

Dutch master florist and RHS Chelsea gold medallist **Hans Haverkamp** won 'Best in Show' at the 2015 Festive Flower & Food Show in Blackpool. As the event returns this November, we ask Hans to tell us how to get the most out of competing.



What is the atmosphere like at a show?

Usually there is a really amicable, friendly atmosphere when you're competing together. I'm fairly well known, but I compete with complete unknowns and we all have the same chance of winning. You have to push yourself and try new things, as this in turn helps to keep pushing the industry forward.

Do you like being controversial?

I competed at a show in Bournemouth about 10 years ago, where the title of the class was 'Conversation Piece'. I decided my design would have a sexual connotation. I made two intertwined torsos from plant material, sat on top of jeans. Some people thought it was utterly distasteful. I didn't win, but the amount of publicity I got was brilliant just from people talking about it. That's what I mean about being original – a prime example of a different angle. I did it to provoke a reaction. It's good fun to shake people up a bit.

What advice would you give to anyone who feels too nervous to compete?

I was working with someone on a flower festival last year, and I told her she should enter the NAFAS national show. 'Oh, I wouldn't be good enough for that,' she replied. But I told her that's rubbish. It's not about being good enough; it's the taking part and enjoying it. You are putting your work in the public domain, so it is open for criticism, but that is part of learning. You'll never feel ready, you just have to jump in and do it. Whatever you do you will learn from and you'll come away with a smile on your face. I look at the nationals as a good excuse to get together, have a laugh and show what you can do. Enjoy the experience of the show. It's such a great platform for creating some fabric within the organisation and the wider industry.

What is the key element of competing on any level?

To me, a show should be a platform for something new. It should showcase the progress we are making as florists and flower arrangers. I'm not anti-traditional work; I'm just all for new ideas. So I would say, it's about being original.

What's your starting point when planning a design?

I look for the title that best suits the work I do (probably as most people do), but then I try to look at it from an angle that is going to challenge me. What will induce me to come up with a new idea, or to take an existing concept and show it in a different light? I try to find a title that will force me to come up with something different. I'm not sure this is a good way to win, but that's not what I do it for. It's not about winning, and I always say that to new competitors.

What do you think catches the judges' eyes?

They are looking for good workmanship, that you have knowledge of plant material and how to use it, and that you treat the plant material with respect. Then there is the artistic side, where your personal creativity comes into play. Whether you like decorative, full arrangements or you have three flowers criss-crossed on bamboo sticks, there is a degree of personal taste in there too. Overall, they are looking for something that stands out.



Hans Haverkamp's design that won Best in Show in Blackpool