

The Modern Language of



Slow Flowers JOURNAL

By DEBRA PRINZING

Teresa Sabankaya has been designing and selling flowers since 1999, but as a gardener, she tended to an expansive landscape long before she purchased a sidewalk kiosk in downtown Santa Cruz, Calif., and named it **Bonny Doon Garden Company**.

Heirloom roses, clematis vines, aromatic herbs and ornamental shrubs such as lilacs and hydrangeas went straight from Teresa's cutting garden in the nearby mountain village of Bonny Doon to her customer's vases. It was an old-fashioned approach to floristry that seemed natural to Teresa, despite what was happening elsewhere in the industry 20 years ago.

"I wanted to take my homegrown flowers and create magnificent works of art. I wanted my flowers to remind one of a beautiful garden, with movement, fragrance and romance," she recalls. "I began to grow my flowers thinking I could change the standard floral arrangement into a thing of ephemeral beauty, something that would trigger emotion and make you look twice and say, 'hey, didn't granny have those growing on the backyard fence?'"

Flowers

Designer reintroduces the Victorian language of flowers with message-laden posies.

Through Bonny Doon Garden Co., Teresa was a true pioneer of the yet-to-be-named "slow flowers" movement. All she knew was that she didn't want to have anything to do with the "commercialized flower arrangements" and the idea that "florists represented someone who shipped flowers in from other countries."

Three years after Teresa opened her shop, writer **Amy Stewart** happened upon her while working on the groundbreaking book, *Flower Confidential* (Algonquin, 2007). The two struck up an easy friendship over gardening, plants, and their mutual Texas roots. Stewart later wrote about Teresa in her book:

"Teresa Sabankaya has the kind of flower shop that you would dream about opening, if you are the kind of person who dreams of opening a flower shop. It's in a little green metal kiosk outside Bookshop Santa Cruz in coastal California. The flowers – all in-

teresting, unusual, old-fashioned, ephemeral, perfumy, not-your-typical-florist kind of flowers – dance and wave from buckets crowded around the stall. Her inventory is highly seasonal: in summer you'll find larkspur and poppies, and in winter it's all heathers and holly and berries. If you've been so busy that you haven't noticed that spring has arrived, you'll stop short at the sight of the pink cherry blossom branches bursting out of her shop in early March, and it'll make you resolve to slow down and enjoy the season. Even if you don't buy a flower – and Teresa would be happy to sell you a single flower – just the sight of her little stall will lift some of the weight off your shoulders. Anyone who doubts whether flowers can change a person's emotional state has never watched the people walking by Teresa's shop.”

Stewart continued: ” . . . The Bonny Doon Garden Company fit with my idea of how floral commerce must work – you'd grow some flowers in your garden, you'd buy some from a farmer down the road, and you'd put them in buckets and sell them to your neighbors.”

In the decade since she landed in the pages of Stewart's bestselling book and later, in **Michael Pollan's** “Botany of Desire” documentary, Teresa has continued with her mission of growing and selling flowers for the people of Santa Cruz. Bonny Doon Garden Co. now resides as a full-service floral department inside New Leaf Market, a popular community grocery store in town.

“I think we're well on our way to redefining what a florist is,” Teresa says. “It's one who would ideally grown some of their own greens or has an acre or so of blooms, also sourcing materials from other local growers and American-grown farms.”

Teresa's signature floral gift is a “message posy,” a contemporary reinterpretation of the Victorian language of flowers, “which I've tried to keep historically correct but also modern-looking.”

She has spent nearly two decades compiling old English and French reference books into a new, modern floral dictionary, one that also includes contemporary hybrids and cultivars not known to the Victorians.

By designing a posy with an intentional message or theme, Teresa believes her arrangements are more valuable to the recipient (as well as the giver). “When someone receives one of our posies, they are captivated by the sentiment and the idea behind it. People are always happy to receive flowers, but when you deliver a posy with the sentiment tag that names each ingredient and its meaning, the flowers represent a deeper level of meaning. They say, ‘someone has put this together thinking of me.’” Recently, she has added a line of Language of Flowers Posy Soaps, created by her daughter **Antalia Sabankaya**.

Teresa shares her modern *Language of Flowers* diction-





Birthday Wishes

- Coral Rose – longevity
- Lavender – luck
- Sweet Marjoram – joy
- Sage – wisdom
- Santolina – dignity
- Rue – grace



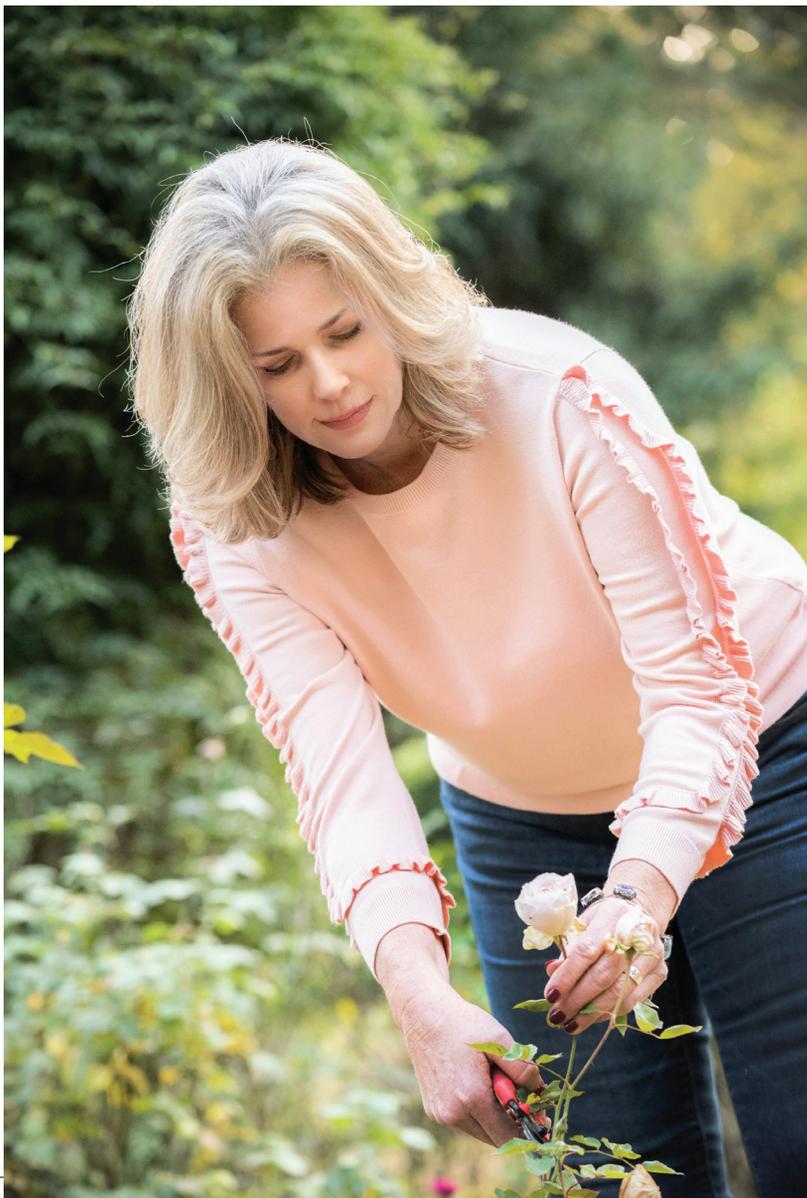
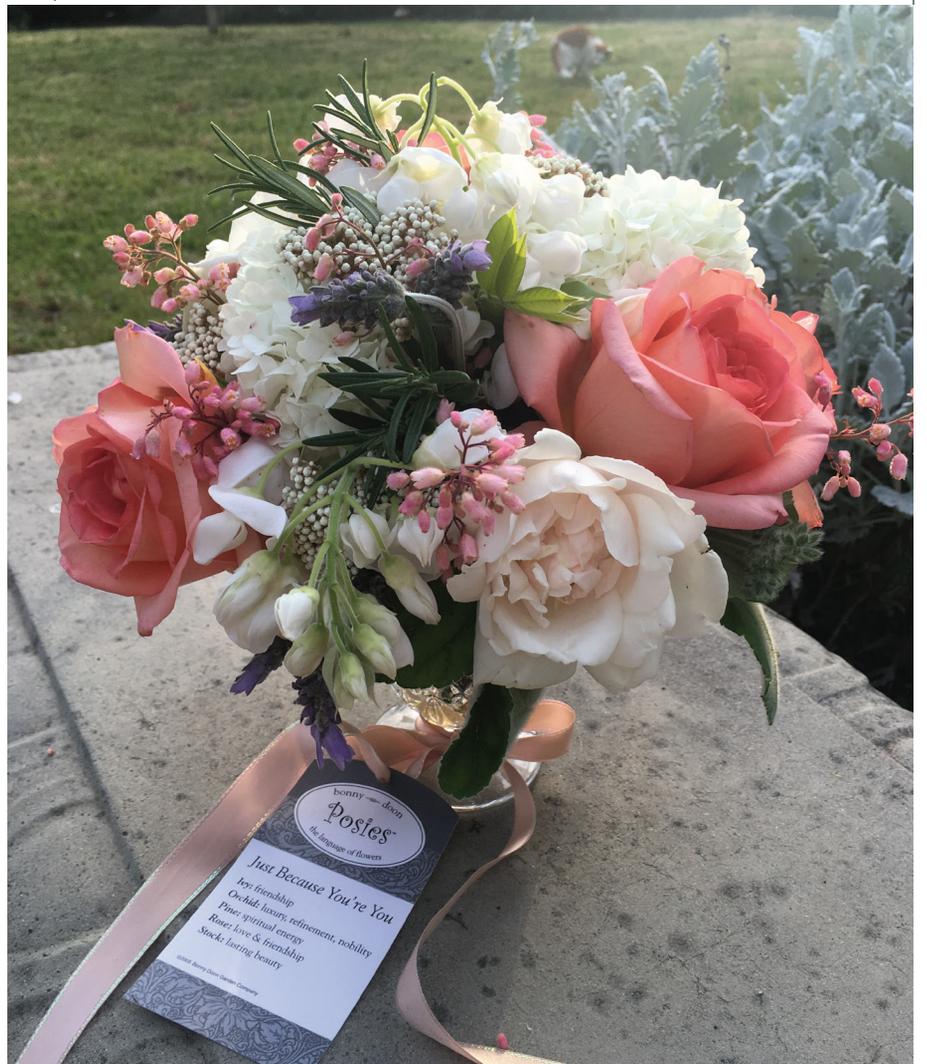
Sweet Heart

- Ranunculus - charming
- Heather - admiration
- Freesia - innocence
- Rosemary - fidelity
- Santolina – dignity
- Red Rose - love

ary on her website, which inspires clients' sentiments when they order a message posy – from *Alstroemeria* (Friendship) to *Zinnia* (I Miss You). She also suggests themed sentiment bouquets, such as “The Fortitude Posy,” which in recent months has been a bestseller. It includes botanicals that represent strength, grace, protection and love, for example.

“In today’s world, we enjoy an obsession in our souls created by the ephemeral beauty of flowers, but we’ve forgotten that flowers hold hidden messages,” Teresa says. “Once we discover their sentiments, so deep, true and honest, we can see flowers in a completely different way. Not only for their beauty, but for their perfumed language that can open up an entirely new dimension of flower love and obsession.”

The Posy Book, Teresa’s comprehensive guide to posies, will include her expanded dictionary of floral meanings, countless posy design recipes and the *Modern Language of Flowers* dictionary. It is scheduled to be published by The Countryman Press in 2019.





POSY 101

The technical definition of a posy is "a circular gathering of flowers, plants and herbs that conveys a message in the language of flowers," Teresa explains. Her designs take the age-old idea of communicating with flowers to create a single sentiment like "happy birthday," "get well," or "congratulations."

"A posy is much more than a beautiful arrangement of flowers. Posies can convey all levels of sentiments and messages that no spoken word can possibly compare to."

1. Research the meaning of 5 to 7 botanical elements that support the overall message. "You want a nice balance of focals, complementary flowers and enhancements like greenery and berries. Also, choose an herb, fern or other foliage for the finishing 'collar.'" Prepare flowers and strip all foliage from the stems.

2. Start from the center with a focal flower and rotate the posy as you work toward the outer edges. "It's similar to a pavé-style bouquet, but with lots more textural elements," Teresa says.

3. Spread materials away from each other, creating a domed effect. Then add the collar of foliage to complete the design.

4. Use bind wire to finish the bouquet, tying as high as possible because the stems need to be cut short.

5. Display in a low container, such as a glass goblet, Julep cup or mug.

6. Add a keepsake sentiment tag, tied to the posy with a decorative ribbon. "The tag explains what everything means in the language of flowers." ■

Creative Credits:

Bonny Doon Garden Co.:

bonnydoongardenco.com

@bonnydoongarden

Teresa Sabankaya: @teresasabankaya

John Kaemmerling Photography; all flower images: Garden Co.