

Belle of the ball ... a fairytale gown made from strands of million stars accented with ribbons of white dracaena leaves.



What a blooming clever idea for an opening statement at the annual SA Fashion Week to be held later this month.

Top floral designers Franz Gräbe and Coenie Hattingh have combined their talents and creative spirits with a global champagne brand to produce a world first: an haute couture line of gorgeous garments made with fresh garden flowers, plants, leaves, twigs, sticks, branches and grasses, from the wonderful world of flora.

The duo, of Franz Gräbe Flower Couture in Parktown North, have created a range of 17 delightfully unpredictable, highly innovative, fairytale designs for the Moët & Chandon Couture Collection that will open the Fashion Week.

There are outfits for men and women, and day and evening wear, including glamorous ball gowns. One has a corset of pink rose petals and a

skirt of million stars – a “noble version” of the common “gyp” conventional florists use with carnations on Valentine’s Day, says Gräbe disdainfully.

He and Hattingh have been busily working on elements of the new range, some of which are shown on this page. Customers who have seen them are already clamouring for their own one-off natural creations.

Gräbe says the new venture takes them full circle “from flower couture to couture with flowers”. The synergy of working with a leading champagne brand has meant designs that are bubbly, effervescent, flashy,

MAKING A FRESH FLORAL STATEMENT

also romantic, timeless and “reeking of elegance”, he says.

All are handcrafted creations, with Gräbe’s signature attention to detail in a “fur” coat in koala fern, acanthus leaves and a collar of hocus pocus roses in a dramatically deep black red, with white yellow marbling.

The process presents its own challenges to “find how far you can go” and “make the impossible real”, says Gräbe. He has selected hardy blooms such as roses, orchids and daisies, but also “temperamental” blossoms like the sweetpeas.

Outfits have a base of mutton cloth for under and outer

washed and worn again.

Gräbe has his ways of keeping materials fresh, including spraying, keeping them in a cool place – and “trade secrets” he is not about to divulge.

The collection promises to be a highlight of the SA Fashion Week, a memorable moment in stylish time. Since memorable moments are often celebrated with a glass of fine bubbly, it is “fitting for champagne makers to be aligned with a world-first fashion event that turns nature into art”, says Deborah Chilcott, Moët & Chandon brand manager.

For more information on Franz Gräbe Flower Couture