



LEFT: Thousands of roses waited in buckets assigned to each individual float.
BELOW LEFT: Rows and rows of water vials were needed to hold the roses in place along the bed of each float.
BELOW: The Rainbird Float scaffolding stood over 40 feet high.



mandy and andy's excellent rose bowl adventure

Two Birmingham floral designers flower fantastic floats in Pasadena.

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I have never, in my 27 years, been surrounded by more than 20 million flowers like I was on January 1, 2008. Even growing up among the flowers of a family-owned florist and now having my own floral studio paled in comparison to this experience. I was not standing in a tulip field in Holland, nor was I among countless rows of roses in Ecuador. I had a front-row seat and a first-hand look at the 119th Rose Parade in frigid Pasadena, California, proudly watching bits and pieces of my handiwork roll down Orange Grove Boulevard.

As I sat in the stands anticipating Grand Marshal Emeril Lagasse's kick off of the parade with a "Bam," I found myself recollect-

ing the events that led us here. It all began in early October when Andy Hopper, AIFD, and I were going through our morning routine at Hothouse Design Studio in Birmingham, Alabama. We received a phone call acknowledging that we were hand-selected to be floral designers in the 2008 Rose Bowl Parade. With a few calls for hotel reservations and several clicks of the mouse for plane tickets, we were ready for our adventure.

The time for our west-coast excursion arrived and we found ourselves boarding a plane on Christmas Day to fly to Pasadena. The next morning we reported for duty at Fiesta Float Company where we received a tour of the facility. Hundreds of volunteers welcomed us as they worked diligently to apply thousands of natural materials to different aspects of the floats. It took only minutes to realize that Fiesta Float Company ran like a well-oiled machine. There was a strict timeline to follow and every single person dedicated the next six days to making the floats come alive.

At our floral design meeting, we were separated into teams and presented with our game plans. Andy and I were assigned to the "Tree Team," with our first responsibility to process all of the flowers used in the trees. This seemingly minute task took the first two days of our week. We processed thousands of fresh blooms including roses, orchids, birds of paradise, heliconia, anthuriums, honeycomb ginger and

many more. The flowers had to be cut, placed in water, counted, labeled, and separated for the appropriate floats.

During our third day of preparation, we were responsible for prepping all of our containers and strategically placing and securing all of the floral foam to the float's metal framework. All of the materials had to be adhered tightly to ensure that none would be damaged while the floats were in motion. Late Friday night, we found ourselves climbing the scaffolding that surrounded the floats and placing the first flowers into the trees, mostly working on a float sponsored by the Rainbird Corporation.

Orchids were used as the focal flower in most of the trees due to their longevity and natural movement. The body of the float was covered in several different flowers, but the rose, of course, was the most substantial in adding bulk color and mass to the float. We spent all day and night Saturday placing the rest of the blooms, all the while watching the hundreds of other volunteers who worked meticulously to cover every inch in natural material such as seeds, beans, barks, mosses, and herbs. The last thing to be done was to layer thousands of water vials containing beautiful

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roses on the bed of the float. All of the team members pitched in at this point to make sure that every float was complete by day-break to be ready for judging and at the parade lineup on time.

For floats participating in the parade, there are several rules and restrictions. Every float must follow the year's theme as announced by the President of the Tournament of Roses and every inch of the structure must be covered with



in the event



ABOVE: Animal expert and wildlife correspondent Jack Hanna waves to the crowd from the front of the Rainbird Float.

RIGHT: The completed Palazzo Float on the morning of judging

natural material—material that is or was living at one time. The tigers made for the Rainbird Corporation's float included orange strawflower for the bodies, stripes made of onion seed, mouths fashioned of lentil, teeth created of shredded coconut, and eye and ear detailing formed of wheat. Pinecones, seeds, fresh fruits, vegetables, pumpkins, seaweed paper and various species of leaves and grasses were also incorporated.

After our work was complete and we watched the floats roll down Orange Grove Boulevard, Andy and I realized just how much planning was involved in making just one float, not to mention all twelve of Fiesta's floats, come to fruition. The whole experience was labor-intensive and sleep depriving, but it was a journey that these two floral designers will never forget. After working through the night until daybreak arranging more than 20,000 blooms and placing the finishing touches on the Rainbird float, which showcased more than six life-size tigers and eight waterfalls, I found myself amazed at our accomplishment and hard work throughout the week.

The morning of the Parade the team found out from the President of Fiesta Float Company that the Rainbird Corporation float received the top honor—The Sweepstakes Trophy—the award presented to the most beautiful entry in the Rose Bowl Parade. Everyone, even guest float rider Jack Hanna, was on hand to celebrate with our team as we all felt a bit of pride that the Tournament of Roses bestowed on us such a wonderful honor.

You might be wondering if we'll make the trek next year for the 120th Rose Bowl Parade. We couldn't pass up the opportunity to travel more than 2,000 miles, drink more than 50 cups of hot chocolate each day and play with over twenty million flowers...could you? *

