



SOUTHERN HERITAGE

At Pine State Flowers, Maggie Smith pays homage to the past while also staying true to her carefree, all-local aesthetic

By Debra Prinzing

Enchanted by an early 20th century flower shop and its remarkable history, **Maggie Smith** left an arts administration career and became a florist.

An east Tennessee native who moved to Durham, N.C., in 2009 to attend the Center for Documentary Studies, Maggie has taken a nontraditional path into the floral world. She was familiar with the vibrant local farming community and knew there was demand and interest in locally-grown food and flowers in the Triangle Region, which encompasses the communities of Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill.

So rather impetuously, she took a chance when the long-vacant **Roll's Florist Shop** came up for lease in 2013. "I think of this building as kind of the heart of my business," she acknowledges. "It certainly inspired me to start **Pine State Flowers**. It has been really special to take something back to what it used to be -- from a time when florists grew all their own flowers -- and again focus on only locally-grown flowers."

She branded Pine State Flowers as "North Carolina's first exclusively local flower shop." With an emphasis on field-grown crops, unique foliage and heirloom flowers sourced from eight local farms, Maggie describes her aesthetic as natural, organic, and a little wild. "My philosophy with the shop has always been about supporting local flower farmers. That's where everything stems from and it comes at a time when people here are curious about local agriculture and where their flowers grow."

Entering the historic Roll's Florist shop is like stepping back in time. As Maggie explains, the 900-square-foot building is all that remains of what was once one of the largest floral suppliers in the Southeast. The original Roll's Florist included seven acres of botanical gardens, a flower nursery and five glass greenhouses (the last one was torn down a few years ago).

"**Fred Roll** emigrated here from Germany and was a florist



for the Duke family,” she explains, referring to tobacco baron **James Duke** who endowed **Duke University** and left his fortunes to daughter **Doris Duke** at age 12. To this day, locals who worked in the greenhouses or bought flowers from Roll’s Florist stop by Pine State Flowers to reminisce about its history or share their stories with the building’s young proprietress.

Maggie has saved and is preserving some elements from the shop’s past, including light fixtures, a 10-by-14-foot walk-in cooler, the copper-framed picture window, a charming rounded front door and shop records dating back to 1920.

By sourcing sustainably-produced flowers grown in the U.S., Maggie lets her customers know their money stays in the local economy. More than ninety percent of the botanicals used at Pine State Flowers are grown in just three North Carolina counties that surround the shop location. “I want people to know: This is the season and this is what North Carolina looks and feels like now,” she says. “With a relatively mild growing climate, I’m able to source local flowers from mid-April to mid-October, frost to frost. I can pretty reliably get local tulips as early as Valentine’s Day.”

In the winter months, she sources orchids from a greenhouse in an adjacent county, orders roses from Oregon-based Peterkort Roses, and offers houseplants, wreaths and dried flowers. Occasionally, Maggie works with **Cleveland Plant and Flower**, a Raleigh, N.C., wholesaler that stocks American-grown flowers from outside the region.

Maggie started Pine State Flowers with her own savings and she has grown it without outside financing. Walk-in retail customers, local deliveries, wedding flowers and a branded bouquet program for a small, local grocery store comprise her business channels. “Running a day-to-day flower shop helps me buy more flowers from the farmers,” she says.

Like any small business, Maggie is focused on growth, although her definition of growth is quality over quantity. “If I can provide a market for local flower farmers who want to experiment with different-colored roses or grow brown flowers, or take the leap to invest in a greenhouse and grow winter flowers, that’s where I’m focusing my energy.”

In her past life, Maggie’s work empowered other artists, so her mission-centric ethos empower flower farmers. She

breathed new life into an elderly building and in doing so, she has created a dynamic business whose heart is rooted in southern history, tradition and culture -- with a new Southern vibe. Time almost forgot Roll’s Florist, but reincarnated as Pine State Flowers, the tiny shop is a hub for farmers, florists and customers. “It’s very magical,” Maggie admits. “You just can feel how special it is being in here.” ■



Details:
 Pine State Flowers
pinestateflowers.com
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