

The Desert as Floral Canvas

Arizona blooms when two farmer-florists collaborate.



Terri Schuett, Happy Vine Flowers (left) and Kate Watters, Agave Maria Botanicals.

Kate Watters, owner of Agave Maria Botanicals, and Terri Schuett, owner of Happy Vine Flowers, are both well aware of the assumptions made about growing flowers in Arizona.

“People think of Arizona as palm trees, cacti, sun and heat,” Schuett says. “They don’t realize we have four seasons. We have hellebores blooming under blankets of snow; there are *Ranunculus* crops in the spring, sunflowers in the summer, chrysanthemums in the fall. Hundreds of flower types are grown all over the state, all year round. There is so much floral diversity in Arizona.”

Watters and Schuett met while interning for Paulden, Ariz.-based flower grower **Whipstone Farm**. Schuett is a veteran of local floral retail and a certified Arizona Master Florist and is now affiliated with the **Agribusiness & Science Technology Center at Yavapai College** in Prescott. Watters has an extensive background in botany, ecological restoration and agriculture, coming to floristry while establishing flower and vegetable gardens at **Orchard Canyon on Oak Creek**, a 10-acre destination resort in Sedona. The two women now partner to teach workshops and design florals for area weddings, drawing botanicals from Schuett’s cutting garden in Prescott Valley and flowers from the greenhouse and gardens managed by Watters.

At the peak of the season last August, the women gathered real-life models, flowers and photographers to capture the best of their region for a series of styled photoshoots.

“We have a deep desire to create meaningful florals and tell the stories of the people and places with flowers grown sustainably here in Northern Arizona,” Watters says. “We also wanted to share color, texture and unique flowers that you can find seasonally and locally.”

They titled the series “This is Arizona: Flowers, Faces, Places,” and produced three visual stories ranging from a seasonally inspired wedding to floral portrait sessions.

“Other than the moss, everything in these designs was locally sourced, including the flowers grown in the



garden I tend and the native foliage foraged from our 10-acre property bordering Coconino National Forest, as well as from Terri's Happy Vine garden," Watters says.

Orchard Canyon is a popular Sedona wedding venue, and Watters' Agave Maria Botanicals is a preferred vendor for events on the property. Bounty from the gardens there influenced the cascading bridal bouquet and floral arbor ingredients, including *Dahlia*, *Lisianthus*, Queen Anne's lace, fennel, dusty miller, scented geraniums, ivy and two types of *Amaranthus*. Many of these botanicals were repeated in the foam-free arbor design, which also included rosemary, oregano, *Pyracantha*, table grapes and canyon grape vines.

The two portrait projects are more personal, reflecting each model's story. For Keo, an indigenous Diné (Navajo tribe) and sociology student at Arizona State University who prefers the pronouns them/they, Watters and Schuett based the designs on Keo's creative vision for the future. "They wanted to share an indigenous perspective through digital storytelling and clothing design," Watters points out.

Schuett designed a botanical ring and earring that features *Dahlia*, succulents, *Celosia*, strawflower, 'Queen Red Lime' *Zinnia* and 'Hopi Red Dye' *Amaranthus*. The headpiece, designed by Watters, incorporates four types of *Dahlia*, Aztec marigolds, *Yucca* pods and many of the same elements used in the botanical jewelry.

"We created the 'staff' to honor Keo's indigenous warrior identity using a foraged *Yucca* stalk, as well as burgundy *Amaranthus*, native-foraged manzanita, silk tassel, juniper branches, wild turkey feathers and a strand of miniature lights," Watters adds.

A third portrait session captures Molly Wood, an assistant gardener at Orchard Canyon, and the edible flowers she and Watters grow to supply the menu for its farm-to-table restaurant. The gardens produce more than 100 types and varieties of flowers, herbs and food for the restaurant's kitchen. The orchard produces fruit from 15 types of apple trees, 10 varieties of peach trees, cherry trees and more. In all, it is a place of beauty open for guests to come and learn.

"And it's our mission to get people to eat as many flowers as possible," Watters says. ■

DETAILS

Venue: Orchard Canyon at Oak Creek

enjoyorchardcanyon.com, @enjoyorchardcanyon

Designers: Agave Marie Botanicals

agavemariabotanicals.com, @agavemaria

Happy Vine Flowers: @happyvineflowers

CREATIVE CREDITS

BRIDAL SHOOT

Photographer: Hailey Golich

haileygolich.com, @haileygolich

Model/HMU: Kylee DaLuz, @theotherkyleeig

NATIVE NAVAJO/EDIBLE FLOWERS PHOTOSHOOTS

Photographer: Kristen M. Caldon

kmcaldon.photoshelter.com, @photographicexplorer

Model: Keo, @thatonerezkid

Model: Molly Wood, @mollywoould



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