

lifeSPRING

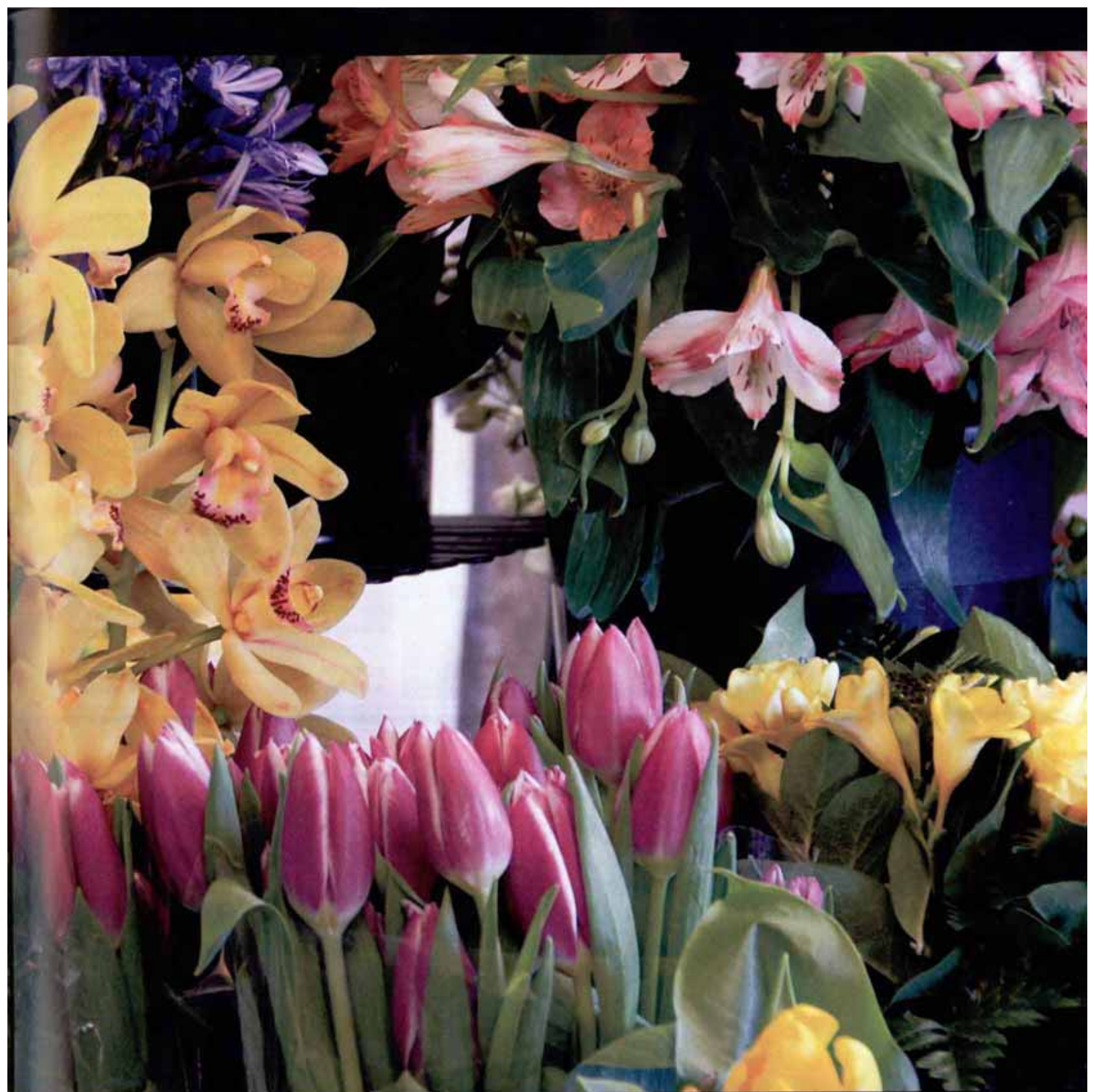


Behind the scene with photographer Stephen Dominick, or setting the scene for family and corporate events, Brad and Brian perform with Panache



There is positive energy at bb blooms, generated not in small measure by floor to ceiling flowers, but also bursting big from the effusive eminence of business partners brian vogt and brad baker, a savvy, innovative tandem committed to excellence. And wow, are they excited about spring

# the powers



By Gail Todd • Photography by Stephen Dominick

# of *flowers*

they don't sell arrangements, they sell emotions

"Spring is the most exciting season," Brian said mid-February, snow lighting lovely on cars in the parking lot outside wall-size windows where bay doors once opened from the one-time corner garage.

"Spring is about new growth, new season, new life. People come in all winter just to smell spring."

Six seconds pass and a rosy-cheeked woman wearing a white down-filled parka enters the shop. "Hello," Brian turns to welcome her.

Her eyes smile back, she tips back her head, breathes deep, and smiles when she says, "wow, it smells so good in here. It smells like spring."

Brian's eyes smile, a knowing grin crosses the entire width of his friendly face. He compliments her perfume. "You smell wonderful, too, what is that?"

A spirited conversation ensues of scents and memories and emotions.

It personifies BB Blooms, the business Brian Vogt and Brad Baker run downtown St. Catharines. They don't sell flowers—they sell emotions. And in event planning and interior design consulting, about 80 per cent of their business, they market atmosphere and ambiance.

It was Peller Estates Winery that brought Brian and Brad to Niagara from Toronto in 1999. The business they ran in Toronto was a "by appointment only" event planning interior consulting firm. They worked with clients from across the GTA, across the border in New York and across the

pond in England. Brad was contracted to design atmosphere in the winery lobby and restaurant. Brian, an event manager who also worked in the professional worlds of fashion, theatre and dance, worked as in-house florist and as a server in the Peller restaurant.

Why leave Toronto and all its trappings for Niagara?

"Duh," Brian responds with an emphasized stare, to epitomize logical escape from hectic crazy costly capital city and its trappings.

They first ran their business from Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada's most beautiful town, the weekend and summer sojourn for their compatriots from the Big Smoke. They'd fit right in with the theatre and arts and wine and dining and creative and corporate communities. They'd apply their international savvy to the hometown heartland they admired so many years from the other side of the Golden Horseshoe. They'd buy local flowers from local growers, and set exhilarating scenes for hotels, restaurants, weddings, business and conference events.

"It was a romantic notion," they now concur, but they rolled with entrepreneurial punches and emerged with business approaches anew.

In addition to the relationship bonded with Peller, Brian and Brad have cultivated relationships with many major wineries in Niagara, as well as hotels, restaurants, and other

regional and provincial interests. They opened the BB Blooms retail store four years ago in the one-time gas station turned dry cleaner. They loved the space, its rugged openness and cement floor—ideal for the messy business of gorgeous floral design. In the bright white 1500-square-foot space, punctuated with bright green hand-painted trimmings, and market shelves of daily arranged flowers, they employ seven people over different shifts, six days a week.

Between crunches of Doritos, a typical late-day big-bag lunch break for Brad, also a certified nutritionist—"everything in moderation"—he gathers flowers and accessories he needs for a live tv spot the following morning in the Hamilton studio of CH-TV. He's been asked to offer tips for Oscar parties planned by movie fans for the coming Sunday annual extravaganza. He has party food, floral arrangements, table setting ideas, designs for invitations—all themed for the glitz and glamour of the Academy Awards. While he gathers calmly and methodically the items he'll need for the tv interview and presentation, two employees are focused on assembling dozens of centerpieces Brad designed for a provincial business banquet Friday night in the ballroom of a Niagara Falls hotel.

The phone rings. It's a bride-to-be setting a time to talk bouquet for her early-summer nuptials. "No we don't have a photo album,"



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she is told sweetly, then encouraged to "bring pictures and pages from magazines, as many as you can find of styles and flowers you love. We'll design your bouquet just for you. We won't copy anything, we'll make it as unique as you."

Off the phone, eyes turn to the clipboard showing five deliveries which still have to be driven by 4. It's a typical busy business day.

"We have fun," Brad says. "We have to. It's a lot of work, but it's what we love, and we make it fun."

Is there a single word to describe business partner Brian, one of Niagara's most eligible bachelors?

"Energetic," Brad quips.

How about Brad?


Brian stops. Tilts his head. Tries to pinpoint a single word while he continues to put together a bouquet, ordered to celebrate the birth of a girl. He's been up since 3:30 a.m. It was his turn to go to the flowers and plants auction in Toronto.

"Just one word?"

Brad winks. He grins. He's sure Brian will not be able to choose one single word.

"Creative. He's one of the most creative, talented skilled people I know. And messy. That's it. Messy. But that goes with creative."

Brad laughs. "I knew he couldn't choose one word. He has too many words."

Staff laughs too, and adds, if he's not talking, he's singing, or he's dancing, or both. It's a fun, crazy place to work, year-round. 



## Spring

Bright and early, morning starts:

a singing trembling green.

Propelled into service, sunlight  
polishes the cold bedroom floor.

Urged to awaken from your  
long winter sleep, you slowly stir.

Oh what a beautiful morning.

The birds agree: it's here, it's here.

And spring is here and beauty  
and everything in between.

—Salvatore DiFalco

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