



Maine

Petal Patterns

The prolific trial gardens and flower fields of **Johnny's Selected Seeds** in Albion, Maine, a location for an American Flowers Week look in 2019, have inspired a new guest designer for 2020.

"Having the opportunity to host a floral fashion designer has been a true highlight for the JSS team," says **Hillary Alger**, product manager for herbs and flowers. "To pause from the busy work of trials and catalog production to participate in something so out of the ordinary stretches our brains in really fun ways."

Designer **Michelle Rech**, of **Electric Flora** in Portland, Maine, is a studio florist known for her avant-garde style and custom art pieces. She eagerly partnered with Johnny's Selected Seeds, where she felt like a "kid in a candy store," thanks to the abundance of late-summer blooms being evaluated for future seasons' seed catalogs. "I was literally in a daze of happiness for months after creating this dress," she says.

"Michelle gets full credit for designing and constructing the dress," Hillary continues. "Our team, including **Joy Longfellow** and photographer **Kristen Earley**, get to play as art directors, dreaming backdrops and props. We wanted to complement Michelle's vision of playful, bright and modern while using the research farm as the setting."

About

"I do a lot of wedding work for a local flower shop, so when I'm doing my own projects I'm hungry to create," Michelle says. "Whether that comes out in styled shoots with collaborations or one-on-one designing for a client, I think of every arrangement I make as a custom art piece. I don't see my pieces as just a bouquet of flowers. I think of them as an experience, so I've tried to elevate and re-imagine each design as a tiny sculpture. When I give flowers to a recipient, I'll take a beautiful studio photograph and put a music video to it. The flowers might die in several days, but the person can frame the photo they receive from me and hear the song, which allows my creation to live forever."

Place

Johnny's Selected Seeds' research farm is the heart of the company. It is there that Johnny's carries out its mission to find and develop the best seeds and tools for farmers and gardeners. The 40-acre farm is located in Albion, with nine smaller fields nearby, all about 25 miles from Augusta, the state capital. At first glance, Johnny's farm looks like a typical market farm, with a dozen or so hoop houses and greenhouses and orderly fields of vegetables, herbs and flowers. But a closer inspection reveals its true nature as a place of study and evaluation. Labels mark



the variety trials, staff members with clipboards make notes and groups of employees from the nonfarming parts of the company participate in guided “crop walks” and “field forums” across the seasons to learn about varieties and methods being trialed.

The Dress

Michelle began with a playful yellow cotton dress from Old Navy. “As soon as I saw the print, I knew I wanted to add floral embroidery to it. I envisioned a tapestry pattern made with flowers and petals.”

She coordinated with Hillary Alger and Joy Longfellow, the floral experts at Johnny’s Seeds, specifying an energetic palette of pinks, oranges and purples. “I specifically asked for very small flowers that dried really well because my whole theme was based on embroidery and tiny details,” she says. “Just holding these little elements in my hands was a different experience because they came straight out of the growing field rather than from a box at the wholesaler.”

A fan of **Françoise Weeks**, Hillary found a pair of strappy heels calling for floral adornment, which added playful whimsy to the overall styling. “I really like the contrast between the countryside kind of look and urban fashion,” Michelle says. Inspired by music, she designed the dress while listening to hip-hop, reggae and Childish Gambino tracks, as well as dream pop.

Ingredients: The dress features *Gomphrena* (mixed palette and purple); strawflowers (‘Sultane’ and Apricot/Peach mix) and *Craspedia* (‘Sun Ball’). The bouquet features *Celosia* (‘Cramer’s Rose’) and *Lisianthus* (‘Dublini Blue’). “Michelle’s personal aesthetic is very bright and vibrant, with lots of hot colors and clean lines,” Hillary says. “Based on her IG gallery, I gathered everything from our flower trials that fit this look. Also, because of the timing and construction, we needed to use blooms that would hold up out of water for a couple days.”

Mechanics: The small flowers were easy to attach with Oasis Floral Adhesive although the highly detailed work was time

consuming. Michelle estimates she used 15 tubes of glue and spent 12 hours creating the embroidery-style details. She worked inside a warehouse at Johnny’s that overlooked the trial gardens. “There was a nice breeze through the windows, and the team brought me all this delicious produce to take home, so I definitely felt nature around me.”

Floral Source: Johnny’s Selected Seeds, Flower trials

Creative Credits

Floral design: Michelle Rech, Electric Flora
electricflora.net, @electricflora

Model: Kristina Alofaituli

Hair: Kristina Alofaituli

Makeup: Michelle Rech

Photography: Kristen Earley, Johnny’s Selected Seeds

