

# From Former Life to Flower Life

BY MICHELLE FITTS

A “leap of faith” is how I’d summarize my flower journey. I made the huge decision to leave my secure corporate career of seven years to start my own floral design business, despite having no experience at all.

When my husband and I moved to Maine from Boston in 2016, the iconic image of a fork in the road appeared to me. I had to ask myself, “What am I willing to sacrifice in order to pursue something I love?” This was a difficult and scary question, not only for me but also for my husband and our future goals as a family. So if I was going to toss my security blanket of a job out the car window as we headed up north to our new life in Maine, then I needed to find my “passion.” I was always pretty scared of that lofty thing called “passion,” as it elicited stressful thoughts of individuals who had dedicated their lives to a single pursuit of divine perfection. Yet, I’ve always been interested in multiple creative areas, from singing and drawing to crafts, antiques, and interior design. I attribute these creative abilities to my mother, because I grew up with the freedom to explore a range of talents; however, I still needed to decide on just one, but which one would it be?

I also knew it was important for me to find an art form that was relationship oriented. It’s been so fulfilling to establish friendships with all my clients and fellow female entrepreneurs. My business is built upon a sense of community, trust, and appreciation for art. One of the most fulfilling parts of my flower life is meeting so many genuine, talented, and inspirational people along the way. I love the fact that my floral designs provide a moment for someone to take a breath and just enjoy the simple things in life. Flowers provide a form of therapy that we all need at certain times in our lives. It’s like a form of meditation when I’m working in my studio, and I think I really needed that in my life.

So it’s hard to explain how I decided upon flowers. I didn’t grow up with gardeners in the family nor did I have a particular affinity for them. I really wish I had a more romantic story for you; however, it simply started with my appreciation for various artistic forms, which led me to take a five-week botanical program at Maine College of Art. The rest was history — my passion for flowers started to organically develop as I continued to teach myself floral design. I staged some amateur photo shoots with my little sisters, put myself on Thumbtack, and began a one-year online mentorship program with Emma Lemke, an Australia-based floral designer. ▶





In our backyard I have about a dozen garden roses, six flower beds, and other various flowers and foliage that I have planted and tend to myself. It's been so fulfilling to be able to use some of my blooms in my flower arrangements, like zinnias, cosmos, scabiosa, garden roses, and sedum. I source from local farms as much as I can provided the short growing season in Maine. I primarily source from Snell Family Farm and Lazy Acres Farm, and Fall River Florist Supply, a wholesaler based out of Massachusetts. >



It's become so important for me to refine my floral design skills on top of learning how to run my own small business. I really work on representing flowers in a very natural, whimsical yet artsy way. I challenge myself every time to be better than the last. I really want my flower clients to have that "Oh, wow" moment when they see my work. I also like to make unique or bespoke designs. I think my brand really reflects a sense of uniqueness and an appreciation for colors and textures. So I continue to teach myself and I continue to work on my self-confidence because being self-taught has its own challenges. Sometimes I put too much pressure on myself, but it's OK because I am so thankful that flowers have given me this motivation and a sense of purpose in my life.

My business is now full time and is growing every day. Unfortunately, COVID-19 threw my first big official season into a tizzy, but I immediately pivoted by turning our large

detached garage into a floral studio. Originally, I went back and forth about whether or not I should build out the garage studio because of the pandemic, but my husband pushed me along and felt strongly that it would be good for me to have this space in preparation for all that was still to come, which at the time felt like another leap of faith!

We excitedly waited all winter to put in extra windows and a large sliding glass door out to our backyard. I wanted to lighten up the interior, so we painted the inside all white to give it that farmhouse feel. It's important to have a neutral background in a studio space so you can really see the shape, details, and textures of your designs, as well as for taking photos of your work. Good shears, a full-length mirror, turntable, floral tape, wire cutters, buckets, twine, wire, zip ties, and wrapping paper are also crucial tools of the trade. I organize these items in vintage tins and an old typesetter tray along with two freestanding shelving units. I used two farm-style

dining tables as worktables instead of buying costly formal workbenches, and added cinder blocks underneath for height. I found two used cooler fridges on Facebook Marketplace. The workbench that came with our garage was moved under the new windows that look out to my lovely neighbors' backyard, and an old shelving unit works great for holding my vessels. I, of course, added some decorative touches with hand-me-down renaissance art, gold mirrors, floral embroidery, and artwork to give it an inspirational and homey feel. The studio is a little rustic, but I like the She Shed vibe, as it feels like an extension of our life. I love pushing back that sliding glass door and entering my studio — it makes my journey feel tangible and real.



I've always described myself as the "organized chaos" type because if things are too tidy for me, it just doesn't work — I need things to be imperfect. Although people think artists are usually perfectionists, I do not consider myself a perfectionist at all. Don't get me wrong, I over-analyze my designs and fret about them endlessly, but when I'm creating, it's a pretty organic process. I really like my floral designs to have that bespoke quality. It's personal to me, as my studio is home-based and I essentially invite my clients into my home to create something special for them. My flower subscribers come to my front porch to pick up their monthly wildflower wraps. I think this is a significant part of my business and an important piece to creating that community feel around my flowers.

I've always had the urge to "nest" within a space, so it is important that my studio feel lived-in and not overly fussy. I think this is why I was drawn to flowers, not only for the endless varieties that never cease to amaze but also for the fact that even though they are pretty and delicate they actually have a hardiness and reality to them. Flowers are a representation of the fleeting reality of life and death, so I suppose from a philosophical sense they sort of mirror my renewed perspective on life. This big career change of mine has taught me so much about myself. ▸



## Advice for Creative *Entrepreneurs*

- Don't worry about being perfect — allow funky to be the new norm.
- Remain critical of your own work, but don't allow that to overpower you.
- Welcome constructive criticism from your clients even if it's hard to hear. Feedback will only make you better.
- Constantly educate yourself through classes and workshops.
- Celebrate your success but also give back to other fellow business owners.
- Connect with your client base. Be more than just a service — be a brand that shows genuine interest in the people who support your business.
- If you stand behind the person you are and put out professional and positive energy, it will come back tenfold.
- Your talent and creativity alone are worth more than the dollar value you put on your work. Don't be afraid to defend the cost of your time, product, and artistry.



Flowers have really opened a gateway that I never could have imagined. I always felt I had more to give, and I didn't feel like I was given the opportunities to utilize my respective strengths in corporate. Flowers have emboldened me and given me a sense of confidence, because I have built something entirely on my own. I've also learned along the way that passion isn't merely about picking a lane. Passion is about building a community of people around you that motivate and uplift you. Passion is about giving back by sharing your creativity with the world in whatever form that may be. It's allowed me to evolve into a more confident woman in ways that I never felt I could in my old corporate life.

I've always been too much of a realist, but flowers have opened a part of my heart that wasn't really open before allowing me to dream for the first time — not only dream but really and truly believe that I could actually make a dream of mine come true. I was always scared of my dreams, thinking they were lofty, unattainable, silly, and unrealistic. I now see that dreams can be achieved — it is not easy, but they can be. And even if my dream is a fleeting moment in my life, like a flower's fleeting existence on this earth, at least I reached for the sun. So, I don't think it's all that silly anymore to just dream. This is what flowers have taught me.

Florals by Fittsy is Michilee Fitts' home-based floral-design studio based out of Portland, Maine, specializing in wedding and event floral design, along with a subscription service, daily florals, and curated gifts. They pride themselves on providing unique and bespoke designs for each of their clients. You can follow their journey on Instagram (@florals\_by\_fittsy) or check out their website at [floralsbyfittsy.com](http://floralsbyfittsy.com).

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