



LUXURY GOODS

Former fashionista reflects on moving from
couture to bespoke floral design.

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Photos © Becca Louise Photography



Her fashion career began at high-end department stores like Saks Fifth Avenue and I. Magnin & Co., and later, led to top sales and marketing roles for cashmere and couture designers. Her creative influences range from a 1970s suburban childhood in Santa Clara, Calif., once home to thousands of acres of cherry and plum orchards (now the heart of Silicon Valley), to studying art and filmmaking – and fashion runways around the globe.

In 2013, after sending her youngest child off to school, **Susan Chambers** was drawn to floral design. She had read an article about the **Russian River Flowers School** in Sonoma County's Healdsburg. "I needed something creative. I was missing that breath of life through creating," she recalls.

The pivot from fashion to floral design became Chambers' self-described "master's program." After a year of private courses, the designer traveled to London to take a workshop at the famed **McQueens Flower School**.

The one-week intensive course was a transformative experience for Chambers, who loved returning to London where she was once an art student. She has since continued her studies at McQueens on a number of occasions, gaining confidence in classical skills as well as in her own aesthetic.

Photo © Wagner Photography





“I learned that event floristry existed and that I could tell a story with flowers,” she recalls. “To know that I could create a space, create a moment of discovery when the beauty of flowers could make people gasp when they walk into a room ... it was so liberating.”

bloominCouture got its start five years ago when a friend proposed that Chambers design the flowers for a corporate event. The studio has since evolved, mostly through word-of-mouth and referrals. Weddings represent a small portion of bloominCouture’s clientele, balanced by “whole home florals” for San Francisco clients who appreciate how Chambers designs arrangements that reflect their interiors and artwork, as well as for holidays. These commissions are the antithesis to the intensity of a wedding.

“It becomes a personal relationship that we have of getting to know their style and their events; what rooms need florals and what colors they love,” she explains.

Five years after forming her studio, Chambers realizes that her bloominCouture floral enterprise is similar to documentary filmmaking and visual merchandising for top fashion brands. “I am creating a visual space and telling a story,” she says. “When I use an unexpected element in an arrangement, whether it’s a funky seedpod or a branch of blackberries on the stem, the flowers become the texture. They become the fabric.”

Seasonality is at the core of Chambers’ philosophy, and she relies on a number of flower farms located from Half Moon Bay to Petaluma. Sourcing flowers locally actually saved an early wedding from disaster, she recalls. When a delivery truck carrying her rose order broke down and couldn’t get to the San Francisco Flower Mart in time, Chambers telephoned a childhood neighbor in Santa Clara, about one hour south of San Francisco.

“I asked, ‘Do you still have the beautiful persimmon tree?’” Not only did the neighbor cut fruit-laden persimmon

tree branches for Chambers’ event, she harvested old roses and branches of citrus trees – and drove the haul into town for her.

“That is still one of my favorite weddings,” the designer maintains. “The wedding took place under redwood trees. We had the persimmons on the branch, coming out of the arrangements. It was just beautiful, and it felt so organic with the fog rolling in. I thought, ‘This is my childhood.’”

That experience has taught Chambers to observe California’s natural environment with appreciation. “I get that rush like I would in fashion, when we would ask, ‘How are we going to do this?’ and then we’d figure it out. It’s a shift in perspective. In Northern California, I have such amazing options. I can cut jasmine year-round from my garden. There is an abundance of *Eucalyptus* here in San Francisco. I look up and see pine cones or cool seedpods and think, ‘I could use that. Let’s be unexpected. Let’s use nature in a new way.’”

Chambers believes the romance and beauty of visual arts can transport the viewer, be it watching a fashion show or enjoying a dinner party. “I am completely captivated by the conceptual magic of ephemeral beauty,” she says. “The thought that as the lighting changes, the nuance and mood of the room shifts; that something as simple as fruit scattered on a table softens the formality and adds intimacy. Now my medium is flowers, but it’s expanding, and I wouldn’t be at all surprised to find myself back in fashion – this time creating the backdrops of runway shows.”

DETAILS

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