

Taking time to smell the orchids

Antoinette Rivard Drouart '74/'03G has accomplished more at mid-life than most people do in an entire lifetime: She's fluent in English, French, and Japanese and well versed in Spanish; she served as a translator for New York Life Insurance Company and the United Nations for 13 years; she's resided in the United States, France, and Japan; she earned her B.A. in French from Rivier in 1974 and her Master of Arts in Teaching French in 2003, and currently teaches French classes as an adjunct professor in the Rivier Modern Languages Department. And as if that's not enough—she recently became a business owner, celebrating her grand opening of Ikebana Flower on West Pearl Street in downtown Nashua.

Ikebana, the Japanese word for “living flowers” refers to the art of arranging flowers with special regard to balance, harmony, and form. “It's the association of ideas and impressions of nature expressed through flowers,” says Drouart, who began studying ikebana at The Sogetsu School of Ikebana in Tokyo and later continued her studies in New York. She became certified after completing five years of intense study and earning four certificates. “When I lived in Tokyo, I immersed myself in the Japanese culture, learning language, sewing, and cooking skills, in addition to ikebana,” says Drouart.

She explains that each flower has a symbolic meaning: pine is “everlasting”; bamboo signifies “strength”; orchids stand for “celebration”; tulips represent the “beginning of life.” An ikebana arrangement typically consists of only one or two flowers, a limited number of branches, and a container that is a “work of art in itself,” according to Drouart. The limited number of elements means that each individual flower or branch becomes the focal point of the arrangement, a very different approach than that taken by western-style florists



Photo by Arthur Durity

(ēkē-bä'nä)

Ikebana: The Japanese art of formal flower arrangement with special regard to balance, harmony, and form.



who often gather dozens and dozens of flowers into a single vase.

Even the flowers themselves are different than those found at local florists. You won't find any carnations at Ikebana Flower. Instead, you're apt to see bamboo, eucalyptus pod, flax leaf, monstera leaf, red dogwood, ginger, orchids, and other unique items.

For Antoinette, owning her own business is about much more than making a profit. As the sole business owner, she's responsible for marketing, advertising, accounting—you name it, she does it. But Drouart's true passion is teaching—something she's done in one form or another her entire life.

The “bread and butter” of her new business endeavor is, appropriately, sharing the art of ikebana with others. She teaches classes in her downtown shop to a diverse group of college students, senior citizens, and business professionals, and to members of Rivier's Institute for Senior Education (RISE).

Drouart is a member of the Boston chapter of Sogetsu Ikebana, a 9,000-member worldwide group that holds monthly workshops on promoting the understanding of ikebana. She is also a member of the NH Orchid Society and the Nashua Garden Club.

Drouart loves the calming effect that the flower arranging offers. She imparts to her students the need to slow down, to consider each lesson an opportunity not only to develop new skills, but to reflect and meditate.

“I enjoy bringing people together,” says Drouart. She promises to always keep a personal touch in her business, noting that's how it's done in Japan and how it should be done in the United States. “There's less and less of the personal touch in today's business world,” says Drouart, leading her to focus on sharing her craft and encouraging others to take the time to “stop and smell the orchids” on a regular basis. ■