

Palm Beach Daily News

BUSINESS

British florist relocates to Palm Beach

Samantha Davis has a passion for flowers. The 28-year-old British florist already has 10 years in the field. For six years, she has been a part of the renowned Moyses Stevens floral-designing team in London.

Founded in 1876, Moyses Stevens has always been regarded as a leader in classical floristry. The company operates shops on Sloane Street and at Harrod's in Knightsbridge. The company also holds the royal warrant for Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, and has contracts with Grosvenor House, Le Meridien and the Four Seasons hotels.

In November, Davis relocated to Palm Beach for the opening of Moyses Stevens at 205 Phipps Plaza. The store is co-owned by Palm Beach interior designer Leta Austin Foster and Jennifer D'Abo, chairman and owner of the Moyses Stevens company.

— CHRISTOPHER KEIDAISH

How did you get involved in floristry?

After leaving school, I went to study floristry and flower production in North Wales. I then went on to work for Malcolm Hillier [of Hillier & Hillier], who wrote a number of books on dried and fresh flowers. From him, I learned how to make elaborate connections of dried fruits, flowers and interesting foliage. Since then, I have free-lanced for many of the better florists in London, picking up different styles and tricks of the trade from each.

The English have a philosophy on flower arranging. Can you explain?

[We] English like our flower arrangements to look very natural. We use a lot of mixed leaves, grasses and twigs and group the flowers around the foliage as if they were growing there.

What are some of the challenges you have faced working for Moyses Stevens?

For one of the six years I have been with Moyses Stevens, I worked as the manager of our franchise in the Four Seasons Hotel, responsible for all of the floral decorations for the hotel and all of the banquets it puts on. Floral decoration on such a grand scale is quite different from shopwork. For example, there was a huge, 5-foot-square, two-tiered urn in the middle of the lobby that we kept completely filled with flowers and plants, using a ladder. And each arrangement had to look different and last a week. That's quite a challenge.

Which facet of floristry do you enjoy the most?

I probably enjoy decorating special events the most. You can really go to town on a large party. And if the party has a theme, your imagination really goes wild. I once decorated a party to conjure up the Indian celebration Divali, or bonfire night, complete with fireworks. We created a woodland pathway through the ballroom, framed with real birch trees, and we strewed cartloads of mixed leaves on the ground leading up to the bonfire, which looked like it was really blazing due to a sophisticated array of lights underneath and spotlights from the sides. And around the room, we had explosions of flowers in strong, vibrant colors erupting from the candelabra.

What prominent parties in London have you worked on?



Samantha Davis (left) moved from England to Palm Beach to open a new branch of Moyses Stevens florist. The store, at 205 Phipps Plaza, is co-owned by interior designer Leta Austin Foster (right).

Daily News Photo by PATRICK EGAN

Of course, the most romantic special events to decorate are weddings. Last summer, at the Livanos wedding reception at the Grosvenor House Hotel, we suspended a huge crown of white flowers over the dance floor. Each of the 200 tables had its own topiary tree, bursting with white roses, casablanco and peonies.

For a twist on the color theme, we decorated a huge dinner party at Bridgewater House — attended by the queen — all in blue: cornflowers, delphinium, blue bee and nigella. The result was quite mystical.

For a party at the Natural History Museum, we had to get a bit more earthy, to fit in with the dinosaurs. So we constructed candelabra out of bamboo, topped with euphorbia, gerbra and long lilies, with a base of bananas, artichokes, lemons and cut melon.

What kind of projects have you done for the queen mother?

Because Moyses Stevens has a warrant from the queen mother, we do quite a lot of state parties. For these, we fill Buckingham Palace's huge fireplaces with more formal arrangements, matched by smaller ones on the tables. We also send out her personal flowers to friends and family, delicate arrangements filled with pinks and blues.

Other than flowers, what is Moyses Stevens known for?

Other than flowers, Moyses Stevens features a complete line of potpourri, baskets, vases and pottery.

What are the challenges of work-

ing as a florist in a different country and a different climate?

Working in the United States has been quite a lot of fun, but it has also presented a new set of challenges. Flowers tend not to last quite as long due to the hot weather, so conditioning them first is very important. I'm also working with more tropical flowers than ever before, especially orchids. I love to mass them in rustic, twig baskets with moss and pebbles and bark.

How were you selected from other Moyses Stevens florists for the Palm Beach store?

I think Jennifer D'Abo, the head of Moyses Stevens, probably selected me to come to America because I have traveled quite a lot — across Europe, in Central America, Southeast Asia, India, Egypt and Israel — and I get along well in all different environments and situations.

Would you say you have a style that is uniquely your own?

Over the years, I think my own style has evolved out of all the different influences and experiences I have had. This is a country look, which means I like the flowers to look as if they are growing right out of the basket. To achieve this, I start with the greenery rather than the flowers, and the shape of the greenery will predict where to place the flowers. I think this leads to the most natural look and encourages the use of lots of interesting foliage. It also has the added benefit of allowing you to easily remove or replace flowers as they wilt.