

During the summer of 2009 I enrolled in the University of Arkansas Horticulture program. From that day on I knew that being a student of horticulture would lead me to a career that matched me perfectly. Horticulture courses sparked my interest in the floral industry, but it wasn't until I was required to complete an internship that a job in the floral industry became more than just an interest.

September 4, 2012 marked the beginning of my internship experience. On that Tuesday I began a horticulture internship at the Rose of Sharon Event Florist. It was my hope that interning with the Rose of Sharon would teach me the principles and elements of floral design while also providing me with experience in owning a small floral design business with a focus in wedding design. I came to the shop owner Althea Wiles with a basic internship proposal. We agreed that my underlying instruction would consist of shop activities where I handle fresh product; by designing, processing and storing, gaining practice in wedding preparation; by conducting client consultations, managing wedding materials and ordering products, and practicing the details of small business ownership; by cleaning, organizing social media sources, conducting sales and helping in business finance matters (taxes, budgeting and marketing).

Coming into the internship I was worried about not having any former training as a florist or as a small business owner. Every experience would be a new experience and I would have to learn quickly. Rose of Sharon's owner Althea has always been patient with me and has made sure that my skills continue to improve.



During the first weeks of my florist internship I began to learn what could be described a 'floral basics.' My 'basics' training was centered on the wedding florist industry but I also received

training in general floral design. First, I became familiar with the 'tools of the trade.' Some of the tools that I quickly came to know are floral snips, floral foam, preservative food powder, ribbons, wire, vases, floral tape, spray preservative ('Finishing Touch') and 'Quick-dip' (dip for freshly cut stems). I became familiar with these tools quickly when I was asked to perform basic shop tasks such as cleaning and flower processing. By observing Althea create arrangements, I was introduced to the technical and creative tools.



The first weeks that I was with the Rose of Sharon I also started working with some Althea's online systems. To keep a record of events and clients, Althea uses a web database called Solve360. I was quickly taught how to input client information into this online database. It was also my job to remove scheduled events from the database once they had been completed. Soon after, I was taught how to use websites 'Flickr,' a photo database, and 'Dropbox.' a photo cloud based system. It became my job to move photos that had been uploaded to 'Flickr' onto 'Dropbox' for easy access. Towards the end of my internship I would learn to take photo based work to the next level by editing photos that would later be added to the Rose of Sharon website and by providing the existing photos on the website with descriptive titles. (<http://roseofsharon-eventflorist.com/gallery/>)

Althea has also implemented a system of idea collaboration by creating 'Pinterest' boards for every client. With this system she is able to provide, say a bride, with detailed photos of specific bouquets, arrangements or even a specific type of flower. Being familiar with 'Pinterest' it was simple for me to catch on to this practice and see the benefits of it.

Soon after my arrival it became time to update the format of the Rose of Sharon website as a whole. Althea communicated frequently with a web designer to see which changes would best benefit her website's status among floral websites. She came to the rest of her employees and I for input on such things as icon fonts, website colors, appropriate pictures and category labels. I was surprised but happy to find that Althea often goes to her employees for advice.

As my proposal designated, I would need instruction in the workings of a small business outside the areas of design. Althea was very excited to hear that I was interested in becoming a future floral shop owner and wanted to help me any way she could. During my first lessons I observed as Althea went through the process of employee payments, tax payments, budgeting, supply ordering, customer payment information input, and pricing of products for profit gain. I am still learning about these matters but have come to understand business financing a great deal more. Althea was always sure to ask for my opinions on every matter even when she was faced with the choice of moving to a new location or remaining in her current location and renting out additional space. It seemed I was very lucky that my internship fell upon the time when that decision needed to be made. To witness one of the larger elements of business, expansion, was one of my greater learning experiences.

Then it came time for me to begin my training in floral design. Even though weddings are essentially the main focus with Rose of Sharon, my first design experience was watching and providing input as Althea demonstrated the design of



a symmetrical sympathy arrangement. She worked in a step-by-step process; providing commentary to the reasoning behind her steps while also asking for my input in matters of color balance and form. I continued to observe as Althea worked, until it was time for me to try my hand at design. With Althea's guidance I completed my first basic arrangement, a small birthday

arrangement. This was also my first experience in costing out a product. Costing

the arrangement required detailed figuring and the creation of a general formula. First, you must take a look at what you have to work with. Factoring out about 40% of a given budget can sum up labor for a basic arrangement. For example, if you are given a \$50 budget for an arrangement, you must first multiply that amount by 40% and subtract out to know how much of the budget is left over for hard-goods and flowers. Once you know how much money you have left to work with you can then factor in how much you will need to remove for the hard-goods cost (vases, ribbon, floral foam etc.). Now, whatever is left from factoring in your labor cost and the cost of the hard-goods being used is your flower budget.

When it comes to plan designs Althea implements a formula system to help use supplies more efficiently. Using the same cost figuring system she can create formulas that show how many hard-goods are needed as well as the number of each flower that will be used in each individual design. This formula system comes in handy with large weddings where florists need to keep within a certain budget and when there is a limited amount of flowers available for each design.

The coming of the fall season brought on one of our busiest wedding schedules. It seemed that I had arrived at a very opportune time. During our first wedding-prep after I began my internship I quickly learned how to work with Althea's design formula system. It became my task to separate out available flower stock into usable groups. Separating the flowers guarantees that each design will be of the right proportions and will fit within the design budget. This first wedding was also when I discovered my passion for small detail design work. Small design work usually encompasses creating elements such as boutonnieres and corsages. Each

flower stem must be wired in a certain fashion and taped with floral tape before they are joined together in a final design. Ribbons were used in this wedding to add an extra touch to the boutonnieres and corsages. For these designs I had to learn how to wrap the joined stems so that the ribbon could not be removed through use. I also put into practice one of my earlier lessons in how to make small corsage bows out of ribbon. This was a skill I quickly developed.



Creating wedding bouquets was soon next on my list of wedding-prep skills to master. Althea taught me that bouquet stems must be placed in a wrap around motion to keep the stems heads from breaking. This practice also creates a smooth rounded surface to later be easily wrapped with ribbon or other bouquet accent.

Larger bouquets have proved to be harder to create in this way. More stems or larger individual stems can sometimes make the wrapping motion harder to maintain. Through the course of my internship I have completed one larger bridal bouquet but have successfully been able to create the smaller bridesmaids version on many occasions.



Gradually my training moved on to creating wedding arrangements such as aisle markers and table centerpieces. Althea was my guide

through the learning process and she also provided me with



informational videos to aide in my training. I soon learned



how to grid a vase using clear 1/2" tape, how to angle

floral stems in foam, and how to evenly distribute color and flower form. These 'tricks of the trade' were also useful in teaching me how to complete everyday arrangement orders as well. Althea was always patient with me as I learned a new skill and she continued to make sure I learned how to do something the 'right way' even if it was not always the easiest way.



Flower delivery, a process that I had thought simple in the beginning, in reality takes a lot of time and planning. Specially ordered 'Bloom Boxes' were used to hold and transport bridal and attendant bouquets. These boxes are an



added expense, but it was explained to me that the ease of their travel make them worth the extra cost. That was an important skill for me to learn; when to go for the cheaper alternative and when to know when a more expensive mode of action was required. It became common practice for us to re-use floral boxes that the week's flowers arrived in for packaging as well. By cutting into these boxes we were able to secure centerpieces, for example, so they would not shift or tip during travel. Helpful was the fact that Althea seemed to be a 'Master packer.' She knew how to use space efficiently.

On one occasion our flower and arrangement load was so great that we used three vehicles, including my own, to transport flowers to a Eureka Springs wedding.

This particular delivery was for one of our largest weddings of the season. At the time I had delivered to two other weddings, but I had never participated in a large, multiple venue, set-up. Our first step that day was to deliver bouquets, boutonnieres and corsages to the bridal party at the Crescent Hotel. We made sure that the materials were up to the bride's standards and made any corrections we needed to on-site. Because we often have to make these changes or create pieces on-site, we always carry spare supplies and work bags containing our essential tools. After checking in with the bride, and making the necessary changes to the personal flowers, we left to set-up for the ceremony. The ceremony flowers consisted of aisle markers that later would be altered as accents in the reception. The largest set-up of the day was the placement of arrangements onto a dinner car where the guests would gather after the ceremony. These pieces would also be moved to the reception location after the guests' return. This wedding was a good example of a multi-venue wedding with multi-functional pieces.

I have come to know so much these past few months. Althea has provided me with such a terrific learning environment and I am confident in my new abilities. Even though my internship is nearing its close, I will continue to learn with the guidance of Rose of Sharon's owner Althea Wiles. Through future employment I hope to master floral design, participate in direct client consultations, and receive multiple certification titles in floral design. Now that I have learned the basics Althea has already moved my training to the next level. I am currently creating solo designs with unused floral product and will soon be working directly with Rose of Sharon clientele. Rose of Sharon is also starting the transition to a new location



where I will hopefully continue to grow as a florist. This experience was more than I could have hoped for and I truly feel that I have found my destined occupation with help from Althea Wiles and everyone at the now known 'Rose of Sharon Floral Designs.'