

Emily Thompson's collection of lush plants adorns the exterior of a Soho building that also houses La Mercerie Café and Roman and Williams Guild

Photo © Adrian Gaut



Servant of Flowers

Emily Thompson's eponymous floral enterprise pays homage to nature's seductive ways.

Emily Thompson is an iconoclast, an anything-but-predictable designer and artist, and owner of the NYC studio and shop that bears her name, **Emily Thompson Flowers**. She describes her aesthetic as “sometimes very off-putting for the unsuspecting ... I prefer flowers that are difficult and materials that are thorny and a bit repulsive.” If you follow Emily Thompson Flowers on social media, you’ll recognize this sentiment in her choice of hashtags: #madebywildanimals, #servantofflowers and #butcherof flowers, among others.

After several years operating both production studio and retail shop from a 19th century building in lower Manhattan’s Seaport District, two years ago she settled the consumer-facing side of Emily Thompson Flowers into a “very beautiful little jewel box” within an elegant SOHO environment that also houses **La Mercerie Café** and **Roman and Williams Guild**, an interiors and home furnishings gallery. “It’s meant to be a very collaborative mixed-use space,” Thompson explains. “We see it as a way that people, especially in New York, who

are out of touch with anything in the natural world, come into closer contact with it. We’re there to make contact – physical face-to-face contact – and to create an experience for people where they engage with our materials.”

The botanical seduction begins as you step into the foyer at La Mercerie Café. Light floods through tall windows and Thompson’s boldly-colored specimens are as sensory as the restaurant’s menu. “We have this captive audience gazing upon our design work while sitting down to their posh brunch,” she observes. The interiors vignettes at the Guild, flowered on a regular basis by Thompson and her team, demonstrate “how we approach flowers for domestic spaces,” Thompson says. “I favor a very low-key experience of flowers in the home. I think the conceit is always that you gathered them yourself from your cutting garden.”

In addition to the retail shop, Emily Thompson Flowers has a 1,500-square-foot studio on West 29th Street, near Port Authority (a former 1-800-Got-Junk warehouse), home to inventory storage and production areas. Here, Thompson

and her team of up to 15 fellow floral artists manage a wide range of floral commissions, including the runway shows for fashion designer Jason Wu's two most recent collections, and ongoing installations for restaurant clients, including Cosme and Verōnika. Restaurants appeal to Thompson because of the accessibility they afford to a broader audience. "We are a little seed in a beautiful context. That's one reason I've also hung onto retail in spite of its challenges. We send out deliveries all over the city every day." Thompson's website offers petite (\$125), standard (\$175), large (\$250) and custom arrangements that begin at \$350 for local delivery. Each arrangement is unique and made as "designer's choice." All are designed with a preference for seasonal, local, and specialty flowers and foliage.

As with collaborations with fellow artists, she values collaborations with growers and breeders. "In the past couple of years, we've started to create relationships with horticulturists whose focus is not cut flowers but plants. They've found our way interesting and compatible, producing materials for us that are outside of the commercial palette. We have a shared love for the medium, and together, we want to support biodiversity in this medium." One such partner is **Issima**, a Rhode Island-based plant nursery. "There's nothing like having this truck full of living treasures arrive to your studio and unload an unbelievable bounty of obscure specimens," she says.

Raised in Vermont, in a place she calls "the Northeast Kingdom – a place of uncompromising beauty," Thompson was deeply influenced by the natural wildness of her childhood. She was educated at the Pennsylvania Academy for the Arts, the University of Pennsylvania and at UCLA, where she earned her Masters of Fine Arts in sculpture.

Thompson grew up with a mother who was "a very serious gardener." She worked at a flower shop in college and grew monstrous *Agave* while a graduate student in Los Angeles. Later, she volunteered to design wedding florals for siblings and friends. "I started to realize that, first of all, I loved to be the boss and work for myself," she recalls. "And more than that, I loved the materials. They started to become a strong direction for me in a very particular way that I felt the flowers needed to be with one another."

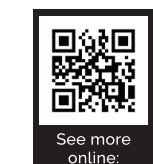
As a floral artist, Thompson knows the best work comes from her personal response to flowers and other gifts from nature she sources and selects, as well as from holding fast to her strong aesthetic vision.

"We never think that we're hawking flowers although, on some level, we are, and we try to do it with great skill," she says. "We're really trying to sell ideas. It's an idea of these materials talking to each other. They are living things. They just aren't products; they're here to pollinate and propagate. Even if I bought them on the commercial marketplace, they have had their own lives. We try to respect those materials and give them the life they merit." ■

DETAILS

Emily Thompson Flowers

emilythompsonflowers.com, [@emilythompsonflowers](https://www.instagram.com/emilythompsonflowers)



See more
online:

<https://qrs.ly/hzbcddy>





Top row from left:

Portrait of Emily Thompson (courtesy ETF); flowers at ETF, © The Ingalls; an arrangement of smoke bush (*Cotinus*), snake garlic scapes and turkscap lilies © Mia Soojung Kim

Middle row from left:

A botanical floral runway for Jason Wu Spring 2020, © Alessandro Garofalo; Emily Thompson Flowers at The Guild; Emily Thompson's collaboration with artist Mark Gagnon; Emily Thompson arranges with flowers, foliage, fruit and more (all courtesy ETF)

Bottom row from left:

Floral runways for Jason Wu Spring 2020 and Jason Wu Fall 2020, © Alessandro Garofalo