



Photo by Alex Leith

TRADE SECRETS

CHRISTIAN HOPPER, LEWESIANA

What's 'Lewesiana' all about? We want to create an atmosphere whereby the shop becomes a shared space for the team and the customers, working together to ensure the best possible floral creations. We will help customers choose what flowers to buy, with the longest life, at the best prices. We're also running flower arrangement courses, and other activities like wine tastings. And there's a little photography gallery in the back of the shop that anyone is welcome to come in and look at.

Who's in your team? Gary has been a florist for 35 years, and has tremendous experience at the top end of the market. Stephanie's portfolio has just won an award of excellence from the City and Guilds, which covers the whole of the UK. I come from a background of corporate responsibility consultancy, which means I'm moving from green buildings to green fingers! I was also a picture researcher for a publishing company, so I have developed a good feel for colour, form and substance, which has helped me during training courses in floristry at Plumpton College.

Why did you set up in Lewes? I love this town, and always have. I chose to get married here, in Anne of Cleves House. I grew up in Bergamo, a medieval hilltop town in northern Italy, and I find there are a lot of similarities. It's a town with a massive artistic bent that's packed with history and cultural depth, with a rebel streak running through it.

One of your lines is Dr Hauschka products... That was a very strong line in the old business and we've kept it on. It's a pure botanical product, so we're still focussing on the luxury of nature.

How green is your business? When I got involved in the flower business I discovered, to my horror, that the industry was far less green than it appears. Many of the flowers here are grown in Holland, and even most of the English ones have been to Holland and back for auction. So I'm not going to make any claims for the greenness of this business, before I can properly deliver on them. Step one is always measuring your position, and we're very much in the measuring stage. But we do want to work as closely as possible within the local community. We're using a metal worker, a wood-turner and a ceramicist from the local area. Look after your neighbours, and they'll look after you.

Are there any perks to the job? I've got a house full of flowers: the 'seconds' we can't sell. They still look fantastic though. Also, the relationship with customers. In the flower business, you're always close to emotion. You're generally connecting with a positive mood.

How was the opening to your new photo gallery? Fantastic. About eighty people came, and they drank me dry! There were four of the artists I'm featuring there, too. Lewes has such a rich history of commercial photography, and I was surprised there wasn't a dedicated photography gallery here. There is now. I also see the space as somewhere clients can use for parties, and launch events. I'm thinking of making it a 'buttonhole bar' on Friday evenings.

Give us a top tip... With hollow stems like Germinis and Gerberas, put a drop of bleach in the water, to keep the bacteria away. And change the water every other day. Most flowers die because of a dirty vase.

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