



# 2018 Retail Florist of the Year

At Magpie Blossom Boutique, winner of our 16th annual contest, everyone is family.

BY CHRISTINE WRIGHT

There's a place on the outskirts of Austin, Texas, where everyone who walks through the door is family. There are actually two doors to enter this delightful flower and gift shop called **Magpie Blossom Boutique**, this year's winner of the "Retail Florist of the Year" award, cosponsored by *Florists' Review* magazine and the **Wholesale Florist and Florist Supplier Association (WF&FSA)**.

One entrance welcomes people with a custom-designed European-inspired flower cart, and the other is graced with stoneware planters filled with seasonal plantings, a black magpie bird sculpture and a sign that reads "We're Glad You're Here." Once inside Magpie Blossom Boutique, visitors are greeted by the voice of a handsome yellow canary, a

happy Jack Russell terrier and a delightful clan of women waiting to meet you and make you part of their family, too.

Owner **Nikki Mackenzie**, along with her daughters **Kristen Waters** and **Malia Bybee** and Nikki's mother, **Mary Frances**, are in the store every day working with customers, creating art with flowers and making sure everyone who walks through the doors feels right at home.

When Nikki was informed that Magpie Blossom Boutique had been chosen as the 2018 "Retail Florist of the Year," she was thrilled. "We really didn't know if we would win because we're relatively new in this industry," she said. "It's great to have this affirmation of the work we do and the business that we run on our gut instinct."



(Left) The two welcoming front entrances to Magpie Blossom Boutique.

(Below) The Magpie Blossom Boutique family.



### family affair

With modest beginnings in what Nikki calls “the cottage” store, a small space with a 5-foot-by-6-foot cooler and “really great coffee maker,” business grew steadily from the moment she opened the doors in 2012. Nikki started Magpie Blossom Boutique with money from selling her home, a deep love of flowers, and a passion for people and the special events in their lives. Back then, her mother would come and watch the store while Nikki delivered flowers, and her daughters would help out on weekends.

After just a few years, it was evident they needed more space – and definitely more staff. Nikki’s daughter Kristen is now a full-time partner who does everything from floral design and producing Magpie’s beautiful website to providing all social media, setting up photos of their work and taking care of customers. And Malia works part time while she finishes college and then plans to become another full-time partner. In addition, several part-time employees help at busy times and with large events.

### european experience

Nikki and Kristen dreamed and designed their current location, which they moved into in January, in the bedroom community of Bee Cave, Texas, which is known for its beautiful scenery and accessibility to all that Austin has to offer. Stepping inside the new shop, customers immediately feel transported to a sophisticated Paris concession. Imported floral wallpaper from Holland, handcrafted pottery, French flower-market shelving, black-and-white flower-patterned flooring and Italian marble counters are just the first things that delight the eyes and senses.

Nikki and Kristin designed the store with the customer experience as their focus. The store is divided into individual vignettes, where each corner feels like a new neighborhood.

Nikki puts a lot of thought into her customers’ experience by creating custom play lists, offering coffee and nibbles, and crafting special aromas for the store. She always encourages folks to stay a while. “Even if people don’t buy anything, we want them to spend time in our store,” Nikki confirms.

Wandering through the 2,800-square-foot store, patrons find unique greeting and note cards and paper goods; fine Sugarfina candies and chocolates; and a baby gifts section stocked with plush blankets, high-quality clothing and baby nursery décor. Shoppers also can browse through bath and body luxuries, candles and home fragrances, jewelry, men’s gifts, kitchen and gourmet goods, luxurious sleepwear, and more. This shop really has it all.

Nikki shares that 50 percent of her business is from the retail and gift items, and the other 50 percent is from floral.

The custom display cooler in the center of the store features a black-and-white tile floor with a distinct flower pattern. The exterior cooler walls are covered in black bead-board and French garden iron fencing at the top. Inside the cooler is a hand-painted quote from Claude Monet: “I must have flowers, always and always.”

Magpie shoppers can purchase ready-made arrangements or flowers by the stem from the shop’s customized display cooler.







(Above) A beautiful wedding bouquet created by the designers at Magpie Blossom Boutique.

(Below) Nikki and her team love designing flower crowns for parties, weddings and other special events.



(Bottom) The baby gifts section is fully stocked with high-quality toys, clothing and furnishings.

(Below) The Magpie Flower Bar has beautiful lighting, comfortable seating and is the center of social events.





(Right) Magpie Blossom Boutique's springtime "Texas Tea Party."

But the definite focal point of this marvelous space is the Magpie Flower Bar. Fifteen feet of Italian Carrara-inspired marble, black custom cabinetry, dazzling chandeliers, gold embellishments and extravagant hardware complete the look. Lively fabric covers comfy metal benches that line one side facing a custom chalkboard-painted wall. This is where casual classes such as "Basic Floral Design" and "Succulent Garden Planting" take place and is a perfect area to set up displays for special events.

The customer checkout counter is an extension of the flower bar, with several more feet of Italian marble. Just behind the checkout counter is the floral design workspace. Customers can watch designs being created and can be inspired by and interact with the designers.

In the office/bridal meeting room, brides-to-be are greeted with champagne, sweet treats and lots of inspirational materials to help plan the flowers for their special day.

### community support

Involvement in their community is at the top of the list of important things for Nikki and her family business. The Magpie Blossom Boutique website ([magpieblossoms.com](http://magpieblossoms.com)) features a long list of local charities and community organizations that the business supports by donating money, products and time. Among those organizations are Citizen Advocates for Animals, Highland Lakes SPCA, Lake Travis Christmas Hope for Wounded Warriors, Komen Austin, Partnerships for Children and several area schools.

The local high school prom is a favorite event, and it's a very busy time. "We have a reputation for our prom flowers," Nikki reports. "Every year, the fashion changes, and this year, they are all ordering mini bridal bouquets. We love making them and being a part of this special time in a young person's life."

### weddings and events

The women of Magpie Blossom Boutique also design floral elements for many weddings every year along with many private and public events in the Austin area that have included large-scale Chinese New Year festivities, vintage circus-themed events and Great Gatsby-inspired parties.

When we asked Nikki about some of the most memorable events they have designed for, she tells us about a customer who hired them to help create a surprise wedding for her and her fiancé. She says they giggled as they covered every inch of the home and yard in beautiful blooms, twinkle lights in every tree and flowers at the altar. The man came home to his own wedding. "We sure hoped he'd say yes!" Nikki laughs. "The day went off without a hitch. He said yes and sent us a very nice thank-you note afterward."



### marketing magic

Nikki and Kristen enjoy doing all of their marketing in house. Kristen designs, writes and produces all of the Magpie Blossom Boutique website content where customers can order flowers and gifts online, check on upcoming events and discover newly arrived merchandise.

Other marketing tools include a monthly e-newsletter, advertising in local newspapers, informational pieces in bridal packets and at venue events, and mailing beautifully printed invitations and save-the-date pieces to customers for the company's in-store events.

These events include an annual holiday party in late fall and a "Texas Tea Party" in the spring. At each event, they serve delicious food along with a signature adult beverage. The store is adorned with lavish floral displays, and the owners award generous door prizes throughout the events. These parties are highly anticipated and well attended by the local community.

Also during the holiday season, Magpie has an "official" North Pole mailbox set up in the store. They distribute printed postcards to every preschool in the area as well as in the store, with instructions to write a great letter to Santa and drop it off at store. Each letter writer receives a personalized response from Santa with an official North Pole waxed seal, mailed to his or her home address. These custom letters are offered at no charge, Nikki tells us, and generate amazing customer loyalty.

When we asked Nikki what she loves most about being in the floral industry, she replied, "We have a special close-knit family who love working together and being a part of this community. It's a real honor to be able to help celebrate life's biggest milestones with our customers." ■