

## the first lady of flora

While groggily travelling home along Ponsonby Road early one Saturday morning, I see one shop still buzzing: Texas Rose.



PHOTOS: JULIE SMITH

Recently voted Auckland's favourite florist for the fifth year in a row, Texas Rose has clearly retained its crown through good old-fashioned hard work. When I spoke to owner, Julie Smith, she hadn't finished work until very late the night before. "I was there until about three in the morning running around". Preparing for Valentines Day Julie was making sure, as always, that Texas Rose will be able to give people a perfect composition. In her earlier days as a florist it used to be the other way around, with her stumbling into work straight from a club and just "getting on with the day".

Julie has now owned the business for six years, and has had almost twenty years industry experience. Remaining a favourite with clients for a such a long time is a major achievement in this creative industry and she believes a strong relationship with the local clientele and community has been vital. "No matter how many shops open up around us our clients are really loyal, I think because they know they are getting quality". Continuing to be voted number one is important feedback for her. "It's a good confirmation for me that we have done the right thing, that we are on the right track". Her focus on the individual and bold experimentation are the two main factors that have shaped her business and made it such a success.

Flowers are always emotive, whether for a valentine or a funeral and she recognizes this, saying "You're selling a message, or what someone feels in their heart. It's very personal". While many people who visit her shop know her by name, it is Julie's skill as a florist that ultimately means loyal customers. Her strength comes from not being nervous to buy what she likes, or to experiment. "Everybody has the opportunity to buy these flowers at the market, but I probably do specialize in the more exotic flowers. People tend to think of us as a rose shop and we do tend to get the most unusual roses that come through."

Ever since she started work as a florist, Julie says she has been lucky to work in places that have lent themselves to compositions that are out of the ordinary. In Texas Rose, it was important to maintain an atmosphere where creative alternatives are always sought by her and her team. To nurture this ideal her shop has the feel of a studio rather than a retail store. "Ideas come from ideas," she says "and it's not ever just one person. It's always a team effort".

Two years living in the heat and colour of Bali influenced her style and gave her a strong knowledge of tropical flowers. Her future plans are to continue to step out of her environment, seeking inspiration. For Julie, travel equates to new ideas. "I think it makes you a lot more aware. It makes you a little more daring, which of course follows though in design and business".

Julie has become known for her daring design and the real key to her success is that she continues to innovate. Her time owning Texas Rose has taught her a lot about her craft, and made her a benchmark for quality in the industry. "I never would have learnt half of the things I know if I was still working for someone else."

