



## kate tierney

### From Fabrics to Flowers— A Seamless Transition

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PHOTOS BY DESDEMONA BURGIN

**F**OR KATE TIERNEY, creating vignettes of “living beauty” with flowers seems to come as easily as breathing. The owner of TWIGS, a center for creative services of all things floral and more in Greenville, SC, has a simple design philosophy: “Flowers are just beautiful. They’re nature’s gift. Let them feel effortless and natural to celebrate their beauty rather than the complexity of a design,” she says. Kate likes things that appear unplanned and believes “even things that are symmetrical can have an easy flow.”

Kate’s entry into the business was just as natural. After several years working in textiles with J.P. Stevens and Ralph Lauren Home Furnishings in New York City, she and her then-new husband moved to Greenville for what she thought was a brief hiatus from big city life. When she had a hard time finding work, she took a job at a local flower shop and discovered it “tapped into a whole other side,” Kate remembers.

She enjoyed it so much that she put in a bid to become a partner, but the owner was not ready to share the business. So Kate returned to textiles. Three years later a phone call came from the same woman who was now interested in selling the entire business. She didn’t need to ask twice. Kate took over the 1,600-square-foot store and began growing her vision little by little.

Now, 17 years later, TWIGS has more than 12,000 square feet of retail space in three stores, and a greenhouse filled with orchids and assorted flowering plants. Kate also presides over the Tempietto, a unique indoor/outdoor garden space used for various events including weddings.

“It was a case of ‘if you build it they will come,’ Kate explains. “I was hauling plants and arbors to locations all



around town, only to get there and find the ground was uneven or muddy, or presented another challenge.” The Tempietto grew, literally, out of the back door of the first shop. An indoor reception area flows out to a covered stone portico, down a field-stone path punctuated by a romantic fountain, and surrounded by a lush lawn edged with tall trees.

In addition to keeping her businesses running smoothly, Kate also hosts demonstration lectures and workshops, sharing her extensive knowledge with others bitten by the flower

**“Whether the arrangement is simple and modest, whether it is bold and gorgeous, whether it is obvious or whether it is subtle, the aim is always to use the plants to the best of one’s means and intelligence so as to form pictures of living beauty.”**

**GERTRUDE JEKYLL IN COLOUR SCHEMES FOR THE FLOWER GARDEN**

arranging bug. The Tempietto additionally offers a delightful place to lunch, now that catering for events is done on the premises. Kate says her customers have embraced the entire TWIGS experience like an armful of flowers: “They tell me it is like therapy to come and get a ‘TWIGS fix,’ have lunch and shop.”

In her newest shop, robin’s egg blue accents mingle with sage and clover walls. Even the ceiling is green. Arrangements



are artfully interspersed with objets, like the diminutive blue ceramic birds or the painted wooden wren that snuggles into a circular nest of delicate twigs. Here, permanent arrangements take center stage, and customers who whirl in and out find it difficult to choose from among hydrangeas and lilies, frothy ferns or stately callas. Each is so realistic and so carefully composed, as if a gardener went out to the border and “snip snipped,” creating bouquets of casual elegance.

Despite the growth of the stores, Kate has kept the business close to home. Raising four children, all under the age of ten, presents plenty of challenges on its own, so it helps that the Tierneys live right behind the Tempetto.

“Before this was home, I’d always be forgetting something important and have to drive across town to get it. Now, everything is right here,” she says. Which she admits, makes for long work days, but overseeing some 30 employees and making careful business decisions calls for just that much dedication.

When shipments arrive from local growers and from all over the world, Kate masterminds several concepts for arrangements.

“I have some very talented people on my staff,” she says. “I provide the creative direction but they come up with some really great things. I think it wouldn’t be as interesting if everything looked like it was done by me.”

It would be difficult to imagine her work ever appearing stale with her preference for unexpected combinations of colors, textures and scents. Her favorite palettes are monochromatic, and the arrangement she returns to time and again is composed of green hydrangea, yellow stock, white oriental lily, and dill. “I just love the smell of dill with the sweet lily,” she confides, with a deep inhale as if it were right under her nose.

“We use a lot of greenery. It is the first design element. We’ll use branches and berries too. It is just like creating a framework for a garden then we drop in the flowers,” Kate says. Her background in textiles, as well as the methods she uses for arrangements both provide an apt metaphor for growing her business.

“It was a natural fit because textiles are all about color, texture, palette, shape and balance. You use a lot of that in floral design; you need depth.” At TWIGS, she delivers that in spades. As Kate says simply, “It all builds on top of each other.” \*

wedding & specialty flowers



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d e s i g n s

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