

By Debra Prinzing

2019 SLOW FLOWERS FLORAL INSIGHTS & INDUSTRY FORECAST

TRACKING FLORAL FUTURES



© Nancy Cameron, Destiny Hill Flower Farm

The floral professional's role is to connect consumers with the natural world through artistry and design. So it's no surprise that the emerging themes of this year's Slow Flowers Floral Insights and Industry Forecast include ideas that strengthen community ties with value-driven consumers and nurture entrepreneurial innovation in horticulture and floriculture.

Here is the annual Slow Flowers report on leading topics influencing the domestic floral marketplace, including cultural shifts and a convergence of collective ideas and attitudes. In recent months, I've shared many of these ideas at Hitomi Gilliam's Trend Summit 2019, the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers' annual conference and the Southern Flower Symposium. If you're an "early

adopter," these concepts may resonate or reinforce your current approach to sustainable design.

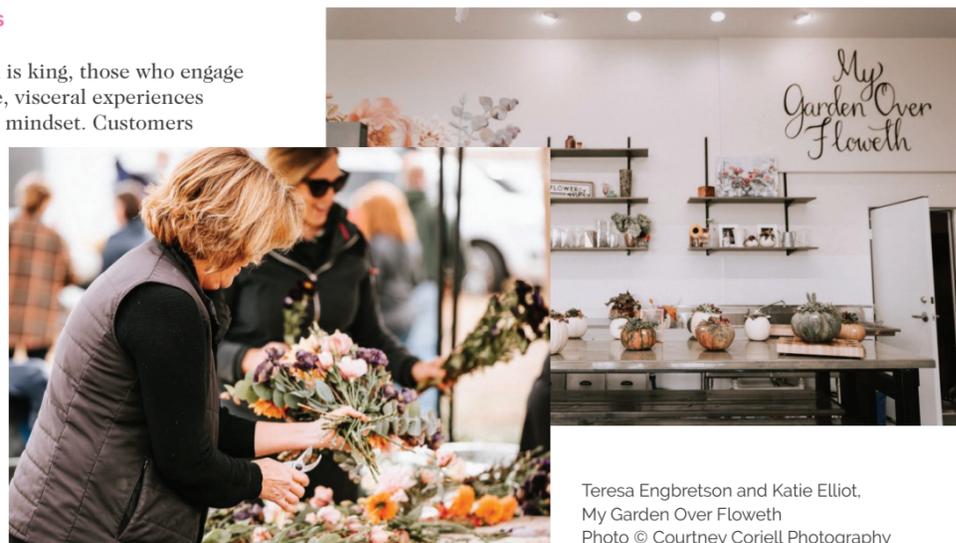
Methodology

For each of the past five years, I have drawn from a number of sources to develop this annual forecast. Sources include hundreds of first-person interviews for print and digital stories, input from the Slow Flowers Community, past guests of the Slow Flowers Podcast and the attitudes of progressive leaders in the floral marketplace -- farmers, florists and design creatives -- who together inspire this "floral futures" report. I hope you find these forward-thinking resources important and valuable. I'd love to hear your feedback and suggestions. You can find an expanded version of this report, including a free PDF, at Slowflowersjournal.com.

#1 Experiences, Not Conveniences

In a retail climate where Amazon is king, those who engage floral consumers in authentic, tactile, visceral experiences will break through the click-and-buy mindset. Customers who connect with you, your story, your flowers and the origin of those flowers are the foundation of a loyal tribe.

And while efforts and actions that strengthen our ties with customers aren't entirely new concepts, they are ones you must habitually practice, especially in today's cluttered and distracting marketplace. Events, tours, workshops and other experiential programming are critical -- and much more powerful than touching customers through social media channels alone.



Teresa Engbretson and Katie Elliot, My Garden Over Floweth, Photo © Courtney Coriell Photography

#2 Artisan, Not Mass-Produced

When you embrace the artisan ethos, the conversation moves away from flowers as a price-sensitive commodity to flowers with high, value-added perception. As botanical ingredients migrate further into the worlds of fashion and couture (yes, Beyoncé and her floral headpiece appearing on the cover of last September's Vogue comes to mind), they are quickly becoming objects of desire in a new way. The explosion of floral wearables, floral couture and jewelry alike, ignites the imaginations of your clients. Handcrafted products, as well as botanical collections, will differentiate you and your brand.

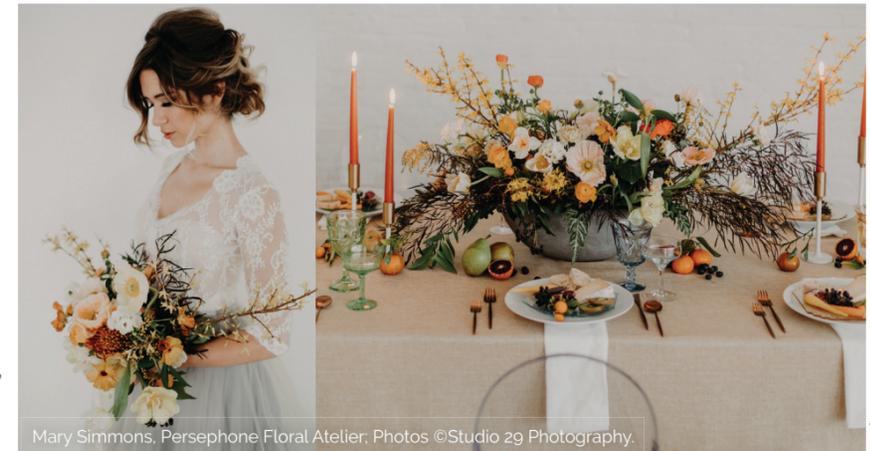


Annika McIntosh, Hazel Landscapes + Design, Photos © Heather Saunders

#3 Floral Expressions, Not Floral Arrangements

Credit for this phrase goes to Tomas De Bruyne, who uttered it during his presentation at the 2018 American Institute of Floral Designers' (AIFD) Symposium. It truly resonates as a design philosophy of infusing relevance into what is so often the day-to-day, production-based floral marketplace. Enticing the senses, setting a mood, emphasizing place and season -- these themes enhance what sometimes feels prosaic.

Uncommon ingredients, geographic uniqueness and botanical curiosities lend that unexpected garnish to arrangements, allowing a centerpiece or hand-tied bouquet to represent so much more than stem-count or price. Perhaps, by tapping deep into the inner artist, an "expression in flowers" will communicate more meaningful sentiments.



Mary Simmons, Persephone Floral Atelier, Photos ©Studio 29 Photography

#4 Environmental, Not Synthetic

Natural, tactile and organic are terms that emerge in this concept, one that returns us quite literally to the roots of this profession. Expressing our earthy ties requires pulling back the veil and revealing how plants grow, an unfiltered "behind the scenes" approach to our work. Tap into that curiosity and give your customers access to the process. Revealing root balls, seedlings, bulbs and tubers as part of the finished design is one easy way to underscore the ties to farmland and agriculture. Wild or cultivated, nature at all stages fascinates -- and providing access to unique sources.



Isabella Thorndike Church, Jacklily Seasonal Floral Design, Photos © Juliet Ashley Photography

#5 Vertical, Not Compartmentalized

More florists are becoming their own source for everything from cut flowers to value-added products (vases, accessories, linens, tools) as a way to capture more profits and reclaim revenue. The opportunity to “sell to yourself” has fueled the farmer-florist model, and increasingly, studio and retail florists are planting seeds to attain affordable luxury -- flowers to grow and harvest for their own channels.

There are innovative crossover and collaborative opportunities, as well, such as **April Lemly's Kamama Flowers**, (kamamaflowers.com) which has co-located with Peninsula Taproom, in Sequim, Wash., two businesses with a shared marketplace. Using #flowersandbeer to reach a crossover demographic base makes this strategy a natural, while also reducing overhead for two retail storefronts.



April Lemly, Kamama Flowers; Photos © Debra Prinzing

#6 Relational, Not Transactional

I keep returning to the oft-quoted **Seth Godin** saying, “People do not buy goods and services. They buy relations, stories and magic.” In today’s transactional climate, florists who can find authentic and relevant ways to engage with customers while also doing business are well positioned to ride out downturns or more competition in their marketplace.

Meaningful connections (back to *experiences* over *conveniences*) have inspired a number of florists to bring their clients closer. **Mary Kate Kinnane** of **The Local Bouquet**, a wedding and event designer based in Little Compton, R.I., hosts DIY floral design workshops that go well beyond a hands-on session. Her “Meet the Farmer” series provides opportunities for customers to tour and learn from The Local Bouquet’s regular vendors while deepening an appreciation for the studio’s values and brand.



Mary Kate Kinnane, The Local Bouquet; Photos © Maaike Bernstrom Photography

#7 Planted, Not Faux

In prior years, our *Slow Flowers* Floral Insights report has identified Cultivated Wildflowers, Flowering Native Plants, Modern Everlastings, Luxe Tropicals and the Woodland as new or revived floral styles worth noting. For 2019, there’s no denying that it’s the “Year of the Houseplant.”

The *Slow Flowers* Journal recently documented the creative ways retail florists are leveraging the current plant craze for their brands. For those who yearn to keep it local, sourcing plants is a mostly domestic practice, reinforcing the brand message they’re already communicating with local and seasonal cut flowers.

The power of plants extends further, with corporate greening services, planting workshops and education, as well as a broader design palette for traditionally flower-centric weddings and events. When you emphasize horticulture-based goods and services, you tap into the yearnings of a new customer base, be it houseplant aficionados or those wanting to deepen their relationship with the earth.



Baylor Chapman, Lila B. Design; Photo © Milou and Olin Photography

#8 Transparent, Not Obscured

There are two different, but equally relevant, themes reflected by the idea of transparent versus obscured. The first relates to many of the items in this report, the idea of being authentic, aka transparent, in how one’s brand is presented to the marketplace. Transparency in our business and sourcing practices is more important than ever. This means aligning images, content, partnerships and practices with the brand values we want to represent.

There is another idea of transparency that has emerged and captured my attention, and that is an aesthetic one. The open, airy look continues and many progressive and experimental designers are playing with negative space in their arrangements. This approach isn’t a replacement for the popular concept of seasonal abundance, but it is an approach that heightens the viewer’s attention on each flower, be it a focal or an accent bloom, and one that allows stems to emerge above and beyond the dense center of gravity of a bouquet or centerpiece. Transparent design seems to defy gravity, in fact. I’ve been drawn to this approach by witnessing the alluring approach of a number of designers recently.



Stephanie Downes, Vanita Floral; Photo © Charity Burggraaf Photography

#9 Multi-Seasonal, Not Single-Use

Extending the season is a popular concept in flower farming, and now savvy florists are reimagining fresh annuals as dried everlastings, or flowers that have an afterlife as seed heads once petals have dropped. Further, when ingredients can serve multiple uses -- equally valued for the bloom, foliage, bark and pod -- they become valuable design elements.

The inspiration here is having an appreciation for all phases of a perennial, shrub or tree. Celebrating the seasonal cycles is yet another way to connect customers with nature while also shifting the idea of beauty away from a flawless hothouse flower and towards nature’s imperfection.



Photo © Charles Little & Co.

#10 Community, Not Solitary

We’ve seen the phrase “community over competition,” and I, for one, believe that is the only way to differentiate ourselves in the noisy global marketplace where authentic connections are rare. We’re seeing Maker Collectives where florists and growers merchandise flowers and arrangements alongside specialty food or art venues. We’re amazed at the proliferation of wholesale hubs where flower farmers connect directly with floral designers.

Co-working spaces, the sharing of infrastructure and equipment between flower farmers, collaborative floral installations for public good . . . these actions are taking place more often than ever before as intentional and meaningful ways to create community and foster a sense that we are part of something bigger than commerce. Rather, a mission to change our own marketplace for better results.

There’s more! Visit Slowflowersjournal.com to download a PDF of this report and to read our two bonus insights for 2019. ■



Photo © Christine Hoffman, Twin Cities Flower Exchange