

JOINING THE Party?

Florists weigh whether to ramp up business to meet record-breaking demand for weddings.

Wedding and event business is booming this year, but not every florist wants to join the party. Dubbed “The Year of the Wedding,” 2022 is expected to bring 2.6 million weddings, the most since 1984, according to The Knot Worldwide, a global media group that surveyed more than 7,500 engaged couples to gather data. “This boost in demand isn’t going away anytime soon,” says Hannah Nowack, The Knot Weddings Editor & Expert. “2023, and possibly even 2024, are shaping up to be big years for weddings as well.”

That doesn’t mean that every florist will cater to the demand. In fact, the pandemic spurred many to rethink their wedding and event business models and reconsider what type of work they want to take on. While some are growing their business to meet demand, others are setting boundaries with the type of work or client they’ll take, and some are finding success in other areas, such as corporate events, sympathy work and even new product lines.

REFERRALS ONLY Nic Faitos of Starbright Floral Design in New York City focuses on building relationships with corporate clients whose events are often annual, easier and more lucrative than weddings, Faitos says. He is selective about weddings, only accepting wedding work from referrals by existing clients.



KEEPING THE ‘WORK Enjoyable’

Jordan Davis
*Lafayette Florist, Gift Shop &
Garden Center, Lafayette, Colorado*

Jordan Davis, website manager and event coordinator for Lafayette Florist, Gift Shop & Garden Center in Lafayette, Colorado, is the shop’s go-to wedding expert. “Our wedding business has greatly increased from year to year,” says Davis, who recently stepped away from hands-on floral work and hired a team of designers so she could focus on the business side of wedding work. “In 2019, I did \$65,000 in weddings and I thought that was amazing. Then last year, I did \$120,000 in weddings, which is now my new standard.” Davis hired an assistant last year to handle all those bookings and proposals.

“The pandemic definitely made me consider what kind of wedding florist I want to be and how to market to those brides,” says Davis. “I want to work with more budget brides, flexible brides. I don’t want to work with brides that need to know every single flower in their bouquet, or if they don’t have the right color of peach they’re going to have a meltdown. The stress level just became a bit too much. So, I adjusted my business model to make sure that my job is still enjoyable.”

First, Davis revamped the wedding portion of the shop’s website. Her goal was to streamline the entire proposal process and better serve her target market, mainly couples with smaller budgets. In addition to creating visuals of bridal bouquets, organized by color,

style, season, shape and type of flower, she included a page for sample corsages and boutonnieres. “A lot of brides don’t know where to start, but if they look at those categories, then they can react — like, ‘Oh, I like this. I don’t like this,’” Davis says.

Davis also put a questionnaire on the website so brides could fill out the details and make design decisions independently. Then, based on the completed questionnaire, Davis fires off a proposal, saving hours normally spent hashing out what the bride does or doesn’t want for her big day.

In addition to setting no minimum for wedding flowers, Davis created a page for micro weddings. She also created a page with elopement packages at four price levels (small to lavish). “After the bride gives me her style and color scheme, I choose all the flowers,” Davis says. “I can pick whatever looks best and that’s seasonal. I’m not stuck in this box. If a certain kind of flower comes in and doesn’t look great, I don’t have to use it.”

Another part of Davis’s new business model is that she no longer does installations. “That’s where I draw the line,” she says. “I won’t hang stuff from your ceiling. I won’t do any type of liability work. It just gets too overwhelming for me.” She also won’t deliver florals more than 45 minutes away for destination weddings. If couples want to pick up their florals, she’s fine with that. In fact, she’s even launching DIY wedding floral boxes that contain the number of centerpiece containers and florals couples want for their event.

GROWING TO Meet Demand

Mary McCarthy
*The Blooming Idea,
The Woodlands, Texas*

At The Blooming Idea in The Woodlands, Texas, weddings and events account for about 25 to 30 percent of owner and lead designer Mary McCarthy’s business. The rest of her work is everyday flowers and funerals. “I love doing weddings and prefer that to the daily work and funeral work,” she says, explaining that every wedding is unique and allows her creativity to shine. McCarthy aims to take advantage of the increased demand for weddings and events this year.

“My aim is to grow the business and take on more work,” she says. “This year I took on two full-time workers and one part-timer. I felt if I’m going to increase the weddings and I’m going to do larger weddings, then I’d need more staff to accommodate the delivery and setup.”

McCarthy also changed her website. “I found a lot of brides were price shopping,” she says. “I was getting a lot of inquiries and spending a lot of time sending out proposals and getting ghosted. Last year I saw a demand for micro weddings where the brides just wanted to pick up the flowers and then those brides who wanted to go all out for full-service weddings. So, I could see I was getting two distinct type brides, and I wanted to service both.” To do that, McCarthy put pages on her website for

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—Jordan Davis, Lafayette Florist, Gift Shop & Garden Center

full-service weddings and increased her minimum to \$3,500. Then she added an à la carte section for micro weddings with visuals and pricing on site. This way, brides could immediately see the cost and style of bouquets McCarthy offered, then reach out if they wanted a consultation and proposal.

Not only is McCarthy getting more inquiries than ever before but also they're coming from brides who want to work with her. She's also saving everyone's time by conducting about 60 percent of her consults by phone or Zoom. "A phone consultation with brides saves them time spent traveling, and yet they still can choose inspiration pictures with me, and I can share pictures with them," McCarthy says. "I think they appreciate that because they're pretty busy."

To enhance the site's wedding floral visuals, McCarthy has started doing more styled shoots. "I work with other vendors — with the venue, with photographers, the make-up artist — and I provide the florals," she says. "We set up mock weddings and the wedding photographers take all these professional photos that I can use on my website. Plus, it's good networking getting to know different vendors."

IDENTIFYING A *New Niche*

Barbara Johnson

Simply Beautiful Floral Designs, Los Angeles, California

In 2016, after 25 years of running a floral business in Denver, Colorado, Barbara Johnson relocated to Los Angeles, California, where she set up shop as founder and owner of Simply Beautiful Floral Designs with her daughter. It was a chance to start afresh and drop the exhausting wedding work that had consumed 50 percent of her business in Colorado. "After doing so many weddings for so many years, you reach a level of burnout," Johnson says. "Brides are very difficult, very intense, and it's a labor-intensive industry. I had just reached a level where I no longer had any interest in that area." In Los Angeles, Johnson realized that she'd need a massive staff if she were to do wedding work. "We're in Hollywood and it's, go big or go home, and we found out that it was really, really hard to nail down a stable group of wedding design specialists unless it

was your primary business," she says. Ultimately, weddings were too much of a headache.

But Johnson didn't have to worry about getting business — she'd identified her niche when she opened — the unserved minority sector. "We were contacted immediately because we hit all of the areas that people were really looking for," she says. "We are a black-owned shop, female-owned business, and small business." Customers, including celebrities, found Johnson even though she hadn't done any advertising.



NEW NICHE Barbara Johnson (at right, with her daughter) did wedding work for 25 years in Denver, Colorado. She found the work exhausting and is focusing her new Los Angeles, California business on sympathy work for minority clients.

Her sympathy work skyrocketed during the pandemic, especially among certain cultures, such as the Vietnamese and Korean communities, who look upon death as a celebration of life. In addition to providing copious florals for what was often a multi-day event, she made and sent floral arrangements from friends and family who could not attend the event in person. "My business was attached to a mortuary and a very, very prominent one at that," says Johnson. "So, we were just inundated the first year and we grew so quickly it was almost unreal."

Johnson and her daughters (her second daughter now helps with the business) are still working to build the business in other ways. When spas and salons had to close during the pandemic, they had the idea to sell essential oils, healing candles and CBD. Now, Johnson wants to incorporate some of these products into her arrangements. When a client orders a bouquet, they'll receive flowers, along with a dose of health and wellness, she says.

BECOMING A *Well-Rounded* FLORIST

Ace Berry

Fulshear Floral Design, Fulshear, Texas

Ace Berry, owner and creative director of Fulshear Floral Design in Fulshear, Texas, has never done much wedding work. "The majority of my work is retail floristry and funeral work," he says. "Before COVID-19, I was doing three to five weddings a year averaging in size from \$2,500 to \$7,500," which comprised about 10 percent of his business, he says. Now, things have changed.

"For the latter part of 2021 and into 2022, I noticed that many florists weren't able to take on weddings," he says. "So, I started focusing on being a more well-rounded florist with more weddings." So far, Berry has approximately 10 weddings on the books ranging in size from \$5,000 to \$17,000. "They're in the small to medium range of weddings, but it's a good amount of extra income," he says. "You're looking at anywhere between \$50,000 to \$75,000 extra a year, and in some cases, an extra \$100,000 in the bank." To handle more wedding work, Berry hired additional employees and built a wedding department.

"I've noticed that a lot of friends that just did events are trying to get out of the business — COVID really took a toll," Berry says. "For me, it taught me to streamline my business and get rid of things I don't need and embrace the things that do well." Case in point, Berry ditched his line of home goods that weren't selling and leaned more heavily into wedding work. "I would love for weddings to be 25 percent of my business," he says. "I used to feel that I didn't have time to give wedding work my all. Now, what I've realized is that I have a bit more time because I figured out ways to do it better."

Aside from using event design software, Berry has begun doing styled shoots to enhance the visuals on his site. He also recently hired a social media manager to increase his presence on Instagram. "I've noticed that's where many brides find their florists, wedding venues and honeymoon destinations," he says. "And the next rounds of brides are going to be through TikTok."

FOCUSING ON *Relationships* THROUGH EVENTS

Nic Faitos

*Starbright Floral Design,
New York City*

Nic Faitos, senior partner at Starbright Floral Design in New York City, has no intention of chasing the wedding market, no matter how big it's going to be. "I'm out of the wedding business and I'm going to let everyone else fight over weddings," he says, noting that his focus has always been business-to-business work. "Our clients are Fortune 500

"We're not necessarily always looking for the profit on the individual event, but more focused on the long-term relationship."

—Nic Faitos, *Starbright Floral Design*

companies and event planners outside the social market," he says. "Now, that doesn't mean we don't do social events, but we do them very, very selectively and only through referrals from our existing clients."

Faitos has found that his corporate clients consistently hire him for their events, which are faster to book, more lucrative, and less time-consuming than weddings. He can count on annual galas such as the Golden Goggle Awards presented by the USA Swimming Foundation and Ernst & Young's Entrepreneur of the Year Awards. The event planners who work with him know he'll deliver gorgeous florals every time, he says.

While many of Faitos' clients closed their businesses during the pandemic, Faitos still found a way to serve them. Instead of doing the weekly flowers for their reception areas, lobbies and public spaces, as well as caring for regular and leased plants throughout their offices, he catered to individuals within each company. "There were a lot of people who work for businesses that wanted flowers," says Faitos, for themselves, their family, friends and colleagues. What's more, his staff began cold calling human resource departments to open up new accounts. And many signed on during the pandemic, says Faitos, placing increasingly larger orders as the pandemic began to wane. In fact, Starbright Floral Design handled the flowers for 73 corporate holiday parties in the first 11 days of December before Omicron hit.

"If we have an established relationship with an organization, a client or planner, if something needs to be done, no matter how last minute it is, no matter what the budget is, we do what needs to be done," he says. "We're not necessarily always looking for the profit on the individual event, but more focused on the long-term relationship." Indeed, Faitos has hundreds of loyal clients and Starbright Floral

Design has an annual revenue of slightly less than 10 million dollars, he says.

"In order for any florist to survive in any economy and at any time, they have to diversify," Faitos adds. "So, it's not that we don't do weddings; we just don't pursue them. Another good example of that is funeral homes. We've never dropped off a business card at a funeral home, but of course we do

funerals. I want to promote my industry and brand where nobody has thought of marketing and promoting flowers. And if I'm doing that successfully, I'm growing my business and not taking away somebody else's business." 🌿

Victoria Abbott Riccardi is a contributing writer for *Floral Management* magazine.



CORPORATE CONNECTIONS Starbright Floral Design has built a following of loyal corporate clients who turn to the florist year after year for event work.