

viva

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GROWING TRENDS

- an artist's garden
- an inner-city courtyard
- a florist's wonderland

DESIGN: KELVIN GOODCHILD

Flower power

Michelle Fitt and Naomi Saffer spend their lives among the flowers, at work and at home. The duo talk to Viva about how their gardens grow

ANYONE listening in on the two back-to-back Trelise Cooper runway shows at Air New Zealand Fashion Week recently would have heard a tremendous amount of oohing and aahing coming from the enraptured audience.

Oh yes, there were divine looking models and lovely garments but the piece de resistance? A stunning wall at the end of the runway made entirely of white orchids, stocks, roses, freesias and chrysanthemums, created by Michelle Fitt and Naomi Saffer of Leaf and Honey. Many a person lingered long after both of Trelise's shows to admire this exquisite labour of love.

Michelle and Naomi were already involved in delivering flower displays for Fashion Week and contacted Trelise Cooper about a possible collaboration — Trelise shares the girls' adoration for employing bold colours and unique patterns, combined with the courage to promote a woman's femininity and the desire and ability to think outside of the box. A meeting was set up, heads put together and, voila, the flower wall became a reality.

Both Michelle and Naomi have an infectious passion for their art — as they refer to it. Determined to

use her creative skills, Naomi initially envisioned herself as a writer and worked her way through an English Literature degree after finishing school. Realising that was not quite the thing for her she turned to floristry and hasn't looked back.

The lure of the world beyond New Zealand has led her on many trips overseas over the past seven to eight years, including to Europe, Asia and South America. Her sojourns to England and Scotland saw her working in a number of exciting floristry roles.

"The florist shop I worked at in Scotland was amazing. Our regular projects included film premieres and other large events. It was extremely hard work and long hours but very rewarding to see the influence the [flower] arrangements made on the ambience of the venues. Plus we got to go to all the parties afterwards, a huge perk of the job", she says.

Michelle always knew flowers were her future. She has been working with them for more than 15 years now and is totally immersed in the trade. It is a vocation that started in her teens and took her for a time to Melbourne. "The flower trade is very different in Melbourne and



Florists Michelle Fitt and Naomi Saffer from Leaf and Honey in Michelle's garden in Coatesville.

PICTURES / BABICHE MARTENS



Australian cities in general," she says. "In New Zealand people want value for money — they want the prices low and they want the flowers to last for a good amount of time. In Melbourne we would get two and three hundred dollar orders at the time".

As well as being their livelihood, flora features heavily in both women's homes.

Naomi is a Torbay resident. Her garden, which completely surrounds the quaint workman's cottage she lives in, is a balance of order and chaos, neatness and freedom, control and spontaneity. A summary of its contents reads like the index of a gardening manual. It is lined with hedges of silver germander and delicate rosemary. The back of the cottage is full of puka, cabbage trees, kowhai, palms, ratas, grasses and clematis. Around the sides are geraniums, viburnums, hydrangeas, daisies, Chinese lanterns and lavenders as well as a few large camellias and a couple of olive trees.

Pink, blue and white are strong colours in her garden. The diverse collection is supplemented by a large trellis supporting a very established star jasmine and Cecile Brunner climbing rose. A jacaranda tree sits in pride of place in the centre.

Michelle lives on a rugged but peaceful five-acre section in

Coatesville. "although we are still fairly close to the hubbub of Auckland City there is a distinct rural feel which both my husband and I love", she says.

"Our section is decorated with eye-catching and sizeable trees such as willows, magnolias and chestnuts." She also has olive, almond and the Kiwi backyard essential, feijoa. Her garden is rustic and colourful. Potted flowers are plentiful. Hydrangeas, roses and pansies are prolific. The vegetable garden is planted with spinach, silverbeet, leeks, rhubarb and an array of herbs.

Their pair say their workspace is "very industrial" and a workshop in the truest sense of the word.

Vases, ribbons, flowers, arrangements in various stages of progress and the usual tools of the trade all clamour for space. Naomi and Michelle are eager to spread their wings and find something roomier to conjure up their exquisite designs.

Flower arranging parallels fashion and interior design in that it is a very fickle industry.

They are switched on to the latest trends and say bold monochromatic colours, petite flowers in large vases, contrasting shapes and sizes of vases, dahlias, garden flowers, sweet williams and lilac are all favourites of the moment.