



Left: Casablanca lily on glass stand; Below: Dawn Smith in the RTfact shop in Claygate



# IT'S THE BEAUTY IS... SILK

The demand for silk flowers is on the increase. You will find them adorning some of the most exclusive residences in the region. Cream of Surrey speaks to Dawn Smith, founder and managing director of RTfact in Claygate, who has been instrumental in creating this trend

**A**CCORDING TO DAWN, when she opened the RTfact shop in Claygate seven years ago, her biggest concern was addressing people's negative perceptions about artificial flowers. By sourcing the finest quality silk flowers and creating stunning bespoke arrangements for clients, RTfact quickly challenged people's pre-conceived ideas, developing a loyal client base which includes celebrities, interior designers and multi-million pound home owners. In fact, business is blooming for RTfact - the only Surrey-based company to have been shortlisted for the British Small Business Champions Award run by the Federation of Small Businesses.

Dawn commented, "When starting the business, my vision was not just to provide the most beautiful silk flowers available worldwide but also to create a niche in the market for designing stunning, bespoke faux flower arrangements. To me it is not just the stems that have to be of exceptional quality. The pots and vases also have to be creative and inspiring, so that the whole piece comes together like a work of art. I also made a conscious decision to aim at the high end of the market and put a great deal of thought behind the colours and messages used to create the RTfact brand. The location of the shop was also critical to the success of the business. I chose Claygate because it is an affluent area, with easy parking and a wonderful village atmosphere."

Not a day goes by without someone walking into the RTfact shop and assuming that the flowers are real. Great care is taken in merchandising, so that it looks and even smells like a contemporary florist. The shop has a prestigious reputation and it is this reputation that won Dawn the trust of many of the exclusive property owners in the area.

Dawn explains, "A number of years ago, a developer came into the RTfact shop, having heard about our reputation locally. After an initial consultation, we were commissioned to dress a multi-million pound show home in the Kingston area with

trees, flowers and artifacts. We still work with this client today along with many other leading Surrey-based interior designers including Hamble Interiors, Hill House interiors, The L&C Company and Aida Interiors, to add the finishing touches to some of the premium show homes and private houses in the county.

According to Lucy Manchester, co-director of The L&C Company, "As interior designers at the luxury end of the market, we appreciate the fact that Dawn understands the quality of flowers needed in order to meet our clients' needs. Dawn is very good at listening and we work together on projects to ensure that RTfact's bespoke arrangements really compliment our design. When dealing with property developers, time schedules can be very tight. Dawn is always reliable and can deliver beautifully crafted arrangements within tight time frames - helping us to enhance the reputation of our business."

With a background in interior design, Dawn also offers a free consultancy service for home-owners and has been invited into over 30 celebrity homes in Surrey. The service is second to none. It is always important for an arrangement to enhance its surroundings and Dawn has the unique ability of interpreting her client's needs in creating arrangements that will perfectly complement a customer's sense of style and the environment in which they will be situated.

"Working closely with the home owner or interior designer gives me a greater insight into their requirements. It is a privilege to be invited into people's homes and RTfact prides itself in designing each bespoke arrangement like a piece of art for a specific place in their home. I never compromise on standards and sometimes, depending on the space, go back to a house two or three times, to revisit the brief and try out different colour schemes or arrangements."

Sometimes the RTfact flowers will enhance or balance an existing colour scheme in a room. Other times, when working with a more neutral interior



→ **Top:** Orchids in glass cylinders; **Above:** Casablanca lilies in UFO vase; **Right:** Selection of herbs in glass vases

that lacks that element of drama, the theme can be created through powerful use of colour and shape. For a more tranquil environment, contemporary arrangements are often used with white or cream flowers and plenty of greenery. According to Dawn, this is the key trend at the moment. She uses white, cream and lime flowers such as orchids or lilies, to give a fresh and peaceful atmosphere. Grasses are also in high demand, adding a lush look to this current retro-style trend in interiors.

RTfact arrangements have a distinct, often dramatic, style. Dawn and her team do not simply use beautifully arranged flowers but often compliment the look by adding other materials such as fruit, twigs, pods or bark. By adding pure extracts of the flower scent to the creation, the owner is left with a stunning design which also smells beautiful.

Dawn continues, "Silk flower arrangements are an investment and, on average, last for over three years. However, not everyone wants to see the same flowers all year round. One of our many clients in St George's Hill, for example, has a bi-monthly change to ring the seasonal changes, such as peonies in summer and amaryllis in winter."

An increasing number of people also enlist RTfact's services when looking to sell their property. These clients don't want the hassle of purchasing fresh flowers each time a potential buyer comes to visit but want the aesthetics that flowers provide. For this, RTfact offers a three month hire service, helping to ensure that the potential buyer receives an extremely positive first impression when viewing the property. This is an extension of the already

existing corporate hire service which currently has in excess of 60 clients from Cambio in Guildford to Toni & Guy and Hamptons International.

Nowadays, the pace of life is so fast that many people no longer have the time to buy and maintain fresh flowers but they still want a fresh look. RTfact is able to offer clients a maintenance free, wow factor. No wonder Dawn and her team are in such high demand.

**Dawn Smith**

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**Clockwise from top right:** Rush grass in black granite vases; Hydrangeas in chrome and spiral boxus topiaries in glass cylinders; Tulips in glass vase; Roses and snowballs in glass tank

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