

Ikebana

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Sakai encourages her students to use interesting materials that they find in nature for their Ikebana creations. One woman had her husband stop the car along the highway so she could retrieve a tumbleweed from the side of the road. "I used a whole can of white spray paint on that," she exclaimed. She then interspersed white lilies and babies breath within the painted tumbleweed to create an arrangement emotive of a bright firework.

Gordon Ward, one of the male minority in the class, is a formally trained potter. He started taking the class five or six years ago with his mother, Anne, who has been a Sakai follower for over 15 years. Both Wards are longtime

Lafayette residents and enthusiasts of Japanese architecture and gardens. "I came to the class and quickly got hooked on Ikebana," says Gordon, who now creates ceramic vases and containers that are used by his classmates and Ikebana artists around the country.

During the last hour of the three-hour lesson, the critique portion of the afternoon, the class moves around the room as a group to observe each student's arrangement, and Sakai provides insight into what works and what does not. "This is very touching. It makes me cry," says Sakai in response to a student's work. "Are you a good cook?" she asks another who has created an arrangement with lettuce leaves and vegetables. Sakai freely moves branches and is not shy about pulling out her clippers to trim flowers to create better proportion and visual lines for the arrangements. For Sakai, less is more. She achieves the right balance of flower, form, and space with a few quick adjustments, and her students are left guided and inspired.

"Such a mentor, we just love her," says a student as she breaks down her arrangement and packs up for the day, ready to do it all over again next week.



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