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Photographs by Angela Moore



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## The 21st century florist

Fresh thinking by Flowerbx

At the risk of sounding like Barbra Streisand, no one bought me flowers until I got my current job. And I certainly didn't buy them for myself. I'm not certain I even knew that was an option. Surely only Elton John was fabulous and flamboyant – not to mention rich – enough to buy himself fresh flowers?

But fashion people do buy flowers, and they even send them to stodgy old straight men like me. It's just one of the things they do, like saying the word "major" a lot and smoking cigarettes for lunch. And so, as editor of Britain's most fragrant men's style magazine, as soon as I got my feet under the mahogany desk a few years back I began to receive, from time to time, splendid bunches of flowers: roses, lilies, on one occasion a magnificent white orchid – every glossy magazine editor has an orchid, it's as essential as an inflated ego and a sense of impending doom – that survived for seasons but died when *Esquire's* features editor, Miranda, who cared for it, went on maternity leave. Plants: such drama queens.

Instantly, I found I loved being sent flowers. I don't eat chocolate, wine only encourages my dipsomania, and I certainly don't need any more leather goods. So flowers, it turns out, are the perfect present →

BUDDING ENTREPRENEUR:  
WHITNEY BROMBERG HAWKINGS  
AT THE FLOWERBX HQ, PARK  
ROYAL, LONDON, JANUARY 2017

RIGHT: WHITE CALLA LILIES ARRANGED IN A TALL APOTHECARY VASE FOR DELIVERY FROM FLOWERBX

for me. They are beautiful, of course. They smell good. And they are chic. As soon as you start receiving them you realise there's nothing intrinsically effeminate about them, either. Flowers don't have to be girly. It's not like wearing a dress or watching *Loose Women* in your jim-jams while sobbing and eating cake.

Still, though: florists. Weird, forbidding places, cold and damp and staffed by harridans who look at you like an idiot if you don't know the difference between a chrysanthemum and a hydrangea. Florists are awful. And then: bouquets. Frumpy, tacky, pre-packaged bundles of false sentiment. A man might like to be sent flowers but few of us would want to be lobbed a bouquet.

All of which is why I was so taken, when I first heard of it, with the idea of the e-commerce venture Flowerbx, a new name in flowers that delivers fresh, uncut stems, direct from Holland to you or the object of your affection, in stylish packaging and at an unprecedentedly competitive price. It's easiest to think of it as the Net-a-Porter – or in our case, Mr Porter – of florists, and perhaps it's no surprise that the Net-a-Porter founders are among its investors.

Flowerbx is the brainchild of one of those same fashion people who once sent me and others like me flowers. Whitney Bromberg Hawkings, a co-founder and director of the company, was for many years Tom Ford's right-hand woman, first at Gucci, then YSL, and latterly at his own-name label.



On a cold December morning, I drove to the Flowerbx nerve centre, on an industrial estate in west London, just off the A40 – a far cry from her previous digs in Tom Ford's salubrious Victoria HQ – and let Whitney, a Texan sunburst in human form, talk at me for an hour about why men should buy flowers, and why, specifically, we should buy flowers from her. I could explain the Flowerbx pitch to you myself, but why bother when she does it so much better?

Over to you, Whitney.

“OK, how it works: flowers come over from Holland, they stay at the Covent Garden Flower Market. Florists buy them from there, then they mark it up, four, five times, then they have it sitting in their store for two, three, four days. So, if you're having a dinner party and you go to a florist, you spend £300, which is ridiculous because you get hardly anything for your money.

“Then, I'm like, flowers are the one thing in the world that haven't been branded. You go to Prada in China, you go to Prada in LA and you know exactly what you're getting; you're getting the same packaging, you're getting the same curated selection of products, and you're getting the same quality. When you're sending flowers you have no idea what the person on the other end is going to get. I would send flowers on behalf of Tom, I'd send his mum white tulips, and then she'd be like, 'Thank you so much for those pink tulips,' and I'm like, 'What?'

“Here, because we order directly for our customer, we have no stock. That way we can't sell anything that isn't super-fresh. This,” (waves arms at various buckets full of flowers) “has all gotten here at five o'clock this morning from Holland and it will all leave today. Because we don't have stock and because we don't have to mark things

up two or three times, we're basically the market. But we're the market branded and delivered to your door.

“Pretty much any single flower, if you group it together in a huge bunch, is chic, you know what I mean? Tom would get sent these bouquets and he would take them all apart, and just put five roses together. Then they look beautiful. If you put roses with this and that and that and that,” (waves again at various flowers) “it sort of takes away from the purity of the flower and the beauty of the flower.

“That is *very* good advice. I think it's our job to educate people: any flower is beautiful if it's in a big bunch by itself. I mean, sure, if you want a bouquet, go get a bouquet. Go to a florist and get a big thing, you know, with baby's breath and eucalyptus and filler, and whatever. But we're all about the purity of the flower.

“What you do is you put a bunch in a chic, simple vase and it's beautiful. And it's going to last 10 to 12 days, probably even more, because they've come straight from Holland, instead of five days, which is if you got them from a florist. We also have introduced this whole vase range, which makes it sort of foolproof. Seriously.

“If you took those daisies right there, put them in one of our apothecary vases, all you have to do is trim the end. Basically, you need a pair of trimmers, which we're going to introduce.

“So, how it works is you go on the website. There's not a bad flower because we've also curated the selection of flowers. There's nothing that you're going to get that's going to surprise you in a bad way or surprise a person you've sent it to.

“Flowers make you happy no matter what: if you're sad, they make you happy; if you're happy, they make you happy. You know what I mean? They just, I mean, just look at them!

“OK. A bunch that we sell of hydrangea is 10. So that is a bunch. That costs £60. That is nothing. Nothing! But if that comes to your door, you're like, 'Oh, that smells amazing.' I mean, that is impressive. And then you trim it and put it in a simple vase. You don't need to arrange it, nor do you need to know anything about flowers. You need to know how to cut. You can cut, right?

“Even flowers I'm not crazy about, I'm telling you that anything you get is chic and elegant. I mean, orange roses maybe aren't my favourite thing in the world but if you put those in an apothecary vase, they will make your office, your house, your life, everything, much better. I mean, there's no one who wouldn't be happy to see it.

“White peonies! White peonies are the most fragrant, the most beautiful. You get 10, your whole life is better. For, like, almost two weeks. They come in a bud and you're like, 'nyaa', you know what I mean? And then you watch them for two weeks and they unfurl and they're amazing.

“Men like white roses. A white rose is a classic, it's universally appealing. Maybe that's a better place to start for a man. Or white calla lilies, which I'm sure you know. I mean this is something Tom always has in his offices. You put those in a medium vase, they're elegant, they'll last again like eight or nine days, and that's quite masculine.

“Live your life with flowers! It's chic.

“So, there. Are you sold?” **ENDS**  
*flowerbx.com*



Hair: Calvin Klambauer | Makeup: Tom Ford Beauty