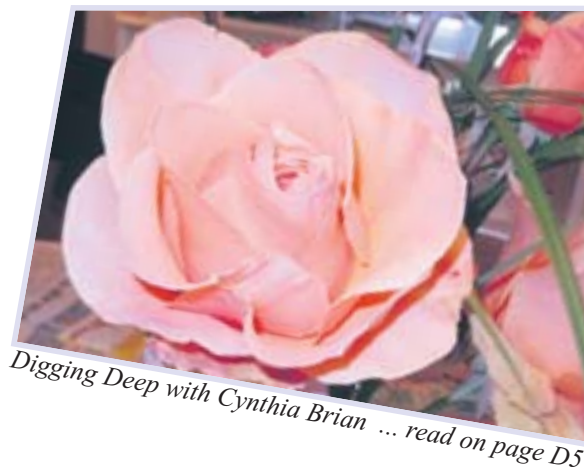


Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 05 Issue 9 Wednesday, July 6, 2011



Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian ... read on page D5

Ikebana—The Art of Floral Sculpture

By Andrea A. Firth

Photos Doug Kohen

It's 1:00 on Monday afternoon at the Orinda Community Center, and a large group of women and a few men cart bags and boxes filled with purple agapanthus, pink hydrangea, orange birds of paradise, indigo iris, carrot-colored day lilies, deep green lettuce leaves, and red and yellow peppers into the main auditorium.

The buzz of conversation punctuated by laughter permeates the room as the thirty students get settled. The students quiet down, and the class looks forward for guidance from their teacher, Soho Sakai, an expert in the art of Sogetsu Ikebana, the disciplined art form of Japanese flower arrangement that combines nature, humanity, and creativity with lines, shape, form, and color.

Today's Ikebana class is inspired by the super nova, an energetic, fleeting, luminous, colorful stellar explosion.

The theme for this 10-week session of Ikebana is natural forces, explains Lafayette resident Marilyn Kaplan, "Lava flows, water flows, avalanches, wind storms, we have done it all. And today we are doing super novas." After taking Sakai's Ikebana class for five years and mastering the four books to gain a diploma in the art, Kaplan has become a member of the "teacher's group." About twenty of Sakai's long-term followers have

achieved this deep knowledge of the flower art form, and they collaborate and help to implement a new theme for each of the three sessions that run through the fall, winter, and spring.

Sakai has taught creative flower arrangement at the Community Center for twenty years. She is recognized as a world class expert in Ikebana, but for her students she is revered as an inspiration, a counselor, and a friend. "She's a superstar," whispers one student.

For Sakai, Ikebana is a way of living and thinking. It brings peace. "The mere act of looking at flowers makes it impossible to harbor violent thoughts," says Sakai. She strives to promote cross-cultural understanding through the beauty of flowers, and her class is representative of this effort. While some of the students are of Asian ancestry, the majority is not.

"I have taken this class for 17 years, and that longevity is not unusual among Soho's students," says Orinda resident Mary Tischenko. Her arrangement consists of three pieces: a tall black vase with spiral arms, a multi-armed branch covered in neon orange spray paint, and a yellow and orange-tipped, spiked blossom. Placed just so, the simplicity of Tischenko's design effortlessly evokes the magnitude of a starry burst.

...continued on page D3



Soho Sakai with Elinor Cullen.



Mary Tischenko's super nova.