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Slow Flowers JOURNAL

By Debra Prinzing

FLOWERS & COMMUNITY

Artistic, educational or promotional, floral collaborations reflect a new model in the marketplace.

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In the imaginations of many floral designers, the medium of flowers is so much more than a “product.” Rather flowers are a vehicle to bring people together – for exhibition, instruction and to illustrate a greater good.

This month, the “Slow Flowers Journal” focuses on three inclusive, community-minded projects. Yes, they are beautiful, but they also have changed perceptions and deepened connections in the floral marketplace.

In Maine, a design workshop allows all participants

to teach and learn with visually enticing florals. In Pennsylvania, flower farming and floral design come together to embellish an urban cultural district and engage the public to see art in a new way. In Minnesota, a florist gives back to flower farmers by teaching them valuable design skills to benefit their growing practices for future seasons.

Each event is a reflection of time, place, people and flowers. We hope each will ignite your imagination to use flowers to build a community in your backyard.



The Thankful Bouquet

A floral designer gives back to growers by teaching them how to design with their own flowers.

Photography © **Amanda Nippoldt**, @amandanippoldt

Ashley Fox is a Woodbury, Minn.-based floral artist with deep roots in the garden, including a degree in plant and earth science from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, and an early position as an educator at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. She's worked in floristry for nearly 20 years, and in 2008 formed **Ashley Fox Designs** – a full-service floral studio specializing in styling and designs for events, editorials and installations.

Admittedly, Fox's desire to source locally grown blooms has verged on obsessive. "I was always seeking out the weird, the unusual, the off-beat. I would drive around sometimes for six or seven hours for a single event, stopping at different flower farmers around Minneapolis and St. Paul and even Wisconsin," she confides. "I would go out and forage. I would go to my Dad's garden, my friends' properties. I knew who had mock orange growing in their gardens in June. I knew who had the peonies. My brain was a map of a 100-mile radius, and I knew exactly when the florescence of grasses would bloom in a certain location so I could go and harvest. It was crazy."

Fox believed extreme flower hunting was necessary in order to make her mark as a florist who sourced fresh, local blooms for her nature-inspired designs.

Then, in 2016, the hunt got easier. Fellow St. Paul-Minneapolis-area florist **Christine Hoffman** of **Foxglove Market & Studio** shifted away from retail and opened a farmer-to-florist wholesale hub called **Twin Cities Flower Exchange (TCFE)**.

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This model just makes sense to me.”

Last spring, Hoffman asked Fox to teach a design workshop at TCFE to help others in the floral community gain appreciation for locally grown blooms. More than 35 florists learned as Fox walked them through her ordering and seasonal design

“It was a dream come true,” Fox says of the new venture, which satisfies her desire to source from multiple growers but saves hours each week formerly spent driving from farm to farm.

“My business could not do what it’s doing right now without the Twin Cities Flower Exchange,” she continues. “As much as I love buying from individual farms, I really like seeing everything in one place, so I can coordinate my design plan in one purchase.

process. “It was really fun and very well received, we heard,” Fox says.

Requests from flower farmers led to a follow-up class later in the year. “I realized they were also hungry for design instruction,” she recalls. “I said, ‘Tell me where and when, and I’ll show up.’ The farmers brought their own buckets of flowers, and I taught bouquet and centerpiece design.”

Lady Fern Flowers, a cut flower farm and design studio based at **Two Pony Gardens**, a *Dahlia* and tomato farm in Long Lake, Minn., hosted the July gathering, and 12 flower farmers attended. Fox brought along a model and photographer to document the festive and creative event.

“It was a marvelous experience,” Fox recounts. “I showed them how I design with locally grown product. Then the farmers designed with their own-grown stems, so every bouquet that they created that day was from their own fields,” the designer says. “It was so touching.”

Fox had a personal motive for donating her time to this community of flower farmers. “I wanted them to understand how I use their product so they will grow more of it for me and for other designers. I wanted them to see how I put things together, especially because I ask them to grow these weird things.”

Minnesota flower farmer **Barbara Pumper**, of **Gullywash**



1) Page 51: Hiring a model for the event allowed each farmer to capture professional photography of their Minnesota-grown seasonal bouquets.

2) For floral designer Ashley Fox (front row, second from right in blue), spending a day teaching techniques to local flower farmers was a rewarding experience that also deepens her ties with her key vendors.

3) Ashley demonstrated a centerpiece using sunflowers and accents.

4) Here are the happy faces of each farmer in whose hands are flowers each has grown and designed with:

Top row, from left: Michael Pursell of Late Bloom Farm, Susan Rockwood of Arcola Trail Flower Farm, Jennifer Nelson of Humble Pie Farm and Barbara Pumper of Gullywash Gardens.

Middle row, from left: Sarah Watts, Rachel Sannerud of Pluck Flower Farm, Sanna Beek of Ladyfern Flowers and Randi Greiner of Beezie's Blooms.

Bottom row, from left: Molly Gaeckle of Northerly Flora, Summer Badawi of Ladyfern Flowers, Jolea Gress of Green Earth Growers and Allison DeRungs of Flower Child Farm.



Gardens, says the day was a rewarding one. “Ashley’s comfortable yet intimate instruction intertwined seamlessly under a midsummer canopy of greens and dappled shade at the lovely Two Pony Gardens. As she designed a bridal bouquet with a selection of our finest blooms, she shared the art and the science of her subject. We then were able to confidently take those skills to heart and create our beautiful bouquets.”

The workshop symbolizes what community can truly mean when the growers of flowers and the designers of flowers collaborate, Fox points out. “It was one of the most heart-warming and moving experiences of my career. To be able to look into the faces of the people who make my job so exciting and say, “Thank you for all you do.”” ■

DETAILS

Ashley Fox Designs

ashleyfoxdesigns.com, @ashleyfoxdesigns

Lady Fern Flowers

ladyfernflowers.com, @ladyfernfloral

Two Pony Gardens

twoponygardens.com, @twoponygardens

Model

Cait Doty, @cdotyyy, @arquetteagency

Hair/Makeup

heathertrachsel.com, @heathertrachsel

Silk Ribbon

shastabell.com, @shastabellcalligraphy