



Floral arrangement by Jennifer Crawford,
Twisted Vines

A “Looks” of Christmas Gallery

“It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas

Everywhere you go”...but...

What does Christmas *look* like?

The *look* of Christmas blends custom and creativity, faith and family, tradition and discovery. Interpretations of how Christmas *looks* can be observed in the workmanship of individuals and professionals. The Texarkana Area is fortunate to have a number of talented designers who can take fresh materials or items seemingly ready for recycling and turn them into objects of beauty. In some cases, their materials may be a pile of vines, leaves, berries or branches. At other times, materials may be ribbons of all colors, textures and sizes, strings of glittering beads, painted sticks, sparkling balls or bits of netting. With their vision and imagination, their knowledge of shapes, textures and colors and their desires to communicate

JOY through their work, these interpreters make the season *look* like Christmas.

Therefore, as our Christmas gift to you, our ALT Readers, the ALT staff has visited Teri Lovely and her Queen City Floral; Scooter Raney from J. Brown for the home, Jennifer Crawford at Twisted Vines and Leenetta Ruth Tyler of Ruth’s Flowers. This group of floral magicians ranges from younger to more experienced. Although they have many of the same tools at their disposal, their work reflects their individual personalities and philosophies, and that’s fun to see. So for your Christmas celebration and pleasure, we share with you our “Looks of Christmas Gallery.”

The decorations of Christmas manage to surround everyone with a sense of celebration regardless of location. Giant green permanent botanical wreaths wrapped with bright red and gold ribbons decorate hospitals or businesses to generate a festive air. Perhaps the most familiar of the Christmas decorations is the Christmas wreath. Wreaths of all sizes have been around since the mid-15th century. Originally made from the green boughs of evergreens, the circular wreaths not only welcome guests and contribute aroma but also symbolize God’s love and His Promise of everlasting life. Local florist “Scooter” Raney focuses on the use of “natural” materials so that all of his wreaths and floral creations tend to have layers-



Floral arrangement by Scooter Raney,
J. Brown for the Home

-flowers in season, ivies, like English or Trumpet Vine, and natural grasses, pine and cedar boughs... maybe even stems of bright red nandina foliage and berries. A yard is a veritable shopping center for "Scooter," as he mixes media, textures, colors, lines and shapes to generate works which challenge the eye as well as tickle the nostrils.



Jennifer Crawford, Twisted Vines

Teri Lovely and Leenetta Ruth also exercise their creative energies. Like "Scooter" and Jennifer, they are always guided by the customer's needs. Many of their wreaths are permanent botanicals (i.e. silk). As Leenetta points out: To be cost efficient, wreaths made from permanent materials make sense if storage space is available. Some fresh ribbon and greens provide the perfect reurbishing to make the wreaths look like new from year to year. Teri and Leenetta like bling-bling and ting-ting in their work and use them skillfully. *Bling-bling* refers to sparkling items while *ting-ting* identifies natural decorative products, like dried wheat stalks, grasses, flowers—even tumbleweeds-- which have been covered with paint or glitter. Jennifer, on the other hand, likes to add "pop" to her productions by combining with more familiar Christmas articles those items not customarily associated with Christmas. She is a builder, as she enjoys constructing her creations so they include the treasures of her customers. Her

unexpected choices in materials and props result in delightful presentations unique to her family clients. Floral arrangements are also an important part of the Christmas season. Although permanent botanicals often require touching before customers know whether they are real, fresh flowers tend to be preferred. "Fresh flowers add a touch to the home

nothing else can," Leenetta observes. "They just do." A favorite fresh flower at Christmas is the poinsettia (Americans prefer red 74% of the time). This ancient flower, revered by the Aztec Indians, was discovered by American Ambassador to Mexico, Joseph Poinsett in 1824 when he attended a Christmas service in Mexico. He was so stricken by the bright red beauty of these plants on the church altar that he obtained some seeds and returned to America with them. Today, over 90% of the flowering poinsettias in the world got their start at the Paul Ecke Ranch in California.

Like so many elements of Christmas, poinsettias are not only beautiful but also symbolic. One story indicates that Franciscan priests in the 1600s saw the plants put on

their beautiful red coloring as the holiday season began; therefore, they used them in their nativity procession. The "Red" leaves symbolize the blood shed for human redemption while the "Green" represent the promise of new life and rebirth. Another legend tells of the green plants picked by two Mexican children along the Mexican roadside and placed around the church manger constructed for Christmas. Mario and Pablo were poor children and had nothing more to give the Baby Jesus. Miraculously, the green top leaves turned bright red, and the manger was surrounded by the beautiful star-like petals.

What are not myths but facts are these: the poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima* meaning "very beautiful") is a perennial flowering shrub which can grow ten feet tall in a warm climate. Aztec chieftains ordered them transported from the warmer lowlands to their colder mountaintop homes.

The red "petals" are actually colored bracts (modified leaves). Poinsettias are beautiful as part of floral arrangements or as potted plants. According to the University of Illinois, poinsettias are the best selling flowering potted plant in the United States. Leenetta points out, "People think nothing of buying their own silk flowers, but they will not buy fresh flowers for themselves."



Scooter Raney, J. Brown for the Home



Floral arrangement by Leenetta Ruth Tyler,
Ruth's Flowers

[Maybe it's time to give yourself a "live" Christmas present?]

All of these designers understand their tools. In fact, most of them feel a sense of "calling" to their profession and pursue its rigorous requirements with passion. They are constantly changing and discovering and "thinking on their feet." "Scooter" remembers a party he assisted in staging at Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas as his bellwether moment. The walls were covered with ice blue



Leenetta Ruth Tyler, Ruth's Flowers

China silk along with the Roman statuary. Since the party would be held two nights, everything had to be covered in two layers. "That's where I learned [early]--anything's possible." He smiles a knowing smile.

By looking at their work, all of these talented folks understand and routinely make the impossible happen.

Teri is working on making her work

look more "woody" all the while discovering shapes and ribbons, even containers, which add to the overall pleasure of the viewer's experience. Much of her work—whether with Christmas silks at the Cass County Courthouse in Linden or fresh flowers as in Atlanta's Hanner Funeral Home-- creates a distinctive mood. When appropriate, that mood will be whimsical with its ting-ting, fresh flowers, bling-bling balls and greenery. Her Christmas designs may include wired jute or burgundy ribbon in beautiful bows and wraps. The spirit of the season is certainly at home among the charmingly ornamented Christmas trees, banners, and decorations of Queen City Floral.

Unpredictable as it may seem, a major component for Christmas at Ruth's Flowers is tropicals like anthuriums, birds of paradise or heliconia. Their colors are bright and blossoms, long-lasting. These beauties reside exclusively in floral arrangements and are at home alone or mixed

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Floral arrangement by Teri Lovely,
Queen City Floral



Teri Lovely, left, with her staff, at Queen City Floral

with more familiar flowers. Their presence is a noticeable surprise, and they are used year round. The world wide web has also found Ruth's so that orders for the shop's creations may now come from London, Brussels or the Middle East. Many of their arrangements— like their Christmas topiaries—are welcomed in churches and hospitals as well as homes. A major Christmas project (as in strings of cranberries and dozens of roses) for Leenetta and her crew is decorating Dr. and Mrs. Jon Hall's 100 year old home for the Texarkana Christmas Candlelight Tour.

In November, Twisted Vines was well represented at the Junior League's Christmas Season Kick-Off Mistletoe Fair where Jennifer Crawford's unpredictability and sense of fun proved much in evidence. Her use of grasses and curly willow assisted in turning the Fair into a place Santa would enjoy spending lots of time. No one can doubt that Jennifer thoroughly enjoys her work and the Christmas season.

Christmas "busyness" is happily familiar to "Scooter," too. With each project he draws from his reservoir of knowledge and experience to surprise even himself, "It's amazing what you can do!" He illustrates what he means by using the fresh deep red, partially open long-stem roses he holds in his hands. He positions them carefully before unhesitatingly snipping the long stems. "The secret to any good design is in the mechanics," he explains as he adds greenery. "This is the hand tied spiral technique. All the stems going in the same direction gives control to adjust the flowers for depth. The stems move in and out from the spiral design and can be adjusted." With that he twists

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and turns the stems just right. "I'm a perfectionist." Then he releases the beautifully completed bouquet—now standing by itself.

"I used to come home from grade school and design. I learned a tremendous amount working with my father [florist David Raney]" Since that time, however, "Scooter" has studied with Asian, Chinese, German and European designers in addition to being encouraged to break away from the "traditional" by local Kathy Stewart and her book EVERGREEN. His use of line, materials, space and props is unique and immediately identifiable.

All of these florists can and do step outside of their shops, however, to decorate homes or Christmas trees or prepare special pieces of all descriptions. They are driven by their customers' requirements and the imagination and joy they experience in satisfying them. Their standards are high, as no work leaves a shop unless the designer personally enjoys it. They have to be at the top of Santa's working elves list.

Christmas IS the season which challenges our senses. The smells of fresh pine and cedar, Christmas cookies and candles; the biting touches of the winter's cold or wind, the smoothness of a rose petal or prick of a holly leaf. Music from choirs and instruments competes with ringing Salvation Army bells while sips of wassail, and snatches from platters of homemade candies, roasted pecans and white chocolate pretzels tease our taste buds. Pulling all of this "specialness" together are the decorations—garlands of lights and greenery, ribbons and flowers—which "shout" Christmas wherever they may be spied. Mother Nature and these artists of the floral world beg us to pause, open our eyes to see and enjoy the wonder and beauty of this special Christmas time, i.e. The "Look" of Christmas.

Merry Christmas from ALT!

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Merry Christmas!



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