

Petal power

This popular Inner West florist shows that having a creative passion can sometimes make for a successful and rewarding business.

Words: Mary Wordsworth



JODIE MCGREGOR ADORES flowers. So much so, that getting to Sydney's Flemington flower markets at 5am four times a week is not considered, as one might expect, a chore. "Not at all!" exclaims the personable mother-of-two. "You're shopping for flowers, so it's nice."

It is this passion for petals that has led to her shop, Jodie McGregor Flowers in Johnston Street, Annandale, evolving into one of Sydney's leading florists. Twice voted NSW Florist of the Year by experts at the flower markets, Jodie has lived and breathed her floral business for several years, boasting a mix of corporate, retail and wedding clients. The entrancing sculptural and textural appearance of her work has become something of a trademark: 'organic' is a word she often uses to describe it. In other words, if you're looking for flowers with a distinctly contemporary twist, head to Jodie's.

Run with her partner Stuart White, the business employs five florists. By all accounts, the little shop is a pleasant place to be. "You get to know people... if I relate my own flower stories to someone, they recount why something is special to them..."

These sorts of exchanges lead to some very satisfied customers. But then again, that is Jodie's aim.

"For example, if someone is buying flowers for an anniversary, I might ask what the flowers were on the bride's wedding day. If her husband gets her those, she will be much more touched by that." So men are not completely hopeless when it comes to buying blooms for their loved ones? "No," she laughs. "I think they do realise the sentimental gestures behind the giving of flowers. We get plenty of them coming in on Friday night and Saturday morning. We also have a bottleshop two doors up, so that works well!"

Jodie says that unlike many people, she quite likes the fact that flowers don't last. Just as seasons change, as flowers fade, new ones replace them and there is a chance for her to do something different.

In fact, the urge for Jodie to be doing something different has led to a highly rewarding creative collaboration with the renowned photographer Warwick Orme, of the stunning *Floranova* book and series of cards. She exhibits his work in her shop, while he is the recipient of any unusual or distinctive blooms she digs out at the markets. It is an arrangement that suits both of them and the results are uncommonly beautiful.

Ask Jodie about current floral trends, and she says that people are into personalising their blooms. "At weddings, for example, you may find a different arrangement on each separate table – not just the same for everyone." Bouquets, she has noticed, are getting much smaller. As for flowers at home, "People are more educated and expect more these days. It's not enough just to have something that will last. They want something with interest."

Surrounded by exotic scents all day long, one wonders: does Jodie wear

perfume, and if so, what is it? She laughs: "Yes, I wear it! I like Ginger Lily scent which I get from a place in Hong Kong, and I'm forever looking for a good gardenia scent."

And her favourite flowers? Well, it is all seasonal. "At the moment, I like cymbidium orchids; in spring, it's lily of the valley; and in summer, I adore peonies and gardenias." In fact, Jodie likes peonies so much that she planned her own wedding date for when the blooms would be available!

Jodie tells us what springs to mind when it comes to these flowers:

Roses – They are old-fashioned and beautiful.

Gardenias – Precious, with the most lovely perfume.

Peonies – A work of art, and a shame they are only available for a short time.

Gerberas – 'Buzz for your buck'. They're bright and are many people's favourites.

Lilies – Beautiful, you can't beat the perfume.

Given the beautiful nature of her business, it is no wonder Jodie has such a passion for it. And with plenty of help from her partner and a nanny, she is ensuring both her family and her customers are well-nurtured. There are many Inner Westies for whom a trip to Jodie McGregor's is an integral part of their week. "We have people who come in on a Friday after they've bought a coffee... it's like once they have picked up their flowers for the weekend, all is right in their world."

And does this fabulous petal-pusher ever receive a bouquet herself? "Yes. I always get flowers for Mother's Day... but I get them a week early, because of course, I'm working!" ●

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