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BUSINESS IN FULL BLOOM

interview with **ted and david winston** | written by **rebecca poole** | photography **as noted**

What began in 1944 on Boston's Newbury Street with a pushcart of flowers, a father-son duo, and a dream, has since turned into a forward-thinking floral design business that remains one of the most highly regarded in the nation. Winston Flowers, now headed by founder Robert Winston's grandsons, Ted and David, continues to excel at catering to its discerning clientele.

You're located in New England and have several locations across the region. How have you grown since the business started? What about New England shapes your business?

Ted: We've grown to have seven shops and two design studios: one in Boston, the other in New York city. Our father, Maynard, was incredibly forward-thinking. In the early 1970s, he started importing flowers that New Englanders could normally only buy for a brief season, like freesias, lisianthus, and orchids. These exotic new varieties played a large role in the company's growth and success.

David: The beauty of New England is in its seasons, and the constantly changing landscape is the single biggest influence on our designs. We rotate collections



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nine times annually in order to offer the freshest, most in-season flowers, and, when possible, we buy from local growers. From late summer to early fall, nearly 70 percent of all our products are native to New England. At other times, it is necessary to import in order to successfully supply flowers year-round, but the aesthetic of our design is always tied to the current season.

What does it mean to you to work with local growers? What does it mean for your business?

D: With our local partners, we have close relationships with both the products and the people. We can go to the farm, see the product growing, and know we're receiving it the same day that it was picked. As a result, our relationships with local growers are very personal and long-standing. In fact, nearly all of the local growers that we work with are generational businesses just like ours. It also allows us to secure one-of-a-kind varieties. We work with a vendor to grow Queen Red Lime zinnias, which is a stunning variety featuring deep burgundy outer petals that gradually lighten to a creamy lime center.

Does Winston Flowers have a unique style? What are your favorite blooms?

D: Since our style is based on the seasons, it is constantly evolving. The hallmarks of a Winston Flowers arrangement are seasonality, texture, attention to detail, larger-than-average blooms, unique vessels, and standout design. We're very intentional with color—generally staying within a single color palette for each design. Our favorite flowers are in-season and a bit obscure. One local grower we often work with offers rare dahlia varieties, such as the Café au Lait dahlia and

Black dahlia. Every element of design is important, so we also have nonfloral elements grown for our arrangements. For example, we ask our vendors to grow mint, raspberry foliage, sedum, and other novelty grass varieties like northern sea oats.

What is your process like for the various events you cover? How do the types of flowers you use help contribute to an event's aesthetic?

D: We start by working with the client to determine their design sensibility and overall vision for the event. Other important factors we consider include the time of year, venue or environment, and occasion. Our flower offerings vary with the seasons. Some of our most popular flowers are amaryllis, calla lilies, and orchids for winter; anemones, tulips, ranunculus, hyacinths, and daffodils for early spring; peonies, lilacs, and sweet peas for late spring; garden roses, delphiniums, scabiosa, and hydrangeas for summer; and dahlias and sunflowers for late summer. We also use lots of fruits, texture, and foliage for autumn. From there, we offer ideas and collaborate closely with clients to bring their vision to life. Our goal is always to use our expertise to help clients express their sense of style—not to impose ours on them.

Is there an event that you would describe as a highlight for the business?

T: Our favorite events are ones that are personal to the client. We've worked with families that have long histories in locations like Martha's Vineyard, and when their children grow up, they'll have weddings at their family home. It's such a pleasure for us to help make an important event beautiful in a setting that's both gorgeous and highly personal.



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What's a memorable story you have from working with a particular client?

T: In 2014, Winston Flowers was honored to provide the florals for a state dinner at the White House. To ensure a flawless event, we sent twenty team members to Washington, DC, to assist with the setup and installation. A few weeks after the dinner, the event planner sought us out to tell us that he'd received rave reviews about our team from the White House staff members. To us, that's the ultimate compliment, as our goal is always to execute a flawless event.



How do you make people feel special through the art of flower arranging?

D: Because flowers are grown from the earth, arranged by hand, and ultimately fleeting, they feel incredibly personal. There's a reason for the expression "Say it with flowers." They have a way of expressing any emotion—from sorrow to appreciation to love.

Philanthropy seems to be another important part of your business. Would you tell us more about your charitable efforts?

T: Philanthropy is a very important aspect of what we do. Winston Flowers

regularly offers in-kind floral donations and at-cost rates to local nonprofit organizations in New York, Boston, and Greenwich for annual galas and fund-raisers.

In 2010, we sought to formalize a "give-back" program and created the philanthropic initiative called Charity in Bloom. Through this program, Winston Flowers donates 20 percent of retail proceeds from the sale of a custom arrangement to a different nonprofit partner each month. Now in its tenth year and managed by my wife, Simone Winston, Charity in Bloom has raised over \$2 million and has donated funds to more than thirty nonprofit institutions on the East Coast.

In the spirit of my father's hands-on approach, both of us are active on numerous boards and encourage associates who work for Winston Flowers to make a difference in the community. That's why you'll see team members doing floral workshops or demonstrations for clients of [women's shelter] Rosie's Place and [homeless shelter] the Pine Street Inn, as well as design classes for young students at Perkins School for the Blind.

Do you find that Winston Flowers follows trends?

D: We like to keep an eye on trends in order to stay relevant and keep our designs interesting. There's a parallel with the farm-to-table trend in food and the floral industry—people want local, in-season products that feel natural and organic. An emphasis is placed on nonfloral seasonal elements like berries, herbs, pods, and vines. Loosely arranged, textured designs are also

popular, and our 2019 collections have reflected that aesthetic.

What's something about working in the floral industry that not many people would know?

T: It's an incredibly personal business. We work with people at some of the most monumental moments in their lives, and, as a result, we've developed intimate relationships with many of our clients. It also requires a lot of hard work and passion. During the holidays, for example, we're working hardest when everyone else is celebrating. You have to really love what you're doing and take pride in making celebrations beautiful for others.

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