

# IN FULL BLOOM

Designers are continuing the time-honored tradition of using floral jewels to convey hidden meanings.

BY BETH BERNSTEIN

While a bouquet of roses might be lovely to receive from an admirer, most jewelry enthusiasts tend to prefer their petals in precious metals and vibrant gems. Floral and foliage designs have represented many sentiments throughout history. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, people often used jewelry instead of words to articulate the romantic affections and intentions that couldn't be spoken freely during that period. Today, we can still “say it with flowers” as contemporary designers adopt the nuances and meanings of these motifs.

The predominant influence for this tradition originally came from the Turkish custom of communicating via flowers, which caught on throughout Western cultures. In 1819, Louise Cortambert, under the pseudonym Madame Charlotte de la Tour, penned what was reportedly the first dictionary of floral meanings, *Le Langage des Fleurs*. The book was translated into English in 1820. By combining the language of flowers with gemstones that carried similar symbolism, jewelers could provide a meaning for almost every bloom.

Alex Monroe Bee & Daisy ring in 18-karat yellow and white gold with peach sapphires and diamond accents.



The Art Nouveau period of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries featured naturalistic themes, often using different types of enamel and gemstones to realistically depict both the hues and the fragility of flowers. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, almost every legendary jeweler cultivated floral motifs in their collections, and many have revived them today. Luminaries from those decades include René Lalique, Tiffany & Co.'s Paulding Farnham, Chaumet, JAR, and Michelle della Valle.

The new guard of designers, as well as some established ones from the last few decades, tend toward a pared-down look that evokes the essential elements of the motifs they are representing. Yet many of them remain firmly planted in the same language of flowers that inspired the Victorians.

Here are some of the most prevalent blossoms with sentimental or optimistic meanings.

## PANSIES

The name stems from the French word *pensée* (thought) and translates to “think of me,” or think of the giver. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there would often be a rebus — a puzzle combining pictures and words to convey a message — showing a pansy with the words “à moi.” The pansy’s popularity in Victorian times sparked designer Sofia Kaman’s imagination.

“Our 18-karat matte yellow gold [Pansy ring] with navy blue enamel is intricately detailed, [which] renders it romantic and modern and epitomizes the vintage sentiment and our blend of femininity and bold design,” she says.

Paula Crevoshay, meanwhile, blends vibrant colors for her one-of-kind pansy creations. She ►





STYLE

From left: Paula Crevoshay multi-stone Persephone pansy brooch; Colette Flower shoulder-duster earrings in 18-karat rose gold with diamonds; Alex Monroe Large Daisy ring on model; Pippa Small Rose and Petals ring in 18-karat gold; Lydia Courteille Lily of the Valley earrings in titanium with tsavorites and pearls.

has found mother nature’s “infinite flowers to be a rich source of inspiration,” she says, noting that “Shakespeare, among many others, wrote and formed concepts through the language of flowers.”

#### LILIES OF THE VALLEY

This flower symbolizes the return of happiness. One designer who incorporates the lily of the valley into her work is Lydia Courteille, who refers to floral jewels as “a communion between workmanship and nature. Man carves and imitates the flowers that nature has given to us as a gift. It is also quite befitting to be drawn to a flower, particularly today, that has such an optimistic meaning.”

Kim Dunham, who creates bespoke signet rings based on customers’ life stories, recalls a lily-of-the-valley ring she made “for a client for whom the ring was very much about her motherhood. It is also the flower of May, the month in which she got engaged, and it commemorated a young family member she lost. When it all came together, it represented a much deeper meaning and a multitude of narrative concepts with a single symbol.”

The inside inscription on the ring read, “This moment is your life” — a quote from Persian astronomer and poet Omar Khayyam.

#### ROSES

Roses have long been associated with love. While the type of love varies with the rose color, all roses represent romantic love in some way, and their precious-metal versions are no exception.

“The sensuality of roses, with both the beauty of the flower and the sense of danger with their thorny vines, has inspired me for as long as I can remember,” says jeweler Karen Karch. Her Gabrielle Rose Tattoo ring is based on a tattoo



stencil of the flower, “reimagined for the finger in 18-karat yellow gold and scattered with diamond accents. The designs fulfill my desire to create pieces that are both feminine and edgy, gritty and romantic.”

Designer Pippa Small renders her roses in a more realistic fashion, as if they were just picked from the garden. “They have long been held as tokens of love for their beauty, fragility and the joy they bring,” she says.

#### IVY

Ivy speaks to fidelity and loyalty in betrothal, marriage and friendship.

“Ivy is a strong plant that can grow in hard environments and is a symbol of affectionate attachments,” says Emily Hirsh, designer at jewelry brand Talon. Her gold Ivy studs owe thanks to her favorite childhood book, *The Secret Garden*. “One of my favorite images in the book is the garden overgrown with ivy.”

Samantha Jackson of jeweler Heavenly Vices also employs the ivy leaf in one of her newest lines. “When I designed my Lock Stories collection, based on combination locks, it was only natural that I would take inspiration from the popularity

IMAGES: STOKSY; PAULA CREVOSHAY; COLETTE; ALEX MONROE; PIPPA SMALL; LYDIA COURTEILLE



of flowers as a means of communicating unspoken feelings, as I am drawn to secret messages,” she explains. “This design features a word for the overall theme of the lock — in this case, *‘flor’* — [as well as] four flower motifs that represent different [types of affection], and braille for those who cannot see to enjoy the beauty of jewelry.”

#### DAISIES

These blooms, which represent innocence and purity of love, make an appearance in Alex Monroe’s Language of Flowers collection. The line features individualized takes on not only daisies, but also roses, forget-me-nots and other blossoms. “My jewelry is synonymous with a British sense of style — slightly quirky and intended to be worn often and with joy,” says the UK-based designer.

Colette Steckel of Colette has her own story about daisies: “When I was a child in Normandy, France, I would collect flowers that surrounded my family home. My favorite were small daisies. I pressed the flowers in books, and many years later, when visiting my mother, I found the books in our house, sparking the inspiration for [my] Les Fleurs pieces. The flatness of the pressed flowers inspired me to create a collection around two-dimensional clustered daisies that sit close to the skin and look like a tattoo when worn. It’s one of my most treasured collections to wear to this day.” ■