

Styled and Storied

Photos by **Kathryn Cooper Weddings**

When she realized that 2020 was going to be a bust, Bay Area wedding designer Sally Sparks devised an antidote: "a collaborative styled photoshoot, with multiple uses."

A fantastical headpiece with a woodland vibe.

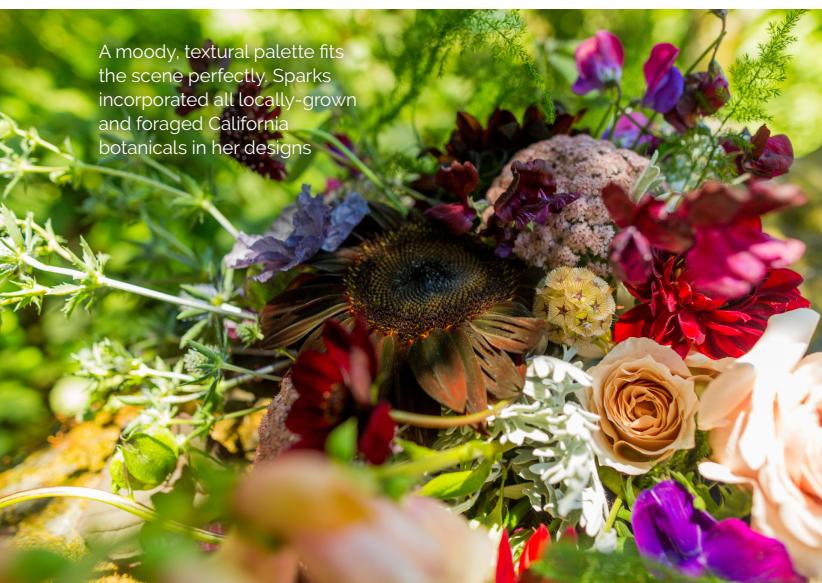
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By **Debra Prinzing, PFCI**



Designer and creative director Sally Sparks poses with the same headpiece.



A moody, textural palette fits the scene perfectly. Sparks incorporated all locally-grown and foraged California botanicals in her designs.

Two years ago, **Sally Sparks** moved her floral business from a tiny retail shop in San Francisco to a spacious studio in an historic Oakland neighborhood. The relocation was not only wise financially but it also gave Sparks newfound artistic freedom as she stepped away from the saturated floral marketplace in San Francisco. Another benefit: The move brought Sparks closer to flower farmers from whom she sources directly.

Taking a pause from a lifelong relationship with retail (Sparks' mother owned a retail shop, and the designer spent the early part of her career working for retail florists) allowed her to focus **Sally Sparks Flowers & Design** entirely on wedding and event clientele. The designer attracts couples whom she describes as "a little bit nerdy, interested in science and nature, with an appreciation for the natural world." Like Sparks, her couples "are people who don't want to necessarily have something they've seen before."

The Sally Sparks' brand encompasses sustainable foam-free mechanics and local farm sourcing, resonating with clients who "want something that is true to them as individuals rather than something straight from Pinterest," she says. "I also love using nonfloral elements—fruits, vegetables, feathers, plants. And I want to use materials intentionally and meaningfully, for both my clients and me."

Embracing Change

The COVID-19 pandemic and its theme of survival and resilience clearly altered the 2020 wedding landscape. Like many professional florists, Sparks has been juggling refunds, redesigns, rescheduled dates and more.

"I was heartbroken for all of my wedding clients for whom I wasn't going to be able to design," she says. "Without events, I didn't know what I was going to do, and, to be honest, I needed a way to stimulate business. I thought: 'I don't know what the future holds, and I might not be a wedding florist forever, but I want to express my own style in a way that isn't seen elsewhere. And be proud of it.'"

Sparks realized that a styled photoshoot was one cost-effective way to obtain new branding imagery and communicate her aesthetic. She originally envisioned a woodland scene at California's Redwood Forest, but due to national and state park closures, the plan shifted to a regional park with forested areas, located just outside Berkeley. Sparks partnered with **Katherine Cooper**, an adventure photographer known for hiking to mountaintops and cliffs with her clients. Then she created a mood board and reached out to dress shops, models and other vendors.

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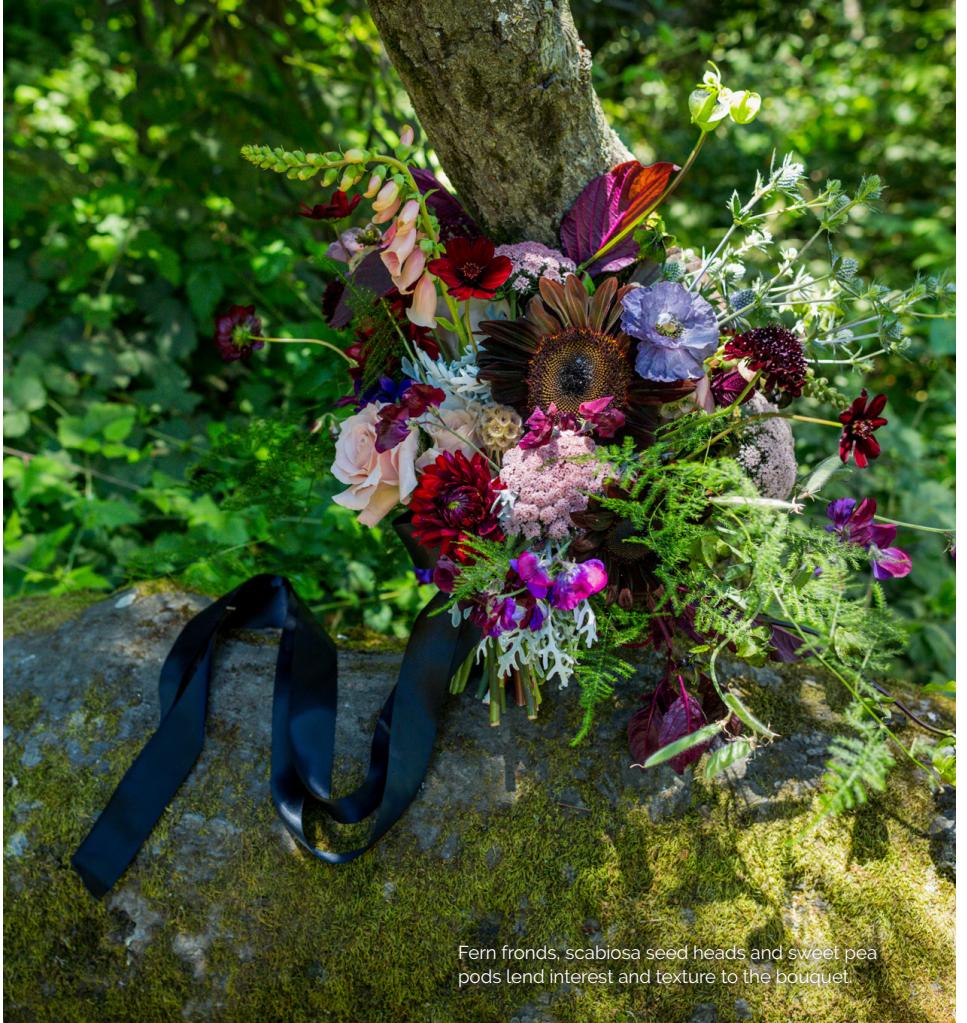


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The styled shoot weaves a mystical narrative, but it also shows prospective couples how Sparks can help them express their personalities through her designs.



Fern fronds, scabiosa seed heads and sweet pea pods lend interest and texture to the bouquet.

The wooded setting melded nicely with Sparks' fictional storyline for the photography. "I was interested in the idea of a sorceress enchanting her love," she explains. "I was thinking mystical, moody and romantic, with an autumn or winter vibe. Definitely not anything bright or summery because that's not the mood I'm in right now."

She shared the dramatic palette with flower farms that supply her studio, including **Boxcar Flower Farm** in Oakland and **Bluma Farm** in Berkeley. "Having a relationship with the individual farmer who raises each flower from seed to stem is important—and special," Sparks says. "My palette and materials are carefully designed, but the structure of my pieces is dictated by the materials themselves."

Sparks tapped two female models and one male model for the session, allowing her to rotate the bouquets, accessories and wearable flowers for multiple vignettes. She borrowed four differing dresses and varied the looks with two selections of personal flowers.

"One of the reasons I chose to use multiple floral pieces and models in one shoot was to have a variety of styles to choose from so that we can send different photos to specific blogs and magazines," Sparks says. "For instance, I knew that I wanted

to feature dried botanicals for one package and local flowers for another. Some publications ask for exclusive access to the images. So, by having multiple sets of images, I can guarantee that happens while still offering my work to many different outlets at the same time."

The wedding narrative she shared with *Florists' Review* features ferns, late-summer blooms like sunflowers, *Dahlia*, *Scabiosa*, Queen Anne's lace, foxglove, California-grown roses, plus dried pods and seed-heads.

Producing something new and fresh, in spite of having to self-fund most of the costs, was worth it, Sparks explains. "To be honest, mainly due to COVID concerns, I wanted to get as many looks as possible in the shortest amount of time with the fewest people involved. That meant that I needed to be the florist, the stylist, and the director (plus their respective assistants)—all at the same time. There was a lot of running around involved to make it happen, but we were conscious of physical distancing and limited the amount of people congregating together. And I think it worked out wonderfully."

The project yielded new marketing images for Sparks' social media and website, laying the groundwork for 2021 bookings. It also reminded Sparks how much she enjoys using dried

botanicals. "My next intention is to do more with dried flowers because I now have a huge inventory. I'm thinking about making dried pieces and selling them online through an Etsy store or a shop on my website." ■

DETAILS

Floral Design and Creative Concept:

Sally Sparks Flowers & Design,
sallysparks.online, @sallysparks

Photography: Katherine Cooper Weddings,
kathryncoperweddings

Models: Haley McCown, [@hales.breaks.loose](https://www.instagram.com/hales.breaks.loose) and Jazz, [@jbuchla](https://www.instagram.com/jbuchla)

Gowns: Garnet+Grace,
[@garnetandgracebridalboutique](http://garnetandgracebridalboutique)

Venue: Charles Tilden Nature Area,
[@tilden.nature.area](http://tilden.nature.area)

Flowers: Boxcar Flower Farm
boxcarflowerfarm and Bluma Farm
[@blumafarm](http://blumafarm)



Planning ahead for models to have a wardrobe change gave Sparks two different wedding styles for her portfolio.