Der Vortrag bildete die Grundlage für den Aufsatz:
Marcus Köhler: Blumen auf der Tafel, in: Wege in den Garten, Festschrift für Michael Seiler, hg. Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, Berlin 2004, S. 244-251. Literaturangaben, die hier nur kursorisch auftauchen, sind in der Festschrift vollständig wiedergegeben.

Dining with Flowers. The History of Floral Table Decoration

(ills.) The history of table and of flower decoration has been extensively discussed within the last ten years: Many books, for instance, have been published on still lives and the language of flowers, questioning their use, origin and symbolic meaning. Others, like the fabulous one of the English National Trust by Marie Rose Blacker, Catherine Donzel's or P. Coat's book on flowers tell us about the different kinds of bouquets and their change throughout history. However, I will not talk about this subject matter, neither will I focus on flower bouquets on chimney pieces or in hallways; I will leave out festive garlands on murals, little potpourris on writing desks or boudoir tables, and also potted flowers for interior planting. I rather want to draw your attention to an aspect which comes up short in such scholarly discussions. It is, nevertheless, tremendously important: Imagine you have to lay out a historic table in a Museum or Country House. Many essays and exhibition catalogues tell you how to arrange the table linen, cutlery, silver and porcelain; but what happens with the flowers? When did they come onto the table? And where and how were the arranged? Were there extra vessels or special plants? Is there any meaning of arrangements? And what were the characteristics of a period?
Our focus will be on the middle of the dining table, the tea table or buffets at banquets. Even if this narrows down the topic of flower decoration immensely it helps to concentrate on the interplay of the cultural history of eating and gardening.

If I would ask you when the first flowers found their way on the table there would be strong arguments for any reasonable period. The Romans who used flowers to perfume their rooms and foods were inclined to decorate their dining tables, too. However, there was no special Roman way for decorating, and it is rather left to imagination what they looked like. A suggestion of it is given by Lawrence Alma-Tadema. (ills.) The baroque author Daniel Kaspar von Lohenstein in his play "Arminius and Thusnelda" of 1690, for instance, described masses

of flowers for a fictional banquet given by Emperor Tiberius in his tent near Mainz.

(ills.) Hundreds of years later, the medieval man saw flowers either as useful medical plants or symbols. Monastic manuscripts, for instance, tell us about the salutary effects of daisies, dandelions, marguerites and so on. And in pictures of the Annunciation the room is often decorated with lilies or roses, symbolizing the Virgin's chastity and passion. This background of understanding might have been the reason why flowers were seen to be unsuitable for use on the dining table. (ills.) Moreover, in times of nearly no soap and bleaching white table cloth was still a symbol of luxury. And when one used colorful carpets or precious textiles on the table top, flowers were regarded as rather distracting.

In the 15th century illustrations and descriptions show that single flowers were strewn on the table linen. (ills.) After every course they were wiped on the floor and replaced by new ones, leaving a natural carpet on the ground. Next to its esthetic effect there was also another reason: Looking to the funny musk-apples of that period the reason seems to be clear. (ills.) In times of the Pest the little apples were filled with perfumes. The lovely scent was said to ward off the illness which on the other hand was transferred by bad air. In that case the smell of flowers on the table was possibly seen a stimulation for good appetite, for digestion and sanity.
The habit of strewing flowers on the table is also reflected in this Swiss table linen from 1527 (see also Joos van Cleve: Predella of the Last Supper; Santa Maria della Pace, Gent, now Louvre, 1520-26; Hieronimus Bosch: Wedding of Kanaan, Rotterdam Boyemans-van-B. Museum ills.). This fashion seemed to be still in use in the 18th century. When Horace Walpole, for instance, spoke about sugar and porcelain sculptures he reported about "wild flowers" on the table. (Paston-Williams, 250), and also the author of "Die curieuse Köchin" (The curious cooking-woman) wrote in 1706: 'Following the seasons the table can be laid out in spring with tulips, violets, narcissus, ... and daisies and so forth. But in winter with rosemary, lemon, orange, pomegranate, laurel or other leaves.'[1] – It is for sure that the smell of flowers never really irritated the people as some scholars had proposed.

[1] "Die Tafel kann nun nach der Jahres-Zeit als im Frühling mit allerley schönen wohlriechenden Rosen Blumen Tulipanen Violen Nacissen Tuberosen Graßblumen und dergleichen. Im Winter aber mit Roßmarin Citronen-Pommerantzen- Grannaten-Lorbeer- und andern dergleichen wohlriechenden Blättern bestreut werden." (Anständige Lust, 143)

However, the usual tables of Renaissance dignities were dominated by centerpieces. Most of them were made from metal or such exotic materials as coconuts, shells, and minerals. Wenzel Jamnitzer's design for the so-called "Merck-Table surtout" from around 1550 is one example of a centerpiece made of extravagant materials (ills.): the floral ornaments he suggests have to be imagined as being from green-gold. In the same way Massimo Troiano decribed the table decoration of a wedding at the court in Munich in 1568 mentioning "precious flowers of silk and gold, looking real" (Anständige Lust, 98). In other words, people liked flower bouquets but only if they were not real.
At the same time guilds often represented their wealth with splendid cups and beakers, wherein the nobles liked little machines, fountains or clockworks, forming sometimes entire landscapes. (ills.) They were either placed on the dining table or on a special buffet. The Green Vault in Dresden, recently reopened, is maybe one of the best places to see such works. It is clear that flowers were not mingled with such precious objects. They were not appreciated on the table which was reserved for far more elaborate objects. (ills.)

Nothing really changed until the 18th century, therefore, when machines went out of fashion. They were replaced by silver or gilded tureens, candlesticks, and fruit baskets. Some of them were actually useful and used while others were just showpieces dominating the center of the table. (ills.)
Before the baroque courtier sat at the table, all dishes and meals were normally set in place, which was a special way of serving which is called "service à la française". For the second and third course the table or the room was changed for a new table setting. (ills.)
This fixed structure gave much room to admire the precious vessels with all their symbolic and heraldic details. (ills.) Table lay outs of this time, that were often published in contemporary kitchen books, do not show any place to put flowers, but there are places for tureens, sugar-sculptures, candles and so on. You might object that some prints of the 17th and 18th century reproduce flowers, and the written sources even speak about gardeners (or Sträußebinderinnen, see: Amaranthes, 1773(3)) laying out dinner tables. A closer look shows that it was only the design they were responsible for, the rest was done in the patisserie-kitchen: every plant or flower was a sculpture of sugar, marzipan or even beets. Entire miniature gardens, like the one described for the Duchess of Brunswick's birthday-table in 1694, were made of almonds and colored sugar: "Behind said Laurels one could see well-proportioned parterres and garden-fields filled with colored candied or jellied fruits... the walks between them were made of

reddish and yellow sugar which seem to be real sand...” And even if you might have found “real” flowers they were made out of porcelain, paper or silk as these copper prints show. (ills.) We know that one used vases with real flowers in the dining room – as an illustration of a dinner at Prince Salm’s House in Paris suggest – but they were only placed on the chimney far away from the table. (ills.)
But why didn’t baroque people like real flowers on the table?, you might ask. The reason is because they were considered ordinary, not festive and even cheap, as the thrifty Empress Maria Theresia suggest in 1761 when she was ordering porcelain and real flowers for the table in order to cut down on the costs for the complicated and far more precious sugar sculptures. Furthermore, we have to consider that this period had a different approach to nature. (ills.) If you look at garden art of this time you will find clipped hedges, trimmed trees, straight alleys, ornamental flower beds and artful fountains. Nature was seen to be attractive only in its tamed and artistic form, altered and changed through art. Therefore, only artistic flowers were appreciated.

The only exceptions were laurel and the most expensive orange trees, which were rare and needed special treatment. In that case they were tolerated as exotics, being likewise artificial. Already in 1587 a dessert table for the marriage banquet of Duke John William of Jülich-Cleve shows some potted oranges and laurels. The description says: “there were several artful laurels decorated with golden flitter and tress with fruits”. (Anständige Lust, 118) Hundred years later in some of Louis Quatorze’s dinners trees are still standing on the table. (ills.)
A reflection of this fashion is shown with a little lemon tree of the Ludwigsburg porcelain manufactory belonging to a bigger table garden which was a copy of real elements being shown in contemporary gardens. (ills.) Also an interesting centerpiece formed a garden of Nymphenburg porcelain from 1755 formed by the manufacturer Ponhauser: Porcelain hedges and conical trees create a setting for strolling groups of courtiers. (Anständige Lust, 111) Little vases which were also found standing in baroque garden parterres accent the scene. The little hollow vessels led to the speculation that they were used for very small floral arrangements. This is also suggested by an oil painting from the same time in the Collection of the Prince of Thurn and Taxis of Regensburg showing a surtout with similar little vases decorated with real spring flowers.
In a French engraving by Jean-Michel Moreau the Younger, the same sorts of vases are freed from the garden and appear to be standing on the table. (ills.) They are still very small but, nevertheless, might be the first glimpse of real bouquets on the table.

During the second half of the 18th century, most of the European countries found their way to landscape gardens, (ills.) leaving the antiquated and formal garden behind. Nature was discovered as being pretty and many decorative objects showed this new approach: cups looked like they were put in the grass for picnic, textiles show garden flowers and wallpapers formed landscape settings... (ills.). For sure, the first real flowers were arranged at the end of the 18th century. In 1798 the Berlin porcelain manufactory KPM offered a water vessel and proposed it for cooling vines or arranging flowers on the dining table.
However, the first attempts at combining live flowers with the elaborate centerpieces that came into fashion around 1800 were not that successful because the centerpieces overpowered the flowers. Indeed, the Napoleonic industries were able to produce these monumental centerpieces rather quickly, and as you see, they featured gilt-bronze candelabrums, figures, craters... (ills.) The combination of modest bouquets with these massive centerpieces sometimes produced unexpected results as it is shown in a picture of Napoleon's wedding to Marie Luise in 1810 in the Tuileries: Bouquets that are much too small to ornament the huge vessels. (ills.)
When Prince Schwarzenberg's cook Zenker published a book called "Comus-Geheimnisse" (Cooking-secrets) in 1827 (ills.) he illustrated his idea of a table decoration with a copper print showing a more balanced version of the concept: the size of the flower bouquets and the vessels are more related to each other. At that time, artificial and natural flowers achieved equal rights on the table.

The increasing love of flowers is shown in several watercolors of Biedermeier interiors: (ills.) window benches, green walls, and etageres are filled with potted plants but the dining table is still a place of modest application. The best example is maybe given by Isabella Beeton who has published one of the most favorite cooking books called "The Book of Household" in 1861. In her first volume she recommended just a single potted wild strawberry on the dining table but from one edition to the next the decorations became richer and more elaborate. In this way, her book can be a unit of measurement: within the second half of the 19th century, the use of live flowers on the table increased.

What was the reason for it? The first reason is certainly a botanical one: We have to consider that many new plants were brought from new colonies to Europe's and America's Botanical Gardens. (ills.) Quickly they found their way to private gardeners like the German-born Conrad Loddiges in London who once ran the largest nursery in the world, ex- and importing many valuable new orchids, cacti, ferns

and palm trees. Like his colleague Julius Bosse, court gardener to the Grand Duke of Oldenburg, he was also interested in the construction of glasshouses and heating-systems. (ills.) They experimented with new materials like cast iron and optimized warming-tubes. Knowledge of planting and cultivation and a sense for experimentation finally made flowers be more available for a broader mass of people and, of course, cheaper. Several nurseries concentrated on cut flowers, whereas they usually produced potted plants or fruits. Other flowers – like the so called "Italian flowers" – came by train in the winter, passing through Gotthardt tunnel that was opened in 1882. A relic of this is still found at the New Year's Concert of the Vienna Philharmonic: The flower decoration comes traditionally from San Remo. Paris and London received also flowers from this Mediterranean region, augmented by their own local productions.

Another aspect to be considered are the many smaller green houses and conservatories that were built for private use. (ills.) Like today, one could order them from special companies that shipped and installed them in the back garden, connecting them with the gas heating system of the house. These bourgeois glass houses were filled with more and more kinds and varieties of plants which were introduced into the market: orchids, tree-ferns, bromelia, chrysanthemum and azalea were cultivated.

Another reason for the increasing flower decoration was the new method of serving dinner "à la russe", which means that servants or waiters served the food on the plate. There was no need to change the table as it was formerly necessary in serving "à la française". (ills.) The middle of the table remained untouched until the end of the meal and gave room for a single centerpiece. It is no wonder that this was the moment that the first books on flowers arranging were published, which is an important aspect of our discussion. Traditionally, the flower arrangements were the work of gardeners, but now more and more of the bourgeoisie became interested in this art and sought instruction in these books – as Miss Maling wrote in her book "Flowers and how to arrange them" in 1862: "How important the arrangement of what Florists call "Cut Flowers" has become since the universal adoption of the "dîner russe", which requires so many flowers", (Paston-Williams, 326). Even Isabella Beeton managed to incorporate live flowers on a table when they served a dinner in the French manner. (ills.) Actually, the picture suggests more of a so-called "service à l'anglaise" where plates and vessels with food were passed around at the table – just as we do today at the family dinner table.

The first models of these table pieces were on view at the Great Exhibition of 1851, decribed in *Cassell's Household Guide* as 'Pyramids

of exquisitely chased crystal-light, airy, sparkling and fragrant with blossom.' (ills.) (Paston-Williams, 325). Later on such small glass or china baskets filled with flowers or fruits were named Alexandra of Denmark baskets, in honor of the Princess of Wales who used them when entertaining at Marlborough House. An important innovation came with the Chelsea Flower show in 1861 when Thomas March introduced his glass stand. (ills.)

The influence the Great exhibition had on the mass production has already been discussed by many scholars. Industrialization meant the production of cheaper versions of formerly more expensive hand-crafted items in more precious materials. Where centerpieces are concerned, this meant the production of models in glass, pewter, plated silver and so on. Furthermore, the Victorians preferred to imitate historic styles which lead to Neo-Renaissance centerpieces and neo-baroque vessels. (ills.)

Very good examples of arrangements are given by John Perkins, since 1848 gardener to the Henniker family in Thornton Hall, Suffolk. In his book "Floral Designs for the Table" of 1877 he is possibly one of the first who speaks about different occasions to lay out an dining table. (ills.) He gives 24 illustrations of a breakfast table, a table for the cricket luncheon, one for the hunt and so on. Every table is characteristic: the hunting table offers ferns and leaves, the cricket table should recollect the club's colors, the "Harvest Home Dinner or Supper" is decorated with fruits and wheat...
(ills.) If we look more closely at the breakfast table we see different elements: first there are flower pillows/cushions on the side. Flower garlands ornament the stands of cups or bowls, garlands were curved all along the table, and a center vase is flanked by four little bouquets. Far more moderate but also with similar elements is the work of the Prussian Court gardener Theodor Nietner for an Imperial dining table in the Neues Palais in Potsdam in the 1880s. The middle of the table becomes now a sort of flower bed which is called "Blumenparterre" in contemporary souces. This actually comes very close to the baroque idea of a table garden.

(ills.) Although Perkins instructed his reader that "lightness and elegance should be the motto of every dinner-table decorator", he nonetheless suggested fountains, huge vases and superstructures. Many contemporary manuals proposed keeping the table decoration quite low, if not to loose eye contact with your partner across the table. Therefore, low glass or zinc bowls were used and filled with ivy, branches of cedars, or even with sprouts/shoots of cress, parsley or

oat. Yet, this rather modest decoration did not suit festive dinners. (ills.) In 1890, Wilhelm Braunsdorf from Vienna suggested a centerpiece composed entirely of tazzas.
The gardener's woman Louise Riss from Danzig did not approve of this, however, because they had the "appearance of true mountains". She recommended slender vases and etageres: "Issuing from the top, one ought to arrange pendant blossoms, and rising from the base - for covering the shaft - a tendril which twines itself around it." She explains her ideas in several illustrations and refers to the purveyor to the imperial court in Berlin, a man named Thiel whose specialty was just such arrangements. Although she tries to advocate simplicity she evokes the contrary: "Concerning the dining room's decoration... I want to recall Ruben's fruit and flower garlands..." (ills.)

Describing a festive dinner table for ten to twelve guests at the end of the 19th century one generally recommends one big or two smaller etageres, accompanied with two flower pots. But, of course, there were further possibilities to arrange even more flowers: There were also, for instance, little Couvert- or button-hole bouquets, sitting in a napkin or a little vase waiting for being stuck on the robe or tailcoat for the ball. Riss described a bouquet for a lady which resembled a brooch: "two or three little flowers, a small fern, ... and a pendant blossom of Fuchsia or begonia will do." Some of the larger bouquets, standing in front of the guest's place mat, expressed a special dedication: There was a bouquet for the bride, another for the husband or the groom. They were meant to be presents to be taken home. Furthermore Riss also tells us about attaching little flower bunches on the menu, or little garlands around the napkin (Wagner, 1887).
(ills.) Not enough, the entire room should be decorated with plants, like Palm and orange trees brought in from the Green house. Such an exuberant flower decoration is seen for example in the Savoy Hotel in London in 1895 or at the Gala table for the German Kaiser at the Palace of Schönbrunn given by the Emperor Franz Joseph in 1908: the walls of the hall are decorated like a conservatory, the table is laid out with bouquets and a long garland. The English illustration even show huge trees peeping through the table top. Other more modest authors recommend potted grapes, miniature apples and pears.

Although over-sized flower decorations were criticized for hindering conversation or restricting ones view across the table, they opened new possibilities, as the footman von Manstein reported: "For the wedding of the German Crown Prince in 1905 a Japanese prince, according to his rank, had to be seated unluckily next to a Russian

grand duke. Because both nations were at war at that time, a huge flower bouquet was arranged in order to keep them both out of sight." (ills.) A very special decoration is found in the combination of flowers with blocks of ice: as the carved ice sculptures which melt, the air is cooled and the flowers remain fresh.

A very good overview of the different kinds of plants which were used on the table is given by Ferdinand Jühlke, court Gardener to the German Emperors. (ills.) Before he gives some valuable hints, he recommended all kinds and variations of Acuba, Solanum, Skimmia, Capsica, Coprosma, Correa, Coronilla, Selginella... leaving the reader dazzled with all the different descriptions and varieties of Latin nomenclature. He preferred all kinds of ferns, grass, dwarf-palms, Bromelia, Hortensia, Dracea and so on, being more attentive to the forms of leaves instead of to flowers. His focus lies not on bouquets but predominately on potted plants because many of the contemporary vessels – so called jardinieres - were made for them. Jühlke liked to arrange the plants according to the variety of forms to make picturesque creations. In arranging he proposes to follow the "nature": Vetches should be twirled, fuchsia and grapes should droop. He urged not to combine too many flowers but mixed them with an array of different leaves, emphasizing asparagus leaves – a fashion which was popular until the 1970s. If the leaves became withered Jühlke supported them easily with a little wire. He mentions economical aspects of buying flowers and stressed his disliked of an English fashion where tabletops had holes for putting in potted plants. (ills.) Like Jühlke some of the authors give valuable instructions: Flowers should be arranged at the peak of its bloom on the day of the event. In grander houses fresh flowers in full bloom are collected in the morning and arranged in so called flower-rooms, like the one I show you from Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C. Perkins suggested five different bouquets over the week for dining tables, which indicates that one never used closed blossoms but preferred rich bloom.

(ills.) Gas, electricity and also candles illuminated the table. Often smaller lamps were situated next to the vases or even integrated in the entire program of decoration. (Moulin, 99) It's easy to conclude that this habit of placing dinner lights on the table might explain most of the smaller lamps from Lalique or Tiffany but also it had an influence of the colors of the flowers: Artificial or shallow light makes lilac, purple and blue flowers disappear in darkness, so they are not practical for the evening. White, pink and orange are more fitting and give more structure to the blossoms, like Azalea, Camellias and Cyclamen, also Salvias, Lilies and Geranium. Yellow colors turn out to

be inadequate too, but there is a positive effect when green stems and leaves are striped and sprinkled yellow (Areca lutescens or aurea, e.g.). It is not only a question of colors but also of a special sentiment that daisies, Forget-me-not and tea-roses were seen to be more suitable for the breakfast or tea-table.

(ills.) Architectural history tells us that the period of European historism found its counterpart in several reform movements in around 1900, such as Expressionism, Art Nouveau, Arts and Crafts... It's no wonder therefore that the table decoration also expresses a reaction to the overloaded Victorian dining tables. Painter close to the Secessionists and Impressionists movement depicted scenes with tables that show a shift in the fashion of decoration.
This is very obvious: When the Kaiser preferred the voluminous arrangements mentioned above, his son, the crown prince and his wife preferred silver and porcelain services showing a traditional center tableau with sculptures, candleholders, and flat and rather modest vessels for flowers. (ills.)
The English modernist gardener Gertrude Jekyll describes the period in 1907: "We have passed successively under the tyranny of the three-tier glass tazza, the pools of looking-glass, the fountains, the block of ice; the elaborate patterns of leaves and flowers on the table cloth, and the centers of the bright-colored damasks and brocades. We have been of late somewhat under the dominion of the shallow pool of water..." and so on. But now, she concludes, the decoration is "guided by more rational motives". No wonder that she, (ills.) always promoting the cottage garden, liked unpretentious, wild flowers.

Times really have changed. In 1909 Erich Gollmer, a German gastro-critique pointed out that hotels like the Berlin Adlon, the model for the Garbo movie Grand Hotel, invented so many different decorations: starting from simple flower arrangements for the tea-table to huge ballroom decorations. (ills.) Next to this a society of Florists was founded, finally an international service for flower delivery, called Fleurop, in 1907 (: Florist Telegraph Delivery, Interflora 1946). The first magazines for florists and amateurs were published, often illustrated with photographs, giving an idea what the arrangements should look like. New flowers were promoted as well as new ideas for arrangements.
Nevertheless, there was no single style. Many flower exhibitions show the influence of conservative, traditional, rustic, expressionistic, Asian and other ideas, often supported and discussed by society-people. In Germany even Princesses of the Court arranged tables for exhibitions. (ills.)

(ills.) Gollmer again, described the exhibition "Der gedeckte Tisch" in 1908: He pointed out the well-decorated tables of the wife of the famous architect Kayser, and the two ones of the artists couple Senft. He writes: "there was (also) a table announcing its heavy richness with carnations, literally packed, and on the four ends ostentatious bunches. Yet, who on earth could stand half an hour without getting a headache, and the flavor of wine and food was disturbed by the penetrating smell of flowers. A Rococo-table was over-decorated like a window display, and a Biedermeier-interior of the painter Weber was just like a third-rate antiques shop... The lilac Secession table with a decoration of cabbage leaves and tomatoes by .... Else Oppler-Legeband was ... as a result of its garish colors the most obvious mistakes." Gollmer is very skeptical when he described an arrangement by the florists Franziska Bruck: "the (picturesque...) candle-holder, the wonderful orchids in the vases, a small goldfish-basin with a bronze bridge, the asymmetrically strewn berries, the effective color-tone of table cloth and china... but it can be doubted if there will be a positive influence on our table culture."

On one side Gollmer was certainly right: The traditional decoration was present on the table until the 1930's: For a wedding with 50 guests one decorated a table of 25 feed in diameter with an ocean of carnations and moss. And a children's birthday was celebrated under a "fairy-tale parnassus". (ills.) Nevertheless, the variety of blossoms and leaves were reduced, also the way of pure ornamental decoration.

On the other side Gollmer's critique was wrong: The modern movement was successful because of strong personalities like Getrud Jekyll and because of new ideas, for example Japonism, which brought single flowers or single colors into the decoration.
One of the first was Edith Wharton who has thrown all vases and flowers out the house giving room little bouquets in slender vases. Therefor, it takes no wonder, that Gollmer was wrong, furthermore, what he criticized became a mere fashion because, just after the First world War, the modern German dining table banished all superfluous decoration apart from simple tableware and flowers. The decorative arts concentrated on simple and practical silver ware and china, as the Deutscher Werkbund promoted it. Ceramic Vases were created by the manufacture of Karlsruhe or Burg Giebichenstein, other vessels were made of copper. Some florists even used flasks, baskets and cups. Like never before the vase or vessel became as important as the bouquet itself. Franziska Bruck, criticized by Gollmer, who was also an author of books about table decoration was possibly the first one in

Germany developing a modern floral style for table decoration. One of the best examples is given in 1936 with a plain dinner service of Nymphenburg Porcelain, combined with a silver bowl by Emil Lettré and a greenish Cimbidium-Orchid.
Far more famous than other reformers was Constance Spry (1886-1960), who started as a florist in 1928 after nurse's training. In 1934 she employed 70 people in her London business. Her merits were to encourage many housewives to decorate their homes by giving many courses about flower decoration. Middle-class women, not wealthy enough to pay for their own gardener but well-off enough to dedicate their spare time to the beauties of the household were her clientele. By a matter of fact, since the end of the 19th century flower decoration had become more and more a domain of women, and more of them opened flower shops. Arranging flowers was seen as a job which – if done professionally – needed a special knowledge and artistry. (ills.) In 13 books Spry teaches the modern woman how to do it, focusing on questions like room color, daylight, forms of blossoms and of course the different shapes of vessels and vases. The highlights of Spry's career – recently the focus of an exhibition in London – were occasions like the wedding of Wallis Simpson with George of England. At that time flowers became a "must" for every dining table.

The time after the Second World War, especially in Europe, was characterized by simplicity and modesty: a single flower in a vase, sometimes accompanied by a stem or a leave made the whole decoration. (ills.) Iris, Chrysantheum, Freesia and carnations were the most popular plants. Often they were not really arranged which changed in the 1960s and 1970s. In some designs one finds the organic or geometric shapes of the contemporary architecture inscribed: kidney-shape, cubical and rectangular lines. (ills.) Later on often wild color combinations found their way on the table - red, purple, and pink were combinations, or shrieking orange and green, often mixed with an incongruent design of single flowers swinging around the center of the vase. In one example an orchid was placed in a tube which was seen as the highlight of modernism. (ills.)
The critique of such arrangements did not lead to modern designs but to a nostalgia for the past – a movement which also can be seen in fashion and architecture of those times. Postmodernism is maybe the right word to express the parallel of revival and modernism which has dominated the cultural life. A good example gives the modern Swiss florist Bedart who suggested a dinner setting inspired by the 17th century and another one by the 18th century, situated in the dining room of Pierre Balmain. In the same time the "Biedermeier"-bouquet came to life again: a small, flat bunch of flowers. This opened also the

view to experiments like the ones Ronaldo Maia introduced in his book in 1978 using creativity in decoration: strange materials, compositions, and sometimes flowers which were out of fashion like gladiolas or even vegetables. He was a specialist in using all different kinds of vases: bottles, fish-bowls, cake forms, test tubes – strange or even every-day materials which were seen in a fresh light when used with flowers.
The way of post-modernism is certainly reflected in arranging the table. In a German book the decoration of napkins and plates was made according to the models Louise Riss has proposed one hundred years before, and the London floral artists Keneth Turner makes arrangements worthy of a dinner for the Kaiser. The decoration of entire rooms is certainly linked to decorations at the end of the 19th century. Floral designers like Philip Baloun, Robert Isabell, and Dorothy Wako concentrate their work on such huge events, openings, balls etc. In that way the modest and elegant table decorations of the New York Florists Tom Pritchard and Billy Jarecki from Mädderlake's seem to have a more human and natural scale. They preferred to use single flowers, sometimes creating still lives. In this way they also refer to style passed over long time ago.
In Europe, table decoration is closely linked to people like Terence Conran who sets fashion trends and styles in the 1980/90s. The old roses of the English countryside, the lavender fields of the French Provence and the rosemary of Tuscany found their way onto the table since. Some subjects were reflected in the decoration: shells and sand for a summer dinner, rabbits and eggs for Easter... A single subject or a ground color tone had to be followed. New plants were coming in: celebrating new varieties of flowers, even field flowers, like Queen Anne's Lace or rape and weeds came on the table.

What did we learn about floral decoration this evening?
Hundreds of years ago the decoration of the table was a privilege of the rich and mighty. Precious textiles, later expensive metals and porcelain were put on the table. It is no coincidence that naturalism and enlightenment opened a room for bringing in the first flowers. It was possibly the high esteem of nature in combination with a strong responsibility for economic needs and philosophical ideas that was decisive for it.
It is an interesting fact that within the next 100 years the materials of the vessels became cheaper and cheaper: starting from gilded bronze we had to face blank pottery at the beginning of the 20th century, passing plated silver and zinc. And even the flowers became different.
We have looked to the little bouquets at the beginning of the 19th century which turned to huge arrangements in the second half. The contemporary literature clearly focus on grander households with

gardeners and an own green houses. The First World War made an end to this world.
The next step – which still forms our fashion today - was done in cottage gardens, preferring simple and natural flowers. Social and modern movements made flowers popular even on tables of the Lower class. Nevertheless, a new culture of table decoration was spread by florists who created simple and elegant arrangements.
The end of the fantastic table surtouts – which we love so much - was the beginning of the fabulous story of flowers on the table.
We can regret this but I hope that I could show you that the last 200 years cannot be called a decline of table culture, in contrary: We have learned to enjoy a bunch of flowers on the table. This lecture is certainly not a baroque one.