

f is for florists

'I don't do things by halves,' says Hayley Newstead of **Absolute Flowers** (tel: 020 7286 1155). For a recent birthday party, the black-and-gold theme was carried through to the staff's Venetian masks, with black-and-gold birdcages filled with balls of white roses hanging in the trees.

Eliza B Flowers (tel: 0870 242 7098; elizabflowers.com) is run by Libba Morrison and Celeste Hong, who pride themselves on attention to detail. Their clients include The Fennell and Moët & Chandon.

'I'm an anti-trend person,' says **Shane Connolly** (tel: 020 8964 4398). 'Every job is unique.' He uses English flowers wherever possible and growing plants (rather than cut flowers) that can be replanted as a memento of the event. We're sure the Prince of Wales, whose royal warrant Connolly holds, would approve.

No surprises from **John Carter** (tel: 020 7731 5146; johncarterflowers.com) – his arrangements are always classic and elegant, with the focus on seasonal flowers (to keep prices low) and simple splashes of colour. Clients include Kelly Hoppen and Cartier.

'Abundant' is the word of the moment for polo-set favourite **Sophie Hanna** (tel: 020 7720 0841; sophiehannaflowers.com). Whether she's supplying English flowers to Wembley Stadium or doing quirkier designs with flowering artichokes, her work is detail-focused and design-led.

It has been a year of weddings for flamboyant florist **Rob Van Helden** (tel: 020 7720 6774; rvhfloraldesign.com): he did the flowers for Elizabeth Hurley's Sudeley Castle celebrations and for John Terry's nuptials at Blenheim Palace. For his own wedding this summer, he used white stocks, gardenias and lilies of the valley.

Robbie Honey's client list reads like an A-Z of fashion, from Giorgio Armani and John Galliano to Marc Jacobs and Vivienne Westwood. For Rena Sindi (see D for Design), he created 100 footballs out of 25,000 red and white carnations. Ring 020 7720 3777 or visit robbiehoney.com.

McQueens (tel: 020 7251 5505; mcqueens.co.uk) do drama: pink peonies for George Michael's birthday party; purple and green orchids for the Wimbledon Champions Dinner; and 'Orange Juice' roses for the *Vanity Fair* Oscars party in LA.

Impeccably chic **Detta Phillips** (tel: 020 7498 2728; dettaphillips.com) has done black roses for a Dior perfume launch and cascades of blue orchids at the Dorchester. Her current favourite: newly fashionable dahlias.



The Real Flower Company (tel: 0870 403 6548; realflowers.co.uk) specialises in highly scented English roses, harvested by hand in a walled garden in Hampshire. During the winter months, flowers are flown in on passenger flights from its fully sustainable farm in Kenya.

Paul Thomas (tel: 020 7499 6889; paulthomasflowers.co.uk) specialises in beautiful, classic arrangements for high-profile society events. He's the resident florist at the Ritz and also works at Claridge's and the Dorchester. His style is traditional-with-a-twist: he's particularly fond of big English roses.

Whatever your commission from **Stephen Woodhams** (tel: 020 7730 3353; woodhams.co.uk), you know the design will be architectural and striking, like pink Vanda orchids submerged in goldfish bowls with galvanised copper bands. Hot stuff.

F is also for fireworks

Not many companies can boast a human Catherine-wheel, but **Emergency Exit Fireworks** (tel: 020 8853 4810; eeafx.co.uk) can. As well as the usual firework corks, it puts on a special show called Arena, with performers, a spectacular set and heaps of impressive pyrotechnics.

Pains Fireworks (tel: 01794 884040; painsfireworks.co.uk) live and breathe fire all over Europe: fireworks to music, performances with acrobats on stilts and kaleidoscopic wheels of fire. Best of all, you can see your name in firelights blazing above the rooftops.

And fencers

At this year's Russian midsummer party for Mikhail Gorbachev at Hampton Court, fencers from the **City Fencing Club** (cityfencingclub.org) showed off the intricacies of thrust, parry and *prise de fer*. Take lessons yourself or hire professionals for a dazzling display.

And falconry

Add feathery flying action with birds of prey from **Hawk Experience** (tel: 01729 860316; hawkexperience.co.uk). Its eagle owls, hawks and peregrine falcons all come with professional handlers.

And foam machines

A foam cannon from **JHA Entertainment** (tel: 01234 301517; ibizafoam.co.uk) blasts foam into a crowd, covering partygoers within minutes. They have snow machines, too.

And finally, making a film of your party

The clever professionals at **Bespoke Films** (tel: 020 8834 7293; bespokefilms.com) will produce, direct and edit a movie starring you and your guests.



G is for gourmet food

Feast your eyes on our favourite caterers. **Absolute Taste** (tel: 020 8870 5151; absolutetaste.co.uk) co-founders Lyndy Redding and Ron Dennis, chief executive of McLaren, have been feeding the European Grand Prix circuit for 10 years, including star drivers and track rivals Lewis Hamilton and Fernando Alonso. They have also fed Roman Abramovich on his private jet and worked with Gordon Ramsay on the Beckhams' pre-World Cup party. Princess Beatrice chose **By Word of Mouth** (tel: 020 8871 9566; bywordofmouth.co.uk) to prepare a Victorian feast for 300 guests at the masked ball for her 18th birthday. Signature delicacies include rose-petal cupcakes and white chocolate syllabub. **Effortless Eating** (tel: 020 7341 0914; effortless-eating.com) is run by Maria Balfour and delivers home-cooked, seasonal British food to your door. Only a few days' notice is needed for a full dinner menu or teatime treats. **The Game Birds** (tel: 07747 868788; thegamebirds.com) are two young lovelies taking the shooting scene by storm. As well as catering for canapé parties in London (they once served Rod Stewart a sausage), they have a dedicated game menu and specialise in shooting dinners across