

# Botanical Liaison

A passion for local flowers inspires dual business ventures that serve both retail and wholesale channels.

**W**hen floral designer **Sarah Reyes** first shared her dream of bringing unique local and seasonal flowers from farms and fields outside of San Francisco to the Bay Area marketplace, I called her a “floral concierge.” She corrected me. “I am a botanical liaison,” she said.

Reyes now has two floral enterprises sharing the “botanical liaison” tag line. **Wildflower & Fern** is a new 240-square-foot retail flower shop, which opened in early September at Oakland’s Rockridge Market Hall, a European-style food and wine market. **Unfurled**, the wholesale buying business, now shares cooler and storage space with Wildflower & Fern. This arrangement allows Reyes to serve wholesale customers who pick up from the back of the house while also supplying her retail customers with local California-grown botanicals.

“Unfurled started a few years ago with my love of supporting local flower farmers,” she explains. The floral entrepreneur originally purchased flowers from North Bay farms and sold them through a series of pop-ups around Oakland and Berkeley, such as during the First Friday Art Walk.

“I knew there were other people who had the same ideals, and I knew it wasn’t practical for them to get out to the farms,” she explains. Unfurled became a personal floral buying service, with Reyes’ weekly trips to flower farms in Sonoma County financed by a small delivery fee paid by her customers. Reyes believes that it’s good for the entire marketplace to connect florists with farms, even if those florists could be considered her competitors.

Unfurled’s list of studio and retail customers grew until Reyes was playing the floral liaison role for 10-plus clients, including **Brian McDonald**, owner of **The Flower & The B**, located in Oakland, Calif. “He eventually became my biggest customer,” she says. McDonald later hired Reyes as his shop manager and offered her the use of a cooler and studio space in his West Oakland backyard for Unfurled’s wholesale venture. (His decision to close The Flower & The B allowed Reyes to assume the store’s lease and open her own retail shop in the same location.)

Reyes wants to establish a different brand and culture for



Photo ©Sarah Reyes



Sarah Reyes of Wildflower & Fern  
Photo © Hedda Brorstrom

Wildflower & Fern. That means transitioning from imported roses to a selection of hybrid tea and spray roses from a North Bay grower; it means offering evergreen and berry branches in the winter, reflecting the seasonal flora of the region. She believes that the customer base will embrace this shift, a prediction that played out in early September when Wildflower & Fern opened its doors.

“We didn’t have time to process all the flowers I had just picked up from area farms,” Reyes recalls. “Customers were pulling bunches off of the cart like it was a farm stand.” She also noticed that the stems from her supplier farms are stripped, trimmed and processed, “the way a florist processes flowers,” something she attributes to the fact that many of the owners are farmer-florists.

The constancy of having a retail location rather than operating out of her car and a borrowed cooler is allowing Reyes to experiment with products and services she’s been dreaming about. These include offering a regular farm-sourced floral subscription program and educational workshops. A store with regular hours means adding employees, which Reyes hopes will free her up to expand the



Full Bloom Farm  
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areas from which she can source local flowers. She’s been in talks with flower farmer groups in the Sacramento Valley and in the Santa Cruz area, for example. This hub-and-spoke model is one that has always worked for farmers, bringing rural harvest to the city. Reyes is reinventing this model to suit her personal mission.

“I take a lot of pride in the connections that I’ve made and the relationships I’ve kept with the farmers. This new path allows me to also provide those flowers to retail customers. I believe I’ll be able to expand my reach to the end consumer this way.”

#### DETAILS

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