

DESIGN & DECORATING



Far left and far right: The orchid wall created by botanist Patrick Blanc for the New York Botanical Garden's Orchid Show.



IN THE AIR
ORCHIDELIRIUM

Blooming on everything from fabric to fine china, orchids are the season's most intoxicating flowers

THREE YEARS AGO, when the New York Botanical Garden first spoke with French botanist Patrick Blanc about doing a vertical orchid garden, nobody knew that Orchidaceae would be the flower of the moment today. Spring 2012 is abloom with orchids, from fashion to home fragrance. Vivienne Tam channeled the flora to create prints of floating phalaenopsis on a crisp white blouse, while Chloé created orchid-embroidered blouses. Metal artist Michael Aram just added new bloom-embellished items to his Black Orchid collection of decorative objects. And in the realm of upholstery, classic orchid patterns are enjoying a resurgence via decorators mesmerized by the flower's palettes and staying power.

Beautiful as these interpretations of the flower are, the real thing is hard to beat. At the New York Botanical Garden's Orchid Show, which runs through April 22, Mr. Blanc's breathtaking display, composed of thousands of orchids and plants, shows off the flower's mind-boggling varieties. The careful placement of the blooms creates a rich, textured tapestry effect.

What stirred all of these designers, working in such different disciplines, to summon the flower that Darwin described as "beautiful contrivances"? Who can say? The orchid's mysterious power, which Victorians risked lives and fortunes to pursue, will always inspire us. Here are some beautiful ways to bring the flora—real or inventively rendered—home. —Charlotte Moss



FABRIC

Two different approaches to representing orchids on fabric: Jean Monro adopted a painterly approach to botanical illustration with a hand-blocked print for Brunschwig & Fils (top), while citrons, bright yellows and chaireuse heat up a floral fabric from Clarence House (bottom). Orchidelirium Cotton Print in Buff, Brunschwig & Fils, brunschwig.com; Les Orchidees in Lime and White, Clarence House, clarencehouse.com



PAINT

Envelop your rooms with the colors of your favorite orchids. Try pairing them with soft greens, butter yellow and Delft blue, separately or all together. Sweet Orchid (C132), Fragrant Orchid (1006-68) and Orchid House (1001-6A). valspoint.com



SCIENT

To captivate guests at the front door, Mizensir created a scented candle called Orchidee Chocolat, a heady blend of orchid, chocolate and amber. \$325 for a 53-ounce candle. ordres.com



CHINA

Anna Weatherly's designs are hand-painted in Budapest by artisans who not only know their art but have a love of flowers evident in every last plate. Equally at home in modern and traditional décor, the dishes can be mixed with other patterns or left alone to be the stars at the table. \$540 each, devinecorp.com



FLOWER SCHOOL: Orchid Care

Delicate yet sculptural, with incredible colors and scents, orchids are renowned for their beauty—and persnickety behavior. Follow these tips and watch your orchid thrive.

Always work with clean tools and hands. Orchids are susceptible to viruses. Keep rubbing alcohol handy, or a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water.

Feed weakly, weekly. Orchids require good drainage. Water saturation will kill your plant. An orchid pot (the kind with holes on the side) is wise—at a minimum, your pot must have a hole in the bottom. Water with tepid water about once a week. For extra nourishment, use an orchid fertilizer as directed, or a general house plant variety will do.

Humidity is a plus. Cluster your plants if possible or set them in gravel-lined trays with a thin layer of water. Keep the roots away from water. Orchids love eastern and southern light, but feel free to rotate. Take care not to let them scorch in a western exposure.

Best time to repot: after the last flower fades, then every year or two thereafter.

Common trouble signs: Yellow leaves mean too much water. Also, inspect the roots—if they're deteriorating, nutrients may not be reaching the leaves. Black spots on leaves? Probably fungal. Try dusting with cinnamon, a natural fungicide.

Fragrance notes: Why does an orchid smell like rose, hyacinth, chocolate or citrus? Many orchids have a fragrance that plays an important role in their survival by attracting pollinators. Ranging from subtle to intoxicating, the world of fragrant orchids is always expanding due to hybridization. Some popular fragrant orchids:

Brassavola = lily of the valley
Dendrobium nobile = floral
Encyclia radiata = coconut
Oncidium twinkle = vanilla
Phalaenopsis coral isles = citrus
Phalaenopsis 'Roman Holiday' = spicy

For more tips on orchids, visit myba.org.