

# FLORAL KNOWLEDGE BASE

How educators are teaching sustainable floral design.

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As more aspiring florists seek to gain new skills and knowledge, the varied educational options, formats and venues are on the rise. And yet, sustainable design courses aren't widely offered. Students in search of Earth-friendly approaches may have to dig deep to find mentors and teachers to share that knowledge.

In this and future articles, I hope to identify best practices and shine a light on floral educators who are incorporating green practices into their curriculum. Be it workshop series, single-topic classes, online teaching or more formal programs, such as certificate- or degree-based education, this Slow Flowers Journal series will document how sustainable floral design is being taught.

To kick things off, here are four models of sustainably-based floral education with details on how each meets the needs of the current marketplace.



## Flirty Fleurs Flower Workshops (Seattle, Wash.)

Alicia Schwede is the owner of Bella Fiori Events, a design studio, and the popular Flirty Fleurs blog for florists. Flirty Fleurs classes launched in 2012, although Alicia has taught design since 2009.

"Flirty Fleurs classes are petite in size, with the goal of making sure each attendee receives extensive hands-on and personal attention," she says. "My goal is to offer a professional, yet relaxing and encouraging environment for students to learn and practice in, plus, to connect with other students and form professional friendships."

**Where:** Flirty Fleurs does not have a permanent space for workshops. Instead, Schwede relies on a pop-up format. "I work with wholesalers, floral design studios and event venues to book dates," she explains. "I've held workshops at SF Brannan Street Wholesalers in San Francisco, at Garden Valley Ranch in Petaluma, Calif., plus at floral design studios in Seattle, Denver and throughout California. I hold my annual *Chuppah & Arch Workshop* at my property in Washington."

**Educational Philosophy:** I especially enjoy empowering people in the floral industry to become confident, profitable and enjoy the profession.

**Most Popular Series/Workshop:** The Bridal Bouquet Design and Pricing Workshop is one of my most popular offerings. It goes to show that everyone in this business wants to know how to price designs accordingly.



**Students Served:** 75 students per year

**Sustainable Education:** "My goal is to have as little waste as possible when designing. Using tape to grid containers or using reusable or recyclable chicken wire are two of my preferred mechanics to rely on. I also compost as much as possible. Plus, I harvest as much as I can out of my cutting garden to use in the workshops. I can often supply all of my own dahlias, lots of foliage and an increasing amount of garden roses and hellebores for design classes. I plan to continue adding to my cutting garden as a source of flowers for my students to use in workshops."

**What's up for 2019?** I'll start 2019 with a Four-Day Wedding-Intensive Workshop. Normally, I teach one-day classes, but past students have requested an extended course. I've put a lot of thought and planning into this workshop and I'm very excited about it.

**Details:** Flirty Fleurs, [flirtyfleurs.com](http://flirtyfleurs.com), @flirtyfleurs

## Flower Duet (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Known as "the Coleman Sisters," Casey Schwartz and Kit Wertz own and operate Flower Duet. The company was founded in 1999 with a focus on in-person flower classes, workshops and event flowers. Today, Flower Duet also runs an online flower school at FlowerDuet.com. "We released our first digital class in 2008 with a DVD called *How to Create a European-Wrapped Bouquet*, and we have appeared in 20 how-to guest videos on the PBS show, *Creative Living*, from 2011 to 2016," Wertz says. "We introduced our YouTube channel in 2008, and started the online



flower school in 2017."

**Where:** Flower Duet is located in Los Angeles in a 4,500-square-foot design studio. Online courses are shot mostly inside the studio, as well as on location.

**Educational Philosophy:** Everyone can learn how to arrange flowers at any age. It's a life skill. With our honed, step-by-step process and one-on-one attention, we've created a rewarding learning experience that keeps students returning for new classes over the past decade.

All of our in-person and online classes are designed to help the new student catch on quickly but keep the experienced designer engaged. We train using accessible floral bunch cutters instead of a floral knife. This reduces the intimidation factor. We also don't really critique in class. If someone asks for feedback, we question the student about what part is bothering him or her and provide guidance to fix the missing factor. Our student base is the floral



enthusiast or hobbyist. About 5 percent will pursue a career or part-time floristry, but most end up returning for the fun of it and bring their friends and family. Students learn about how to care for flowers, which encourages them to buy more and be less afraid of designing, which in turn, strengthens the floral industry as a whole.

**Most Popular Series/Workshop:** Live workshops: designing with succulents, peonies, dahlias and hydrangeas; online workshops; *Flower Arranging Fridays*.

**Students Served:** 1,600 through in-person or online and thousands of views on our free YouTube channel ([youtube.com/c/FlowerDuet](http://youtube.com/c/FlowerDuet)).

**Sustainable Education:** We talk about options to create designs without floral foam, and we highlight which flowers we source for the class that are locally grown. For all of our classes and demonstrations, we work toward an 80/20 ratio of 80 percent locally grown botanicals and 20 percent imported product. As part of our on-location classes, we offer an add-on tour of the Los Angeles Flower District where we highlight the flowers that are grown locally. We educate consumers on each flower's origin and how that may affect conditioning needs, vase life and seasonal availability.

**What's up for 2019?** Another full year of *Flower Arranging Friday Forever Classes*. For \$8/month, subscribers can access the 52 classes from 2018 and a new class every Friday in 2019 and beyond. Each month, we offer a free teaser class from the series. Our wedding courses continue, tailored to a range of students, from the DIY bride to the deluxe floral designer. We also offer event courses, tailored to specific challenges.

**Details:** Flower Duet, [flowerduet.com](http://flowerduet.com), [courses.flowerduet.com](http://courses.flowerduet.com), @flowerduetla

1) Students show of their creations in a Flirty Fleurs' corsage class.

2) Alicia Schwede of Flirty Fleurs, was joined by Francoise Weeks and Miles Johnson to teach a three-day design intensive. © Alexandra Knight Photography

3) The recurring Chuppah & Arch Workshop is held at Alicia Schwede's personal garden outside Seattle. © Becca Jones Photography

4) Casey Schwartz prepares to instruct online students the proper way to use a bunch cutter to trim a hand-tied bouquet for Flower Duet's wedding series. © Flower Duet photography

5) Kit Wertz finishes an online class featuring locally grown flowers including safflower and cabbage. Flower Duet's Flower Fridays Forever online subscription course is geared toward weekly seasonal flower design classes featuring a majority of locally sourced flowers and greenery. © Randy Schwartz Photography

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## FlowerSchool Portland (Portland, Ore.)

LauraLee and Bill Symes opened Sellwood Flower Co., a full-service retail florist, in 2015. While they have offered workshops and learning experiences all along, they formalized programs in 2018 with the launch of FlowerSchool Portland.

FlowerSchool Portland provides FIY (flower-it-yourself) workshops for floral enthusiasts, master-level events for those who wish to up their professional floral game, as well as longer courses for those who wish to learn the floral business or advanced design. Sellwood Flower Co. team members/floral designers, including LauraLee, teach the majority of workshops and classes. The school also invites celebrity florists to teach special workshops.

**Where:** Teaching takes place in the gardens surrounding Sellwood Flower Co. and in a light-filled studio space located above the shop. The school also hosts events at the Portland Flower Market and on the dock of the LauraLee and Bill's floating home, located a short distance from the shop.

**Educational Philosophy:** We strongly believe that florals should be sourced locally and seasonally whenever possible because the product is so much fresher and utilizes far fewer resources to move from the field to the vase. As far as design goes, our arrangements are inspired by what you might see growing in the French countryside; a little wild, natural-looking, lush, fragrant and verdant. We enjoy designing in footed vases, as well as in unusual or repurposed simple containers. We minimize mechanics and keep things as natural as possible.

**Most Popular Series/Workshop:** We believe that people are drawn to experiences and we pride ourselves on creating an experience for our students. We want them to have a great time when they are here. Aside from just learning how to design an arrangement, we



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offer meals, sparkling wine, and most importantly, individual, one-on-one instruction. We listen and adapt to make each event special for the participants. It doesn't hurt that we have an in-house chef who prepares amazing food and pastries for our courses. Our most popular workshop to date has been Floral Design 101.

**Sustainable Education:** We work to develop relationships with local growers and utilize their products as often as possible. Each season, we create new designs for our website and we strive to make the recipes based on local and seasonal availability. We rely heavily on flowers from Oregon Flowers Inc, Peterkort Roses and some California farms for winter blooms. With regards to mechanics, we only rarely use floral foam. We wrap our hand-tied bouquets in Eco Fresh wraps, which are 100 percent plant-based, compostable and biodegradable.

**What's up for 2019?** We are in the process of finalizing our 2019 schedule, which will be posted on our website early in the year. We have many more floral experiences and fun-filled flower-it-yourself events on the calendar.

**Details:** FlowerSchool Portland, [flowerschoolportland.com](http://flowerschoolportland.com), @flowerschoolportland; Sellwood Flower Co., [sellwoodflowerco.com](http://sellwoodflowerco.com), @sellwoodflowercompany

## Russian River Flowers, School & Events (Healdsburg, Calif.)



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Dundee and Ian Butcher founded Russian River Flowers in 2013, inspired by Dundee's experience at Jane Packer Flowers in London years earlier. She believes in encouraging students and clients to look at flower design with freedom and individuality. "I teach curiosity and confidence and love nothing more than helping my students find the beauty in what is growing NOW and to glorify that on their table or at their event," Dundee explains. "It is finding that connection to the earth



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and to each other through what is going on in nature that is so special." The business employs several full-time and freelance designers to produce programs and special events.

**Where:** Russian River Flowers is located in a 1,500-square-foot studio in downtown Healdsburg, in the heart of California wine country.

**Educational Philosophy:** I believe whom we look to for our inspiration is of utmost importance. If we only look to other flower designers for inspiration, we will copy them versus translating what we see artists from other disciplines creating.

**Most Popular Series/Workshop:** McQueens of London has co-taught classes at Russian River Flowers twice in the past two years, drawing up to 24 students from around the world per course. Ongoing programming includes one-on-one classes, group courses, privately booked classes and corporate team-building workshops.

**Sustainable Education:** Dundee started in flowers 12 years ago in a very formal environment in London. Now, she's coaxing her students to work with gorgeous, locally grown flowers, as well as celebrate the unloved and unknown – weeds, the half-dead branch and more. Russian River Flowers works with seasonal and locally grown materials in both its school and event design. Dundee draws an abundant supply of unusually beautiful botanicals from her substantial personal garden in the area. The school sources uncommon containers and scours antique stores and markets for repurposed vessels, and has commissioned local ceramicists to develop vase collections exclusive to Russian River Flowers.

**What's up for 2019?** *Designing without Borders* is a five-day course scheduled for May 2019. It will delve into the creative process of five different designers from varied fields. Russian River Flow-



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ers also has a fully-booked class tour to Kyoto to explore all-things-flowers in Japan, including Zen gardens, flowers in the tea ceremony, instruction from a Master flower designer and more.

**Details:** Russian River Flowers, School & Events, [russianriverflowers.com](http://russianriverflowers.com), @russianriverflowers



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6) (previous page) Flower Duet believes in educating its local wedding industry as well as its floral workshop students. For the past five years, they've co-sponsored a free education event at Terranea Resort where invited top event planners and catering managers from the Los Angeles region attend, network and learn ways to improve and expand their businesses. Here Kit and Casey teach attendees about creating flowers with meaning. © Flower Duet photography

7) Berkeley, Calif.-based floral designer Max Gill (left) with student Kailla Platt of Portland-based Kailla Platt Flowers, enjoying a FlowerSchool Portland gathering © Bill Symes photograph

8) A student project during a 2018 FlowerSchool Portland session © Bill Symes photograph

9) One-on-one instruction with Françoise Weeks (right) at FlowerSchool Portland © Bill Symes photograph

10) FlowerSchool Portland hosted teacher and floral artist Françoise Weeks © Bill Symes photograph

11) Russian River Flowers partnered with designers from McQueens of London to teach two recent design series. © Russian River Flowers photograph

12) Food styling with foraged ingredients at a recent Russian River Flowers event © Russian River Flowers photograph

13) Dundee Butcher in her private garden, a source of design ingredients for Russian River Flowers' workshops © Russian River Flowers photograph

# MADE IN THE USA THE STYLING MAT

Designed by a photographer, the innovative product is a portable solution for on-the-go creatives who need a beautiful flat-lay background.

All images © Taken By Sarah Photography

For several years, Sarah Collier of Taken by Sarah, a fine art and film photographer, noticed how impractical and cumbersome flat-lay styling boards were to use, especially for on-location work.

“Product photographers have been putting objects down on a surface, arranging them and then taking a picture from top down – forever,” she notes. “Then, flat-lays became a pretty big trend a few years ago with wedding photographers and on Instagram, but I couldn’t find anything that I liked using to photograph my own floral arrangements.”

Solid styling boards offered varied color backgrounds, but Collier found those cumbersome and hard to store or clean. “I kept saying, ‘somebody ought to make one that’s portable, foldable and washable.’”

It took a few years for her wish to come true, but last April, she unveiled The Styling Mat, which carries the tagline: Portable, Foldable, Washable.

“Literally, I was in the shower, which is where I get all my ideas, and it popped in my head: ‘Photographers have all these reflectors that fold up. Why don’t I just make a fabric cover for one?’”

Frustrated with her own sewing skills, Collier brought her idea to a seamstress friend and they came up with a prototype early last year. The first version included a fabric cover for a 43-inch round reflector, which folds to 15-inches – more than twice the size of rigid boards used by photographers for flat-lay projects. Like a pillow slipcover, The Styling Mat fits over a reflector and is secured by a zipper along the edge.

The larger, oval mat doubles as a background for photographing florals. “Last summer and fall, I was freelancing for Sue Davis of Fresh Designs Florist in Greensboro, N.C., and I realized she needed to get a picture of a bouquet. I walked around looking for a spot, but I couldn’t find anything that worked,” Collier recalls. “I thought, ‘Why don’t I make a bigger backdrop for florists?’”

She worked with her seamstress to create the oval version of The Styling Mat, which measures 40-by-60 inches and folds to 20-inches. When floral designer Holly Chapple saw the first sample at a Hope Flower Farm workshop, “she pushed me into releasing it more quickly,” Collier says.



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The covers have different fabrics on each side, giving stylists and photographers more backdrop options. Collier spends a lot of time sourcing beautiful, wrinkle-free fabric that she knows will complement whatever is photographed against it. She has found photographers tend to prefer neutral colors, such as tans and grays, while florists are drawn to blush, greens and dark blue. Options include velvets, linen-textures and faux marble-printed fabric. “I feel like I’ve become a color consultant,



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choosing the best materials and palettes for each type of customer,” she says. The items are made in small batches and can be customized for specific color needs; they range in price from \$179 to \$275, including the base reflector.

Producing The Styling Mat in North Carolina is one of Collier’s priorities. “Much of the textile industry here has shut down, but I’ve always wanted to do a business that impacts other people’s lives in a positive way. I like hiring local vendors to keep the manufacturing in the United States.” ■

## DETAILS

The Styling Mat. [stylingmat.com](http://stylingmat.com), @stylingmat  
Photography: Taken by Sarah. [takenbysarah.com](http://takenbysarah.com), @takenbysarah

1) The larger version of Sarah Collier’s Styling Mat measures 40-by-60 inches, making it ideal for photographing bouquets and arrangements.

2) A top-down view of the oval Styling Mat, used for photographing a tabletop vignette.

3-6) Four examples of The Styling Mat used for flat-lay and background photography.



# Q & A

## How We Do It: The London Plane

Community hub appeals with a feast of food and flowers.

**Who:** Katherine Anderson (owner), Jeni Nelson (manager)

**What:** The London Plane is a multi-faceted space with a full-scale flower shop and studio, co-located with café serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, a pastry kitchen, a baker of the famous Plane Bread country-style loaf, and retail shelves filled with all sorts of treasures, such as aprons, books, soaps, plants, ceramics and kitchen pantry items.

**Where:** Seattle, Wash., in the historic Pioneer Square gallery/artists' district on the corner of Occidental and Main.

**Social Media:** [thelondonplanesattle.com](http://thelondonplanesattle.com); @thelondonplaneplaneflowershop & @londonplanesattle

**About:** Co-owners Katherine Anderson, an architect-turned

flower grower/designer, and restaurateur Matt Dillon dreamed up The London Plane. Both Seattle natives, they wanted to create a community hub in Pioneer Square while reviving a somewhat forgotten neighborhood for which they both feel a fondness. Each of them has an incredible eye for interior design and together turned the former Bank of America building into a beautiful gathering space that attracts people from all around the world. London Plane trees line Occidental Avenue, hence the name. "Napoleon originally planted the species along boulevards all over Europe to shade his troops," Anderson says.

**Square Footage:** Around 5,000 square feet with a soaring ceiling and tall windows through which streams lovely natural light. Approximately 500 square feet is devoted to the floral studio and shop.



**Services/specialties:** Our flower shop offers everything from single stems selected from the make-your-own-bouquet flower bar to flower arrangements for delivery. We also offer weekly or monthly flowers subscriptions, floral classes featuring our favorite blooms, and the floral design of grand events and weddings. Our style is loose and garden-like with a particular focus on color palette, line and texture.

**Sourcing practices:** We strive to support hard-working Washington growers as much as we possibly can and have built friendships with many of them. The **Seattle Wholesale Growers Market (SWG)** makes this very easy on us, as a co-operative that has brought together talented American flower farmers from the region who grow all sorts of unique varieties. We make at least two weekly market runs to SWGM for the bulk of our floral product and then supplement from there.

**Seasonal sourcing/varieties:** A handful of growers deliver right to our door including our yearly dahlia and peony growers. Our dahlia grower has even canoe-harvested water lilies for us. We put them in a bowl of water and enjoy watching them open and close each day. It's a wonderful opportunity to get to work directly with growers in our region.

**Off-season sourcing practices:** We rely heavily on California product in the off-season and receive weekly shipments from **SF Brannan Street Wholesale Florist** in San Francisco, which is like opening a box of California sunshine every week with all sorts of interesting, textural varieties, such as eucalyptus pods, green almond branches and fritillaria.

**Best off-season flowers:** Forced-blooming branches, especially quince and magnolia. We like having them cut quite tall for us since we have the vertical space to display it.

**Advice for others:** The off-season allows for designing with less-expected materials and gives us the chance to think outside the box of the typical flower arrangement with "flowers and filler." In the off-months we celebrate dried flora and all the magnificent seedpods and grasses. We find ourselves drawn to the soft, muted color palette that can be composed with such material. We turn dried stems into little tussie-mussies, bouquets, swags and wreaths. Garlands can be another way to let greens have their spotlight when fresh flowers are less

available. Canyon live oak is a variety we are drawn to for its wintery feel; tallow berry gives garlands a bit of interest. Installations are outlets for artistic expression and bare branches often comprise our armatures. One year, we did our signature branch installation with Distant Drum garden roses from California, which was the most magical, romantic canopy to gaze upon.

**How do you market:** We send out monthly newsletters to announce our floral classes, and we then get to know our customers during our workshops. Referral and word of mouth from happy clients are probably what have helped our shop grow the most. Foot traffic certainly helps, given that The London Plane is a bustling place for diners who then take a moment to stop and smell the flowers. ■



1) The abundance of flowers and vessels is on display for all to see and appreciate at The London Plane. © The London Plane photograph

2) The host station at The London Plane bridges the transition between flower shop and popular cafe. © Debra Prinzing photograph

3) A garden-inspired floral arrangement from the designers at The London Plane incorporates botanicals sourced from Washington flower farms © The London Plane photograph

4) Jeni Nelson, manager, puts the finishing touches on a signature branch installation from The London Plane © The London Plane photograph

# How to Throw a Galentine's Party

Four creatives design a floral-centric event to engage lifestyle business owners and influencers.

All images by © Missy Palacol Photography

For Seattle-based floral designer and stylist **Tammy Myers** of **First & Bloom**, Galentine's Day offered the perfect theme for a photo shoot at **Urbane Restaurant**, in collaboration with photographer **Missy Palacol** and event planner **Callie Holcomb** of **Holcomb Weddings & Events**. They invited local Seattle area bloggers to be part of the 2017 Galentine's experience, produced as a festive girlfriend's brunch.

"That was my first glimpse of how influencers work – the mommy bloggers and the home décor bloggers," Myers explains. "I started paying more attention to their Instagram feeds and what they were showing."

She noticed product posts with everything from a piece of furniture or kitchen appliance to a handbag, often styled with flowers. "I also noticed that influencers tagged all those products in their post but the gorgeous flowers weren't tagged at all," she added.

On a one-woman mission to inspire lifestyle influencers in her sphere to consider the source of flowers, Myers invited a small group to attend a floral design party in her garden. She also invited several local flower growers and me, asking us to mingle with the guests and talk casually about the **Slow Flowers Movement** and the importance of making connections with the people behind the beautiful blooms. Missy Palacol photographed the party and guests left with a newfound awareness about the local flower scene, great images they could use in their feeds and new contacts for



their future projects and collaborations.

"A lot of a-ha moments happened that night," Myers recalls. "And I wanted to create more opportunities to influence the influencers."

That idea led to a collaboration including Tammy as floral designer, Missy as photographer, myself as writer and a fourth creative, **Karen Thornton**, owner and lead event planner of **Avenue 22 Events**, to coordinate the festivities.

We called ourselves **We Fleurish** and established our mis-



sion to support fellow creatives through events that offer stylish and meaningful content that those who produce blogs and social media content can share with their audiences.

Our first event of 2018 was a **Bloggers' Galentine's Party** with a female-only luncheon at Fogo de Chao in Bellevue, Wash. We priced tickets at \$75 per person and promised hands-on learning, an expansive menu (complete with signature cocktails), new networking connections and generous swag bags from sponsors.

The party took place in late January, selected to give influencers lead-time on Galentine-themed posts prior to February 13th and Valentine's Day.

"I think people are really eager to learn and connect at the New Year and so the timing of this event was right on," Thornton says. "People are reenergized, motivated to do something cool and work on their own growth, be it personal or for their business."

Forty women attended from a wide cross-section of industries, not just the original target audience of lifestyle bloggers. "We successfully helped them think about how flowers are an everyday product that we want in our lives and to better connect flowers with content across all the social channels used by influencers," Myers says.

Having enjoyed a sensory experience on all levels, guests left with inspired language and incredible photography for their posts, not to mention a centerpiece they designed themselves using local and domestic flowers.

As one attendee raved in the follow-up survey, "In addition to all the great tips I picked up during the educational portion of the program, it reinforced for me the importance of getting out, doing something new and meeting up with other like-minded women." ■



## DETAILS:

We Fleurish: [wefleurish.com](http://wefleurish.com), @we\_fleurish  
 First & Bloom: [firstandbloom.com](http://firstandbloom.com), @firstandbloom  
 Missy Palacol Photography: [missypalacol.com](http://missypalacol.com), @missy.palacol  
 Avenue 22 Events: [avenue22events.com](http://avenue22events.com), @avenue22events

## DONATIONS:

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**Ro & Jewel**, @roandjewel  
**Seattle Wholesale Growers Market**, @seattlewholesalegrowersmarket  
**Stargazer Barn**, @stargazer\_barn  
**Syndicate Sales**, @syndicatesales  
**Trucup Coffee**, @trucupcoffee  
**Victoria Emerson**, @victoriaemersonsdesign

1) We Fleurish worked with host restaurant Fogo de Chao to create a flat-lay image to brand the Galentine's Party, complete with pink iPhone case and pink signature cocktail.

2) Chalk art welcome signage and hand-lettered place cards, from Julianne DeShayes of @somethingtochalkabout greeted guests.

3) Networking and conversation took place organically, as each workshop table accommodated four guests.

4) A sample floral arrangement designed by Tammy Myers of First & Bloom inspired attendees to create their own centerpiece.

5) Tammy Myers presented her philosophy of using domestic blooms and sustainable design practices.