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Composed by Nature

Trained in landscape architecture, Kailla Platt melds the garden with floristry.

(Right) Floral designer Kailla Platt, photographed in her grandmother's garden.
Photo © Amy Winnerlind
(Bottom left) A carefree seasonal arrangement
Photo © Love Lit Wedding Photography
(Bottom right) The iconic Pacific Northwest garden of Kailla Platt's grandparents
Photo © Debra Prinzing

Unlike most florists who head to a wholesaler with their shopping lists, **Kailla Platt** can usually be found with clippers in hand as she prunes and trims from uncommon botanical specimens growing in the majestic 2.5-acre landscape created by her late grandparents, **Jane Kerr Platt** and **John Platt**.

The **Platt Garden** is located in southwest Portland, Ore. One of 50 residential properties featured in the 2015 book *Outstanding American Gardens* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang), the family's landscape is praised for collections that include an alpine rock garden; an arboretum of species *Rhododendron*; deciduous trees and conifers; and plants cherished for unique bark, foliage and blooms. The Platt's son, **David Platt**, is the current owner and caretaker of this celebrated garden, but it is their granddaughter, Kailla, who continues Jane's lessons of arranging bouquets straight from its abundant plantings.

The designer is one of few with cutting privileges at her grandmother's garden. She selects rare stems with specific pieces in mind: a bridal bouquet, an editorial shoot, a custom arrangement. When Platt was young, her family lived in the high desert community of Bend, only a few hours east of the Cascade Mountains but diametrically opposed to wet and verdant Portland.

"My 10-year-old self thought it was the greenest place in the world," Platt recalls of visits to her grandparents' home.





(Clockwise from top left) A lush compote arrangement; just-picked dahlias from Kailla Platt's Portland garden; a bridal bouquet in a tonal cream, peach and lime-green palette. All photos © Kailla Platt

Photo © Love Lit Wedding Photography

As a child, Platt recalls having tea with her grandmother and then being given free range with a pair of clippers. "She was a big influence on me," she remembers. "Photographs of my grandmother's arrangements look like what's being done today. She always had the idea of connecting her indoor space with the outdoors. To me, it has a lot of resonance when you're looking at a vase of gorgeous blooms and you know they are also blooming outside or down the road."

With degrees in fine art and landscape architecture, and after working in residential garden design for nine years, Platt migrated to the much smaller platform of floral design. She launched **Kailla Platt Flowers** in 2013 and considers herself a wedding and event florist. Her approach is influenced by the larger-scale landscapes she has designed in the past. "When I think about a venue, whether outdoors or inside a beautiful church, it's easy for me to visualize the scale and how people are going to move through and experience that space."

Platt also traces her preference for woody branches and foliage plants to her garden heritage. "The branches and the greenery set the stage for adding layers of flowers—both in the landscape and in the vase."

To her, floristry is a more immediate form of garden design. "It's like you created this amazing thing that is fleeting whereas a garden goes on and on in time," she says.

Platt draws from horticulture to differentiate her designs, choosing landscape plants not often familiar in the floristry vernacular. Like the hellebore craze that started in the gardening world and moved to floristry, she thinks the evergreen ground-cover *Epimedium* is worthy of more attention. "They cut beautifully, their foliage is amazing and the flowers are like delicate jester hats. You would never find them commercially."

Similarly, she loves using *Enkianthus*, a shrub native to Japan that blooms in a profusion of creamy yellow-to-pink bell-shaped flowers. She heads to local plant nurseries for more design inspiration. "Walking around nurseries is one way to find what you're not seeing yet at the flower market," she suggests.

Platt describes her aesthetic as "composed and thoughtful, botanically inspired." Color plays a major role in her designs, especially when Platt can repeat a singular color in five different types of flower shapes. "There is always inspiration whether it's from an unusual shrub or a plant with foliage that's not widely available. I love to pull from the garden because it keeps my designs in tune with the current season." ■

DETAILS

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