

FELL IN LOVE WITH FLOWER GARDENING AFTER I BEFRIENDED

flower farmers. At the time, 15 years ago, their branch of domestic floral agriculture – the flower farm – was often unrecognized by the farming world as a “legitimate” profession.

But the farmers who formed the Seattle Wholesale Growers Market in 2011 welcomed me into their circle and their embrace of my storytelling has made all the difference in shaping the Slow Flowers Movement. I wrote about SWGM’s origins in “The 50 Mile Bouquet,” published in 2012. In a chapter called “Brimming with Blooms,” I quoted Vivian Larson of Everyday Flowers, one of the Market’s founding board members. She explained: “Everybody has taken a risk. We’ve gone to an uncomfortable place and stepped outside our boundaries. Technically, everyone here is a competitor, but we’re operating from a good-business point of view, and we all feel that it’s best to take care of our customers first.”

Vivian went on to compare this dynamic new hub for local flowers to the baseball field in the iconic 1989 film “Field of Dreams.” “We built it and they came,” she said. “The thing that really makes us unique is that we are a group that works together. Not one of us could have done this alone – we all make each other better, and that’s what a cooperative really is.” Her comments hint at what I believe are the three essential elements to SWGM’s success: The Farmers. Their Flowers. And The Designers whose floral artistry elevates both.

Flowers are at this intersection, of course, an enormous collection of hundreds of species, which explode in beautiful and seasonal abundance and bring together these two groups of passionate and talented folks. If you’ve heard the decade of my Slow Flowers Podcast episodes or read any of my profiles of domestic flower growers, you’ve heard me talk about this magical connection: *When we meet the flower farmer and hear their*

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story, our perceived value of those blooms increases. We talk about “putting the farmer’s face on the flower,” an idea that has flourished at SWGM.

All of us who cherish local flowers are connected by a common thread. We are curious plant fanatics. We get excited by the “hunt” and thrilled by the “find.” Farmers and florists alike cherish whimsical plant forms, precious varieties that only bloom for a few weeks each year, and mind-blowing petal palettes that nature (or breeders) produce for our delight.

I believe there is an artist in each of us. Creativity is a trait that needs to be developed and nurtured. And what nurtures floral artistry? It begins here at SWGM, where there is a wonderland of botanicals to choose from, supplied by the growers, our fellow artists.

All this talk of art and inspiration is appealing. But it’s also important to recognize that the growth of domestic floral agriculture has created a new economy for our region. Prior to the advent of the Seattle Wholesale Growers Market, you could find local flowers at places like farmers markets and summer you-pick fields. Local flowers even occasionally appeared at some grocery stores and in the coolers of some conventional wholesale outlets. But it wasn’t easy. In fact, it was so hard that many florists just threw up their hands and proclaimed: “local flowers simply are not available.” We know the story is entirely different today.

Believe me when I say that the landscape has changed. For the better. This community of flower farmers – and their influence on locally-focused floral design – has been a game-changer. And that’s cause for celebration!

DEBRA PRINZING

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