In its fourth year, American Flowers Week celebrates U.S.-grown (and foraged) botanicals with five fresh, inspiring and handcrafted couture looks.
The flora of the Big Island of Hawaii provided Alison Grace Higgins, owner of Grace Flowers Hawaii in Honoka’a, and manager, Nicole Cordier, a complex palette with which to dream up their remarkable his-and-her botanical garments.

With the island’s plant life as artistic muse, the Grace Flowers Hawaii team wanted their designs to celebrate both familiar and uncommon flowers and plants. They used gradient color banding to “weave” an intricate tapestry incorporating locally harvested Anthuriums, Epidendrum orchids, hanging fuzzy ferns, ti leaves, Cymbidium orchids, statice, snapdragons, Dianthus, Anthuriums, Epidendrum orchids, hugging fuzzy Heliconias, bottletree, fiddle palm, blue jade vine, crown flower, Kalanchoe, foxtail Agave, Cordyline, ginger, Bougainvillea, bromelials, pincushions and croton leaves.

These floral artists were clearly influenced by the botanical landscape of the Hawaiian Islands and Polynesian culture. Yet the majestic garments they devised are not costumes. Instead, the dramatic cape modeled by Na’iwi Young, owner of Olowalu Entertainments, a local firm known for Polynesian entertainment, and a hi-low-style skirt worn by Kayla Mahulia Kawai, a Luau dancer, stage actress and artist, reflect Hawaii’s horticultural diversity found in the natural landscape, cultivated gardens and small agricultural plots that supply flowers to the studio.

“We started with the color scheme, which we wanted to be bold,” Alison explains. She chose to avoid pastel hues, which the shop often works with for destination wedding clients.

Both Nicole’s playful skirt design and the masculine cloak that Alison created draw from an audacious floral spectrum that ranges from spiced orange, flamboyant purple, hot fuchsia and vivid canary yellow to glossy studio. Gracia Malendres, Grace Makeup Artistry

Hair/Makeup: Gracia Malendres, Grace Makeup Artistry

Photography: Megan Spelman, Bikini Birdie Photography

bikinibirdie.com

graceflowershawaii.com

CREDITS

Location: Kohala Coast, Big Island, Hawaii

Models: Na’iwi Young and Kayla Mahulia Kawai

Hair/Makeup: Gracia Malendres, Grace Makeup Artistry

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Floral Palette: Tropical and temperate flowers, foliage and botanicals grown on Hawaii’s Big Island, including lantern (Abutilon), Spanish moss, Cymbidium orchids, hanging fuzzy ferns, ti leaves, Cymbidium orchids, statice, snapdragons, Dianthus, Anthuriums, Epidendrum orchids, hugging fuzzy Heliconias, bottletree, fiddle palm, blue jade vine, crown flower, Kalanchoe, foxtail Agave, Cordyline, ginger, Bougainvillea, bromelials, pincushions and croton leaves.

Designers: Alison Grace Higgins (owner) and Nicole Cordier (manager), Grace Flowers Hawaii (Honoka’a, Hawaii), graceflowershawaii.com, @graceflowershawaii

Florals supplied by: J&D Farms (Kamuela), Pacific Floral Exchange (Hilo), Hawaii Isle Flowers (Volcano), The Orchid People (Kamuela), ESP Nurseries (Kamuela) and High Country Farms (Pa’auilo Mauka).

Models: Na’iwi Young and Kayla Mahulia Kawai

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Location: Kohala Coast, Big Island, Hawaii

Na’iwi Young, owner of Olowalu Entertainments, a local firm known for Polynesian entertainment, and a hi-low-style skirt worn by Kayla Mahulia Kawai, a Luau dancer, stage actress and artist, reflect Hawaii’s horticultural diversity found in the natural landscape, cultivated gardens and small agricultural plots that supply flowers to the studio.

“We started with the color scheme, which we wanted to be bold,” Alison explains. She chose to avoid pastel hues, which the shop often works with for destination wedding clients.

Both Nicole’s playful skirt design and the masculine cloak that Alison created draw from an audacious floral spectrum that ranges from spiced orange, flamboyant purple, hot fuchsia and vivid canary yellow to glossy green and burgundy foliage choices.

Together, rows of floral pieces form rhythmic bands, the sheer variety of which is staggering, considering that each piece took about two full days to produce. The designers kept the garments rather simple, attaching them to the models’ bodies with drawstrings, and used minimal botanical elements were individually glued in overlapping rows onto the garments’ cloth foundations. Alison estimates that every employee made one strand,” Alison says.

The elaborate Lei Po’o (also known as head lei) lends a regal quality to the finished designs, framing the models’ striking faces and completing the floral narrative. When it came to location, Alison, Nicole and photographer Megan Spelman, of Bikini Birdie, were drawn to a hard-to-reach cliff above the Kohala Coast.

“I wanted something that showed Hawaii but not just palm trees and white beaches,” Alison says. “This is a special place where you can actually walk from the cliffs down to the river bed and the ocean.”

There was just enough breeze to catch Kayla’s hair and lift the cloak from Na’iwi Young’s shoulders, lending a regal quality to Megan’s photography. The dramatic fashion shoot expresses the sense of local pride that motivates Alison and her staff at Grace Flowers Hawaii. Flower farms and nurseries on the Big Island supported the idea of an all-Hawaii-grown fashion shoot to commemorate American Flowers Week.

“We wanted to source as close to home as we could, so everything was grown locally on the Big Island,” Alison says. “We put our hearts and souls into these designs.”

There is a strong influence of wearing flowers here in Hawaii, although rarely on this scale,” Nicole acknowledges. The florals supplied by: J&D Farms (Kamuela), Pacific Floral Exchange (Hilo), Hawaii Isle Flowers (Volcano), The Orchid People (Kamuela), ESP Nurseries (Kamuela) and High Country Farms (Pa’auilo Mauka).

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