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I Want to Thrive A Cut Above: Anne Bowen and Stems

BY MEGAN ABIGAIL CHANDLER

It is a fleeting glimpse. One day it is there, staring you in the face as a smattering of color. It breathes life into any space and any moment. It is delicate. It is ornate. It is gift-worthy and picture-worthy and note-worthy. Often, these little morsels escape us, whether by a short-lived existence or by being taken for granted; however, it is the measure of beauty that something can catch an eye despite being so very small.

It is a flower, a simple concept that you plucked from schoolyards as a little girl, that you slipped on your date's wrist or lapel or that you clutched while marching down the aisle. These tokens have brightened up lives and rooms for centuries. Nevertheless, in the art of flower arranging, there often lacks a certain creativity that sets 21st-century flowers apart from your grandmother's arrangement. Or at least, that's what Anne Bowen says; she is budding owner of Stems.

"I will find inspiration more from a hardware store than from a flower shop," the youthful florist says on a brisk November morning over lattes. The woman uses feathers, cotton stalks, lettuce, serving pieces, juice glasses, black beans ... really whatever she can get her hands on. She has an aesthetic perspective that shows young people that flowers are for appreciating and integrating. It is Anne's clever vision that has lent her shop, Stems, on Cannon Street, its



PHOTOGRAPH BY MEGAN ABIGAIL CHANDLER
Pictured in her Cannon Street studio, Anne Bowen is surrounded by her flowers. Here she teaches cut flower arranging, creates her masterpieces and manages her thriving business ... she's under 30 and thriving!

success in these first few months of business.

Opening in January of 2010, Anne started Stems out of what was apparently a gutted cinderblock building on Cannon. It is impossible to drive down a cluttered area like parts of this street and miss her white shop-monument with wide windows and loads of space. Looking through one window you could easily see straight through to another. It is a home of inspiration, catered to by fragrances and light.

The renovation of this building was no piece of cake, but once Anne decided that flower arranging was what she wanted to do, there was no holding her back. A self-proclaimed stubborn one, she started out as an art major at the College of Charleston where she anticipated she would ease into graphic design. Instead she found her first job after graduating at a florist's shop, and she stayed in the line of work when she realized she stumbled

into her calling. Sometimes it's like that, and with six weeks of careful conditioning at a floral school in London, she was destined to own Stems.

The stint in London was what really brought her to her peak of floral design, because of the vast Western European appreciation for cut flower arranging and gardens. This grandeur dates back to times when American gardens were more for growing food for surviving and less for growing flowers for enjoyment. Today, she takes this love of flowers to the next level as she teaches a variety of classes on flower arranging in her studio.

With her creative genius taking off through word of mouth, Anne has been incredibly blessed with a receptive audience of Charlestonians eager to learn younger and fresher ways to display this perishable artistic medium. However, Anne doesn't deny that, at such a young age, it has been tricky to be business-minded all

the time.

"Still, to this day, it is 100 percent trial and error. I've made every mistake that I could, and I continually do on a day to day basis," she laughs. And despite the odds, she has come to realize that being her own boss means biting the bullet and saying that she can't do it all. She's recently brought on a small staff after doing it on her own for nine months, but she hasn't reduced her role in the company.

"It just made sense to do it on my own (start the business) so that everything I put out adheres to a code of ideas that I have." Of course, she has hopes that in the future she and her staff will challenge each other everyday, as her confidence in those whom she surrounds herself with abounds. She is ready to sacrifice a Saturday to make an impression on the event in which she was entrusted, and that is the standard of respect her company commands — a code that translates from aesthetics to customer service.

get to you through several countries is something hard to wrap your head around. For Anne, telling a bride that her flowers couldn't get to her because of an international disaster took a touch of compassion and creativity. Didn't think you needed that from your florist, did you?

But the key is to understand and appreciate the gift of a flower. For her London-based clients who came into her school-slash-operating flower shop as regulars, she saw the joy that a £2 posey gave them. She is bringing that back to the spirited streets of Charleston, and showing each and every one of us that flower arranging hinges on the creative eye and spirit of the arranger.



PHOTOGRAPH BY BLAIR HALFORD
To create texture, Anne stacked two vases one inside the other and surrounded the outer vase with cut greenery. The step-by-step is a phenomenal showcasing of Anne's immense talent!