

Line & Line Mass Designs

By Ray Hunter

A very wise writer once said “I’d rather have roses on my table than diamonds around my neck”. To some this may be a debatable statement but there is no debate to the conclusion that roses are the diamond equivalent in the flower world. In this article, two wonderful and somewhat unique approaches are discussed for placing roses on your table...the line and the line-mass rose arrangements.

The line and line-mass arrangements are outgrowths of the Far East influence on Western floral design. The oriental essentials of heaven, earth, and man are displayed vertically where linear design dominates rather than the oriental triangular shaped pattern.

The roses in a line design should be directly above one another; the straighter the better. A line design could be done at a 45 degree angle; however, some consider this as not conforming to the traditional design. A horizontal line design is viewed as a modern design. Here are a few clues on how to do a line design simply and beautifully for your next rose show.

The Traditional Line Design

Let’s discuss three major elements in traditional line design: the roses, the container, and the mechanics.

The Container: Since the silhouette in a line design should be straight as an arrow, the container should be slender and vertical. The height of the container depends on the size of the roses to be used and how many roses will be in the design. Often in line designs the container is selected first, and then the arranger determines how many roses can be fit into the vertical spaces (above and below the lip of the container). A candle stick or tall vertical glass or metal vase is terrific. It is best that the container does not have too much pattern or too bright an appearance in that this could create a distraction in viewing the roses and harm the **dominance** or **harmony** of the arrangement.

The Roses: The most important rose

in the line design will be at the lip of the container as this rose will be the **focal point**. This rose should be $\frac{3}{4}$ to fully open and be exquisite in appearance. A rose either with fully open stamens or petals with a beautifully tight spiral is important in making this a much admired rose. Since there are few roses in the arrangement, it is usually best to have roses (1) of the same or similar color or (2) of a gradation shading (darkest at the middle focal point to lighter at the ends) to strengthen the **balance** and **dominance** appearance of the arrangement. The arranger has to make a decision as to how many roses will be in the design. Three roses can be used but is often viewed as needing a bit more. Five can be used very successfully, or seven even better, or nine roses, or more. The more roses in a line the higher the height of the container needs to be.

Ideally the bottom rose needs to be $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ down the front length of the container. Likewise the top rose should be 1 to 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ heights above the top of the container. This achieves the correct **proportion** and **scale** for the design. After placing your best rose at the focal point, start placing a slightly smaller rose above and below the middle rose. Allow a space between the roses so they do not overlap. This will create an appearance where the viewer has to view each rose separately and will generate a rhythm (eye will move from rose to rose). When roses overlap, the **rhythm** is damaged. The top (Heaven) and the bottom (Man) rose in the design should be a bud shape rose. This will create a unified **balanced** arrangement with the largest rose in the middle and roses gradating to smaller and smaller sizes with buds at the end points.

The Mechanics I: The means of how to put the arrangement together is a true art form and is referred to as the mechanics. Mastering the mechanics is what can transform a beginner into an excellent arranger. How would one stick flowers into the top of a candlestick and have some roses going up and some going down from the middle? Here is one

approach. Hot glue the bottom of an empty tuna fish or cat food can to the top of the candle stick or vertical container. Before attaching the can to the candlestick or container, drill one to two small holes in the front side of the can one above the other. The holes should be large enough that rose stems can be stuck through either hole. A wise move is to then paint the can a dark leaf green color so that it is easy to camouflage later. Once the can is secured, hot glue or use floral tape to attach a kenzan, (also called a spiky frog), to the inside of the can. To this kenzan, firmly push down a piece of fully wet Oasis® which has been cut to be about the same width as the container. By having the Oasis® about $\frac{1}{3}$ the height of the container, enough space will be available to insert all the roses above and below the midpoint.

Placement of the Roses: Take your focal point rose and cut the stem to 2-3 inches in length. Place this at the top edge of the “tuna can” into the Oasis®. This rose should directly face the viewer. Your **focal point** is now done. Select the two next smaller rose and place one above and one below the middle rose. The one going toward the bottom can be stuck into the Oasis® through one of the drilled holes in the front of the container. Then take a slightly smaller rose and stick it into the Oasis® directly above and below the others. (If you need a slightly smaller rose, pluck off some petals). The roses in the end position should be the smallest. To obtain a higher **distinction** in the design, consider a pointed plant leaf or bloom at the ends to create even more of a straight line design. Your line arrangement is now near complete.

The Mechanics II: The second phase of the mechanics is to camouflage the can and the Oasis® such that the visual concentration is completely on the roses. The simplest approach is to use rose leaves and attach them with double sided tape to the can and the harder elements. Rose leaves can be attached to the Oasis® by using very small straight

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pins. Once the elements have been covered your design is virtually done. Often the line design can be enhanced by inserting a filler of very small flowers sparingly from the top to the bottom. This filler will enhance the **unity** of the design and further improve its **distinction** (superiority) and beauty. Your line design is now complete. You will receive many favorable comments on your wonderfully creative floral line design.

The Line-Mass Design

The straight line-mass design can be done in a similar approach as the line design; however, the line mass is bulged in the middle by adding more roses and filler. The line mass has more flexibility in that it can be done not only vertically but also in a crescent or an S-shape (Hogarth) curve. The arc of these designs can be achieved by using curved stem roses and fillers to accentuate the creative elements of these approaches. Because the line-mass is bulged in the middle, larger containers can be used. The mechanics involved are basically the same as in the line design. The focal point is still at the lip of the container. The same approaches are used for rose placement with the largest roses in the middle and gradations with smaller size roses to buds at the end points.

To visualize the line and line-mass arrangements, here are four examples of

excellence in arrangements with roses. It helps to learn from the best, so let's do a critique on what would have made them better, similar to what a judge would do in a rose show.

Photo 1 of the pink roses in a line design is absolutely wonderful using a candlestick as the container. It is a bit off a complete vertical composition and has too many rose leaves in the middle for achieving a sleek appearance. The snapdragons at the end enhance the vertical of the arrangement. The quality of the focal point rose could be a bit better. It is a wonderful line design.

Photo 2 is a marvelous vertical line mass with yellow roses. It could have a larger rose in the middle at the **focal point** to enhance this rose's distinction from the others. The size gradation from the middle to the bottom could have been enhanced with more of a bud rose at the bottom (pluck off one or two petals). The top roses tend to go back and if brought forward would have added further to the distinction or superiority of the arrangement. The roses are too tight in the middle and by overlapping tend to take away from the design's rhythm. It is still absolutely superb.

Photo 3 of the yellow and orange roses is a marvelous example of the S-shaped or Hogarth curve in a line-mass. It could have a bit more curvature at the top to

enhance the S appearance. There is a bit too much filler. The container is marginal for a traditional approach as pitchers with handles are occasionally frowned on as a traditional container. The arrangement could have been visually improved if a solid color niche had been placed behind it. The striped wallpaper and chair rail act as visual distractions. The niche would have added distinction (superiority). The arrangement is an absolutely beautiful line mass design.

Photo 4 of the pink roses is a superb example of a crescent line-mass arrangement. A few petals could have been removed from the end roses to attain an even greater size gradation and pointed arc (expressiveness). The three fillers used (statice, berries, and rose leaves) makes the appearance look a bit crowded. This design is my favorite of the four. It is unbelievably gorgeous.

Make plans on making a line or line-mass design for the upcoming Nashville Rose Show on October 1st and 2nd at Cheekwood. You will have fun and learn more about mechanics which will in turn help you tremendously with future creative arrangements. Line and line-mass arrangements do not require many roses and will elicit many wonderful comments on the uniqueness and beauty of the composition. You will be so happy with your achievement and others will appreciate it so very much.



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