



Tomas De Bruyne

‘Design is understanding why something needs to be there’

Tomas De Bruyne began his career as a florist and has gone on to become an internationally renowned floral designer, author, educator and keynote speaker. His work has taken him to prestigious events, luxury weddings and international projects around the world, for clients who see design as adding strategic value to the overall experience.

TEXT | RAMONA KEZER PHOTOGRAPHY | ALEX MATEIU

That international experience laid the foundation for his distinctive vision of floral design, in which flowers are not the end goal but a medium for creating experiences, emotions and meaningful moments. He sets out this vision in his recently published book *The Art of Design*.

He also shares his knowledge and design philosophy with professionals around the world through talks, training courses and EMC, the training institute he co-founded.

The shift in Tomas's vision did not happen overnight. 'It was a gradual process in which I began to understand that flowers are not an end in themselves.

'At the start of your career, your focus is primarily on technique: how do you cut, bind, attach, insert and construct, and

'I no longer saw flowers as the starting point, but as a medium'

ensure that something is stable, will last and is executed correctly? That is essential, because without craftsmanship an idea often remains just an idea. You also develop your sense of colour, proportion and beauty. Those are aesthetic choices that determine what something looks like. But technique and aesthetics are not yet design. Design begins when you consciously consider what you want a design to make people feel or experience, or what you want it to communicate. The focus then shifts from making an object to creating impact.'

According to Tomas, this does not diminish the importance of technique. 'Quite the opposite. Throughout my career I have always devoted a great deal of attention to craftsmanship and technical mastery, which was recognised, among other things, with an award for best

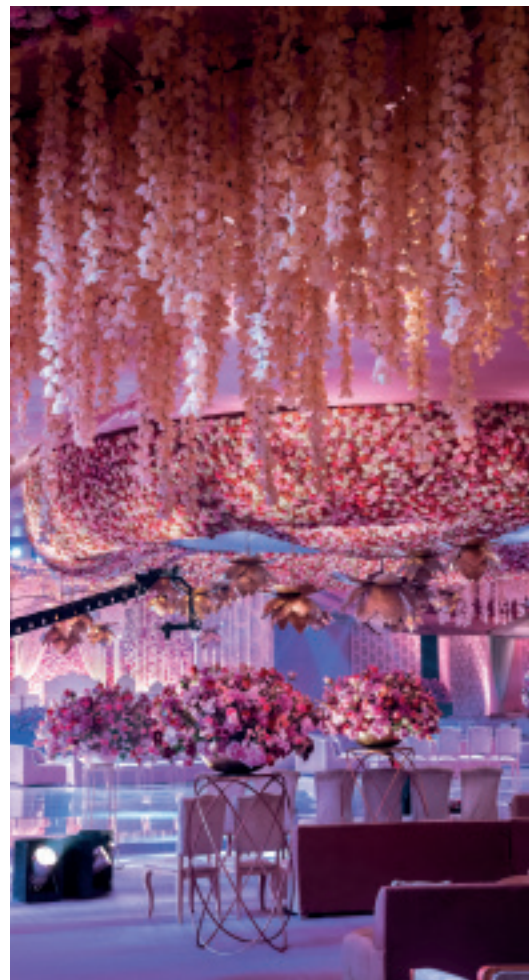
technique at the World Cup Floral Art. That conviction also formed the basis of my book *Techniques for Floral Beauty*, in which I discuss more than 150 techniques and their applications. For me, a design first takes shape in the mind. Technique then makes it visible, tangible and achievable. What has always driven me is passion: a passion for understanding more deeply and looking beyond what is visible.'

EVERYTHING HAS TO BE RIGHT

According to Tomas, the strongest projects are not those with the most flowers, but those in which everything comes together: the space, the scale, the light, the movement of guests and the emotion of the moment. 'This fundamentally changed the way I think. I no longer saw flowers as the starting point, but as a medium. From then on, the design grew out of an idea, an emotion or an experience that I wanted to create. Only after that did I ask how flowers could support it.

'That insight gave me much greater freedom as a designer. Floral design was no longer a matter of decorating, but of consciously shaping experiences.'

According to Tomas, a creative professional only becomes a designer when they do not simply execute, but make deliberate choices guided by intent.





‘Craftsmanship is knowing how to make something. Decoration is making something more beautiful. Design is understanding why something needs to be there. The distinction does not lie in the size of the project or the budget. A small bouquet can be designed, while a large-scale installation can remain purely decorative. Design emerges when form, function, context and emotion reinforce one another. Why this colour? Why this scale? Why here? Why now? What does it do to the person experiencing it? A good designer does not think in terms of flowers, colours and technique, but in terms of impact.’

The most important phase of a design takes place before the first sketch is made or the first flower is chosen: observing, understanding and analysing. What is the essence of this space? Who are the people we are designing for? What is the occasion, the purpose and the desired

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impact? What emotion should linger? What deserves attention, what needs amplifying and what is a distraction? Only when those questions have been answered can a design emerge that does more than simply look beautiful.

UNDERSTAND FIRST, THEN DESIGN

Tomas works on events, demonstrations, experiences and installations around the world for clients. To develop the right concept, he often visits the location in advance or asks the architect for the building plans.

‘I look not only at what is possible, but above all at the potential. How can the space support the design? Which existing qualities can be used or strengthened? For me, design begins with recognising possibilities that make an idea greater than it was originally. My job as a designer is not to fill a space, but to reveal its potential. Every design starts from scratch for me;

I do not repeat myself. The buildings are often very large, and I use the building and its interior to elevate the floral design. That is why, for example, I want to understand exactly how people move through a space. Not just from a logistical perspective, but because every experience has a rhythm. As a designer, I try to build that experience deliberately. That is why sightlines, circulation, arrival points and transitions matter so much. They determine not only where a design is positioned, but also how it is experienced. Ultimately, I do not just design objects in a space; I design a journey through it.’

‘I am also designing for a client. That means I first need to understand who they are, what matters to them and what expectations surround the project. Practical factors naturally play a part, such as budget, timing and feasibility. But understanding the underlying intentions is at least as important. What

experience do we want to create? What should this project mean to the people who will experience it?’

During installation, the floral designer works closely with subcontractors. He has an extensive network of freelancers. The size of the team naturally depends on the scale and complexity of the project. For large weddings, the team can number as many as 500 people. ‘But a small-scale approach is possible too. I recently worked on a wedding in Italy with my right-hand person and twelve Italian florists. I make a conscious effort to involve local people in

executing my projects. That is not only because I think it is important to give something back to the local economy, but also because they bring indispensable knowledge of the area. They know the language, the culture and the way people work and communicate. This anchors an international design more firmly in the local reality. Alongside local teams, I often work with one or more regular team members who know my design vision and help safeguard the quality of the execution.’

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ADAPTING AND IMPROVISING

However carefully you plan something, it can still unfold differently. Tomas encountered this, for example, on a large project in India. ‘There is often a kind of controlled chaos there, so I am always there in person. On this project, a specially designed structure had been constructed on site at a much smaller scale than planned. That is when you have to adapt and improvise.’

Problems with the flower delivery arose on a project in Pakistan. As a result, the original design could not be executed as





Photo: Cohim

planned. In the end, Tomas worked with 4,000 local white gladioli, which were coloured on site to match the client's colour palette. 'It is a choice whether you see something like that as a challenge or as impossible. It is tense for a moment, but it is also enjoyable to have to be intuitive and innovative. I spot patterns quickly and can break them just as quickly. That helps.'

INTERNAL LOGIC

Some designs linger for years, while others disappear from memory immediately. Tomas has an explanation for this. 'People do not remember exactly what they saw, but how it affected them. It has to create a moment: tension, a point of calm, a surprise, emotional recognition.'

For him, the story, context and experience are crucial parts of the design. A strong

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design has an internal logic. Everything seems self-evident, however much thought has gone into it. The details are not accidental. 'Some designs fade away because their only aim is to impress. They are large, expensive or spectacular, but lack an emotional anchor. What remains is not volume; what remains is meaning.'

This vision also formed the basis of the book *The Art of Design – The Floral Poet*. The book reflects a professional journey spanning more than twenty-five years: from florist to designer of international events and large-scale experiences. Tomas takes the reader behind the scenes of the creative process.

Through sketches, concepts, practical examples and personal insights, he shows that design begins not with making, but with looking, understanding and interpreting. The book offers insight into what happens before a design becomes visible. It is as much a book about creativity as it is about floral design.

'I wish I had understood much sooner that design begins not with doing, but with looking. This book is not a manual for copying my style. It is an invitation to learn to look differently. Because as soon as someone looks differently, what they create changes too.'

FROM PRODUCT TO EXPERTISE

Tomas sees plenty of opportunities ahead, provided the industry learns to take a broader view of itself. 'Flowers are far more than a product. They are a medium with which we can shape atmosphere, emotion and experience. The better we understand the impact our designs can have on people and spaces, the greater the value we can create as florists and designers.'

According to Tomas, our industry's greatest opportunity lies in broadening our role. Not by leaving flowers behind, but by better understanding what we actually do with them. 'We work with a medium that evokes emotions, transforms spaces and enhances experiences. That requires not only craftsmanship, but also an



Photo: Pasquale Cuorvo



Photo: Tanuj Bhatia



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understanding of people, context, space, culture and experience.

‘AI will change our industry too. Not because it ‘replaces’ designers, but because it makes clear where their true value lies. An event designer does not design décor; they design an experience. That requires an understanding of space, emotion, behaviour, culture, logistics and objectives. AI can assist, but it does not understand why an experience needs to work. That remains the designer’s responsibility.’

This is also one of the principles on which the training institute EMC was built. From the outset, its founders

‘Floral design is about consciously shaping experience’

focused not only on the end result, but on the thinking behind it. ‘Our methodology, the Infinite Creative Effect (ICE), is rooted in a simple idea: when people understand why something works, they become independent of trends, styles and formulas. Because ultimately, the greatest value lies not in the product itself, but in the ability to consciously create experiences that mean something to the people who experience them. Perhaps the greatest challenge for our industry is not attracting more people, but broadening what we understand floral design to be. Flowers are far more than a product. They are a medium. That applies just as much to a bouquet given as a gift as it does to a wedding, an event or a hotel interior.

When young people see that wider perspective, they get a different picture of the profession. They see not just a craft, but a profession that brings together creativity, entrepreneurship, communication and human connection. Perhaps we should therefore focus less on how many people we attract and more on presenting our profession in an inspiring way. Quality has always had more impact than quantity. The future of our industry will be determined not by the number of florists, but by the people who succeed in making the value of our profession visible and relevant, time and again.’ 🌹



Photo: Pervez Taufiq

TOMAS DE BRUYNE IN BRIEF

Tomas De Bruyne is an internationally renowned floral designer from Belgium, specialising in architectural and conceptual floral design. Through his company, he creates large-scale installations around the world for weddings, events, exhibitions and corporate gatherings. His work centres on experience, emotion and storytelling. Flowers are not merely decoration, but a means of creating experiences and memories.

Besides his work as a designer, Tomas De Bruyne is actively committed to advancing the profession. He is the founder and lead tutor at EMC (European Master Certification), an international training programme that helps florists further develop their design skills and creative potential.

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