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A Single Rose Will Never Do

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PRESTON BAILEY is quite an arrangement.

Mr. Bailey, 53, an event designer who specializes in flowers, was wearing Versace (top), Armani (bottom) and Prada (boots) on Monday, sitting in a cream-colored club chair in his living room on lower Lexington Avenue, surrounded by flowering bougainvillea trees that had been tweezed like eyebrows until they were nothing but tropical leis wreathing the air — ocean breezes with blossoms.

Mr. Bailey was giving a party for himself and a thousand guests the following night at the Rainbow Room, on the occasion of the publication of "Preston Bailey's Design for Entertaining" (Bulfinch, \$45), his first book. But Mr. Bailey typically gives four or five parties a week for clients, working with event planners, so he didn't appear to be breaking much of a sweat. He was as natural as a pruned bougainvillea as he spoke.

"I'm one of those people who believe more is better," he said, angled in his armchair as though he were wearing that, too. "If somebody's going to send me Champagne, send me a case. Twelve bottles, not one."

Mr. Bailey let out a high extended melodic tone that sounded like someone calling in a herd of goats, which is how he punctuates surprise or approval or just makes a point. He also likes to slap the arms of his chair, bounce himself a foot into the air and then land on the hip he wasn't using before he launched.

"I think 'over the top' is the most fun thing in the world to do," he said, which is good, because that's what Mr. Bailey does.

Mr. Bailey is the man who recreated czarist Russia (in winter) at the Plaza Hotel in 1998 for Joan Rivers, for the wedding of her daughter, Melissa, to John Endicott, which included a cathedral aisle of 20-foot-tall birch trees painted white with a "snowfall" of 30,000 white flowers hand-tangled into the blue-lighted branches. The bill for Mr. Bailey's decorations was \$300,000. The couple separated this year.

Mr. Bailey designed the inauguration party for O, the Oprah Winfrey magazine, in 2000, with 12-foot-tall orchid trees and several thousand red flowers making a big "O." He has done fashion shows for John Galliano, and he did Liza Minnelli's Halloween party last week, with white not black. Mr. Bailey also designed Ms. Minnelli's wedding to David Gest this year. He has married as many people as a Las Vegas judge.

Anyone not from New York could fairly assume that Mr. Bailey lives in the grand ballroom at the Pierre, or in the penthouse at the St. Regis, or in the Temple of Dendur at the Metropolitan Museum of Art — the city's great party spaces. In fact, he rents a two-room apartment, where he lives with Michael Speir, a graphic designer, and two cats, including a deaf 22-year-old calico.

Mr. Bailey, who started his event designing informally in 1980, is self-taught. He had a men's clothing store on Third Avenue, which went out of business in 1977.

"We sold very tight French suits," he said. Two friends, Vicente Wolf and the late Bob Patino, interior designers, put him to work providing flower arrangements for their Park Avenue clients.

"I absolutely did not know what I was doing," Mr. Bailey recalled. "I can't tell you the amount of mistakes." That means a lot of dead songbirds, so to speak, when you are working the exotic in flowers. Mr. Bailey bought flowers from retail florists to cover the attrition when clients walked into party setups, to check on them, just as the arrangements were starting