aesthetic fine tuning usually result in a greatly improved product. Lersch also feels that as fresh horticultural materials have many natural variations, the results are often quite different and unexpected.

As mentioned, Lersch has his own publishing company, so promotion of his design ideas worldwide is very possible, but this process is quite slow. A more effective method of promotion is through his retail outlets or by public demonstrations, exhibitions and seminars.

During the seminar Lersch spent considerable time demonstrating ideas for the presentation of the finished design. Most floral designs are delivered by a courier service or collected from a retail florist outlet and as the designs are fragile they require protection from some form of packaging that will enhance the floral materials. Lersch uses minimal amounts of simple brown paper wrapping and a paper based ribbon embossed with his store logo. It all looked very elegant and appropriate, and more importantly, it is all biodegradable.

In Australia, some floristry outlets are using high grade plastic wrapping and plastic based ribbons to wrap their product for delivery, or sending toxic coloured plastic lined cardboard boxes to clients. These products, whilst legal, will not break down but will rather end up as landfill and damage our environment. There is also a backlash from some community members which will eventually harm retail floral designers if this practice is continued.

Lersch has always encouraged designers to find and use environmentally friendly products, and indeed had no alternative, as plastic based, non-compostible wrapping materials are banned in most parts of Europe. Gregor Lersch promotes natural materials including large dried leaves, or unbleached papers and chemical colourants in all wrapping presentations by his firm.

As Lersch uses minimal amounts of low cost wrapping materials, he is able to save his business considerable amounts of money. In doing this he complies with Government regulations and has not sacrificed the public image of his business and brand name.

The period spent with Gregor Lersch and the group was exhausting and often stretched into the night, but it was incredibly satisfying on many levels.

## Marc Boers

In the Netherlands Straub was able to meet a wholesale supplier of cut materials named Marc Boers, whose company, which is based at the Aalsmeer flower market in Amsterdam, supplies high end hotel groups, European royalty and prominent designers with magnificent cut flowers. The meeting was made possible through a contact in the Victorian Flower Growers Organisation who supplies Boers with Australian native blooms.

This meeting was a great surprise; Boers sent a very large black Mercedes to collect Straub and deliver him to his office and warehouse, deep within the market complex. Boers shared his industry knowledge freely.

Straub was able to see first hand the operation of the market, which is housed in the biggest building in the world, and Boers explained his company's aims and why it is so successful.

Straub was amazed at the variety of fresh cut flowers and potted plants available from all regions of the world. The sheer volume of top quality flowers that passed through the market on that day was beyond comprehension. Over three million bunches of roses were sold amongst great quantities of the most beautiful blooms Straub had ever seen.

The market complex and operation is owned by the growers and wholesalers and includes direct links to all major European airports, quarantine and customs facilities and a green waste and paper product recycling centre. All waste produced by the operation is processed as mulch or compost and sold and all paper based waste is pulped and made ready for recycling.

Boers took Straub to visit one of his plant breeders and a supplier of high quality *Hydrangea macrophylla* blooms. The property is covered in high tech glasshouses which produce blooms to meet the requirements of clients in many countries.

The Japanese market requires small blooms of a particular blue and white hydrangea, while the American market favours large, brightly coloured blooms in hot pink or electric blue. The market requirements of other countries is important to commercial flower growers interested in the lucrative export market.

Many Japanese people enjoy various forms of Ikebana and the hydrangea bloom is traditionally one of the most favoured ingredients of this art form, but the blooms must be small and the colour subtle. American floral design does not have the same constraints as the rigid Ikebana style of Japan and the designs are quite flamboyant, so large, brightly coloured blooms are sought after.

The hybridist breeds of plants require less water and nutrition, but still produce the required blooms. Many varieties in the experimental first stages of cross breeding will not be seen on the market floor for some time, if at all, but the Dutch breeder is not deterred.

Australia is isolated geographically and fashion trends can be slow to emerge but for a flower grower, whose product may take a number of years to mature and whose costs are high, knowledge of overseas markets and tastes cannot be ignored.

Floral relay networks have been operating in Australia for many years. More recently, internet technology has allowed consumers to have fresh flowers delivered to all parts of the world. For the floral designer, executing or sending the flower order via the relay company, or the internet, knowledge of international fashion or preferences is highly valuable.

The advantage of meeting and working with talented designers and suppliers from a wide range of businesses in the two countries visited is still being felt today. Straub is constantly using the skills learned and ideas gathered in his work as a teacher and designer and it was an extraordinary experience that Straub could never place a value on.

# Knowledge Transfer

According to Straub, the most successful method of knowledge transfer in any artistic, creative field is achieved by hands-on workshops. The number of participants should be purposely small to enable the session leader, in this case the floral designer, to demonstrate a range of techniques required to create a new design or style and explain in depth the technical difficulties, design advantages and potential applications to the commercial Floral Industry. The participant should create their design interpretation with the active involvement and guidance of the master designer. The student should be able to question the master, solve design difficulties and technical problems in a supportive and non-threatening environment. This type of activity is a very personal, nurturing and, therefore, highly successful means of passing knowledge to another eager to learn. A critique is usually conducted at the conclusion of the session. Although this can be highly critical of all work presented, students gain a great deal of knowledge from the discussion of all members' work.

To be most beneficial, a workshop would target experienced floral designers who possess high levels of floristry skills. These participants would, potentially, then have the ability to introduce the new skills and techniques to other staff at their particular business. The workshops would also target educators at registered training organisations, who would in turn incorporate new skills into industry training programs.

A workshop is usually most successful when run over a one or two day time-frame. The sessions delivered should be very intensive and would be most effective in a shorter time frame, but could be developed into a series of exciting learning events over a longer period of time if necessary. The venue for such events needs to have adequate workspace, good natural light, and because of the nature of fresh materials and water used, surfaces that are easy to clean are required. Carpeted floors and porous surfaces on any work surface should be avoided.

The most practical time to present a workshop of this type is when plant and fresh floral material are plentiful and less expensive. Event planners should also avoid peak business periods for the industry, such as Mother's Day, Valentine's Day and religious events.

In keeping with ISS Institute's 'multiplier effect', the Institute will work with Straub to draw together workshop participants from across the VET system, so his findings can be passed onto others.

The report will be distributed to stakeholders, particularly the relevant Industry Skills Councils, so Straub's findings can be incorporated into national training packages.

# Knowledge Transfer



*Designs created for an exhibition of work for the Floral Art Society of Victoria, after Straub's return. The work, on quite a large scale, used construction techniques and design philosophy from Wally Klett and Gregor Lersch but was designed to fit the Australian industry needs, taste and unique lifestyle.*

# Recommendations

The following are recommendations to the Government, industry, the business sector, professional associations, education and training providers, our community, and the ISS Institute. The following information was identified whilst meeting with various floral designers, flower growers, hybridists and other interested parties. The observations compounded the already identified skill deficiencies and shortcomings in the many facets of the Australian Floral Industry.

Education/training of both growers and floral designers and a greater public awareness of newer design styles, appear to be the major factors in the potential future improvement within the Floristry and Floraculture Industries.

## Government

- Through initiatives such as the funding of this Fellowship, the Victorian Government is providing access to the world-best-practice and taking current skill, knowledge and understandings to a higher level. The Victorian Government is encouraged to further its support of this Fellowship program.
- Both State and Federal Governments share responsibilities for education in this country and funding for education programs aimed at various facets of the industry should be more accessible.
- Funding is needed for programs to educate the flower growing industry in areas of green waste recycling and better practice in regards to water usage in commercial flower production.
- Financial incentives and information programs are needed to encourage flower growers to diversify to floral crops which are less reliant on large volumes of water but retain expected levels of production and income. The Government would be required to work closely with the various industry advisory bodies to identify potential crops and their possible sustainability.
- To provide effective assistance, the Government is encouraged to consult widely along the Supply Chain on an ongoing basis with all sectors of the Floristry and Floraculture Industries.
- The industry is fashion driven and requirements for training and production of flowers can change rapidly. Assistance offered or changes to Government policy, especially in education, requires constant consultation. This will allow the industry to remain relevant and ensure training or financial assistance can be put in place quickly. This in turn will keep the Floral Industry sustainable and abreast of overseas trend forecasts, allowing it to meet local demand and export markets.
- The Government needs to acknowledge and financially support ISS Institute's Master Artisan initiative, so those in floristry have a career pathway for lifelong learning, similar to our counterparts in Europe.

## Industry

The Floral Industry has a range of participants that include flower and foliage growers, hybridists, floral designers/retailers, and the wholesale industry including floral sundries and businesses selling fresh horticultural material. Providers of training in horticulture and floral design are also very important contributors. There is no industry body representing the interests of the various industry components in this country.

The industry, relatively small in numbers of personnel, generates large amounts of income locally and internationally, but without a united voice is ineffective in lobbying Governments and raising public awareness.

# Recommendations

Industry in both Germany and the Netherlands has very influential organisations to lobby and promote all aspects of the industry. Australia has a much smaller Floral Industry in both participation and turnover, and will continue to be under-rated unless a combined body can be created. Government funding and proactive involvement by key industry players, is required to enable a successful representative body to develop.

## Business

Australian businesses need the expertise of professionals with qualifications similar to those who graduate from the masters programs in Germany – see last item under ‘Government’. These programs are not available in this country. Qualified Australian designers holding the Certificate IV qualification, the highest level available, are usually under appreciated and certainly under paid.

Floral designers possess high level skills, have a wealth of knowledge and are well placed to assist the Floristry and Floraculture Industries in this country to grow and develop new markets, but industry support is often not forthcoming. Floral design businesses and flower growers in general would benefit from better design skills that reflect the Australian lifestyle and taste. Business owners and some floral designers continue to produce floral designs first made popular in the 1950s and 1960s. These business owners and old school designers complain of falling revenue, but fail to support their designers in new design concepts. Business support of talented floral designers is increasing, but often fails to realise the potential rewards of new design trends and skills.

Greater public awareness and respect for creative designers and the industry in general is both possible and essential in ensuring future financial prosperity.

Australian horticultural businesses are in a very strong position to educate and influence the flower and plant buying public in relation to the ongoing water crisis and green waste management.

Increased product knowledge and potential applications in all areas of floristry, floraculture and general horticulture, with a major focus on horticultural materials suitable to the dry Australian environment, is essential for business growth at all levels.

Business owners, large or small, need to provide avenues to feed the public interest, such as store window displays, exhibitions and workshops displaying new trends in floral design relevant to the Australian lifestyle. This means designs featuring green material that do not rely on vast amounts of water and lesser known floral materials.

Businesses in Australia should develop stronger links with training organisations, flower relay networks (such as Interflora) and greater communication with flower growers worldwide to promote, educate and sponsor interested parties from all areas of floral/horticulture business activities.

## Professional Associations

The following organisations are currently the major controlling bodies that influence and advise various aspects of the Floristry and Flower Growing Industry. They have been established to work with all other interested parties, such as Government, business and training providers to promote, educate and raise the public awareness and improve perceptions of the Floristry and Floraculture Industry in Australia.

- Flowers Victoria
- Flower Association Of Queensland

# Recommendations

- Australian Floral Art Association
- Australian Horticultural Judges Association
- NSW Agriculture
- Northern Territory Horticultural Association
- Flower Industry Association of Australia

## Education and Training

Based on the German floristry education model, training in Australia can benefit greatly. TAFE institutes and, to a lesser extent, private training providers, deliver all accredited floristry and floraculture training in this country.

The National Training Package is reviewed usually every five years. The review is undertaken in consultation with industry representatives, floral designers and training providers, and allows all parties concerned to examine the scope and content of the package. It is possible to develop new modules and re-assess existing competencies in the Certificate III and IV design based modules; to fulfil perceived industry needs in the future. The German education model has provided a wide range of potential improvements, additions and modifications to the Australian Floristry Training Package.

The Australian Floristry Trainers Network is working to establish a position on the many aspects relating to floral design training to submit to the national body conducting the package review.

The more immediate impact on training is the potential for new techniques, trends and ideas to be delivered to trainers, florists and the next generation of floral designers through programs of demonstration, workshops and the floristry and floraculture media.

## Community

In Australia, the image of the Floristry Industry needs to be improved and public perception altered. Other industries have created high profile celebrities that have radically changed the perception of that particular industry. The European master florist is highly regarded and this is possible to replicate in Australia. Master florists with a very strong creative talent could be marketed positively, which in turn would benefit the whole industry. However, this would require the Master Artisan pathway developed by ISS Institute.

The Australian Government needs to give serious consideration to providing funding to assist with marketing and education, especially as the water crisis appears to be ongoing. Australians have a strong history of gardening and the outdoors and Government involvement in promotion of a sustainable environment will rapidly alter the public perception of the importance of the industry. Many floristry and floraculture businesses or floristry interest groups are small scale or depend on voluntary efforts, and therefore lack sufficient funds to market and advertise themselves and promote the industry.

## How ISS Institute can be Involved

The International Specialised Skills Institute has the potential to utilise its many contacts to attract sponsorship and work with training providers and interest groups to assist the promotion of the Floristry and Floraculture Industry. Floral designers and the flower buying public have, in the past, been strong supporters of hands-on floral, horticultural workshops and demonstrations with content to improve design skills or enhance lifestyle. Seminars aimed at florists training with accredited providers, nationally, could provide a platform

# Recommendations

to educate and encourage trainees and also promote the goals of the ISS Institute. No major equipment or facilities are required to provide this promotional activity and it could be achieved with minimal outlay by the ISS Institute.

It is crucial the ISS Institute maintains its commitment to its 'Master Artisan framework' and that the Australian and State Governments support financially as they do to universities for their post-graduate programs to build and sustain high level skills and knowledge.

## Further Skill Gaps

The skill gaps in relation to sustainability in the industry will continue as the flower growing industry appears quite conservative and shows a reluctance to affect change. The ongoing shortage of water and the effective disposal of green waste material is creating new problems and will require constant input to meet changing conditions.

Floral design skills, and their application, are also changing constantly. The industry is fashion driven and closely aligned with the fashion and homewares industries and, therefore require constant monitoring to remain current.

Australia has a vast range of unique floral material and, at this point, further design skills need to be modified, or developed to take maximum advantage of their unique character. Many floral designers appear to be afraid to use these more unusual, but sustainable materials, and so further education and design skill development is required.

# Since the Fellowship was Awarded

Along with sharing his new learnings with Floristry Industry businesses along the Value Chain and through his role as a senior educator at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT), the Fellowship has opened opportunities to further enhance Straub's position as a leader in his field.

Since Straub's Fellowship was awarded, he has presented a series of workshops in Philadelphia to some of the United States' highest profile floral designers.

He has been writing a regular series of articles for a New Zealand based floristry magazine that has world wide distribution.

Straub has been invited to present a series of workshops and demonstrations (*Contemporary trends in floral design – Australian minimalism*) at a major world floristry conference to be held in Sydney in August 2009 – *Flora Australis* ([www.nswfloralartassociation.org.au](http://www.nswfloralartassociation.org.au)). This conference will be attended by floral designers from 28 countries. Five Australian designers have been invited to present programs headlined by master florist Gregor Lersch from Germany.

Straub has been invited to judge the exhibits at this major competition and he is the only Australian selected on a panel of international floristry judges.

Says Straub, "*The Fellowship has opened many doors. Prior to the Fellowship award I'd had a high industry profile, but the award has allowed me to gain an international reputation.*"

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## **Bibliography**

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