

The Forager-Florist

Southern Sense of Place

Alabama floral designer Lisa Smith Thorne infuses the rich history of her region into wedding and event commissions.

Lisa Smith Thorne's designs tell a story, often inspired by architecture, landscape, antiques or family treasures. Through her studio **Thorne & Thistle**, she draws her clients into a world of Southern family traditions that evoke a sense of place and rekindle stories passed from one generation to the next.

It's important to her to observe and appreciate the beauty of Alabama's rural character and to understand how uncultivated, foraged elements of nature define that effortless look. "I often refer to it as 'seasonal relevance,'" she explains.

Lisa encourages couples to make their ceremony uniquely personal to the time of year, whether that means harvesting from local "popcorn trees" in winter (*Sapium sebiferum*) or trailing sweet autumn *clematis* from a fall bridal bouquet. "I have brides tell me after their wedding that they recognize a flower or pod I used and it brings back memories of that day."

Lisa is based in Auburn, Alabama, a college town located about 100 miles southwest of Atlanta, Georgia. Few flower farms exist in the area, so Lisa relies on foliage, vines and branches from her area to communicate seasonality and locale. "I forage from trees at all stages because I want the look to always be organic. I avoid purchased greenery in

favor of crepe myrtle branches, *Eleagnus*, southern Muscadinie wild grapes, red oak, *smilax*. I even use *kudzu*."

Yes these things grow wild and yes, many people take them for granted, but that's why Lisa loves Alabama's natural beauty. "We have privet with those gorgeous blue berries hanging off the side of the road -- it reminds me of the nature-crafting and floral crowns we made when I was a little girl. And now I'm doing it for my brides."

A Georgia native, Lisa moved to Alabama as a child. She has family land where she forages wild ferns, vines that climb tree trunks, as well as greenery and moss to grace tables and

altars. Her goal is to gather and style organic-looking bouquets that feel effortless, similar to old Southern gardens. "From bouquet to bouquet, my looser look is a little out of the norm of what weddings have traditionally looked like here."

Lisa often sources flowers she can't find locally from Florabundance in California, such as those featured in this story. She cuts from her garden and neighbors' gardens -- *hydrangeas*, *magnolia*, *camellia* and other classic southern ingredients. "I also buy from a lot of nurseries to get shrubs and perennials like *Artemisia*, which is a soft gray. Veronica also grows well here. But the roses I want come from California."

We asked Lisa to cre-



ate a narrative that reflects her personal aesthetic and she began with the setting. The 1836 plantation home, one of the first in Alabama, is now fully restored as a wedding and event venue at The Elms of Coosada, in central Alabama. “We do love our old homes here in the South,” Lisa says. “Here, the venue sets the tone, with moss-covered trees along the Coosada River.”

She was inspired by greenery from the site, crab apples, elderberries, purple beauty berry and draping moss. “I gravitate toward indigenous or native plants because I want them to fit in with the location of the wedding. I want to tie in the habitat that’s around us and make a connection to the tabletop and bouquet.”

Lisa also incorporates monograms, a classic Southern detail, into every wedding she designs. “They are a holdover from the past when most Southern girls learned how to do that handiwork, crewel work and embroidery, like I did,” she says.

“We use the monogram, or entwined monograms of the bride and groom, and carry those design elements throughout the wedding -- in the paper suite, on napkins, silver, even on the ribbon of the bridal bouquet. I have a calligrapher recreate the monogram on signage and table numbers for the wedding day. And we’ll often put the monogram crest on the cake.”

A lifelong trained eye for interior design and a love of anything handmade, foraged or restored combine to give Thorne & Thistle its artisanal style. To namesake Lisa Thorne, effortless doesn’t mean “thrown together,” but instead, a style in which all elements from the largest to the smallest detail are thoughtfully executed. ■

Details:

Florals: Lisa Smith Thorne, Thorne & Thistle
thorneandthistles.com, @thorneandthistle

Film Photography: Haley Bilunas, photosbyheart.com
 @photosbyheart

Venue: The Elms at Coosada, elmsevents.com
 @the_elms_of_coosada

Hair/Makeup: Amanda Hinton

Paper Goods: Empress Stationery, @empresstationery

Gown: BHLDN Weddings, @BHLDN

Silk Ribbon: Cocoon Silk Ribbon, @cocoonsilkribbon

Cake: A Joy Cakes, @ajoy.cakes

Model: Amanda Hinton

Blue Stemware & Chairs: World Market, @worldmarket



Lisa's timeless bouquet design includes California garden roses, Chinese elm, smilax, sweet Autumn clematis, beauty berries, limelight hydrangeas and Rose of Sharon hibiscus. Locally-dyed silk from Cocoon Silk Ribbon trims the bouquet with a vivid shade of blue.

The tree garland is composed with beauty berries, Chinese elm, red maple, limelight hydrangea, California garden roses, crape myrtle, smilax and Spanish moss.

The cake is decorated with sweet Autumn clematis and a gum-paste flower inspired by a just-picked Rose of Sharon hibiscus, a classic Southern bloom.

