

MY LIFE IN FLOWERS

INTERVIEW Lucinda van der Hart

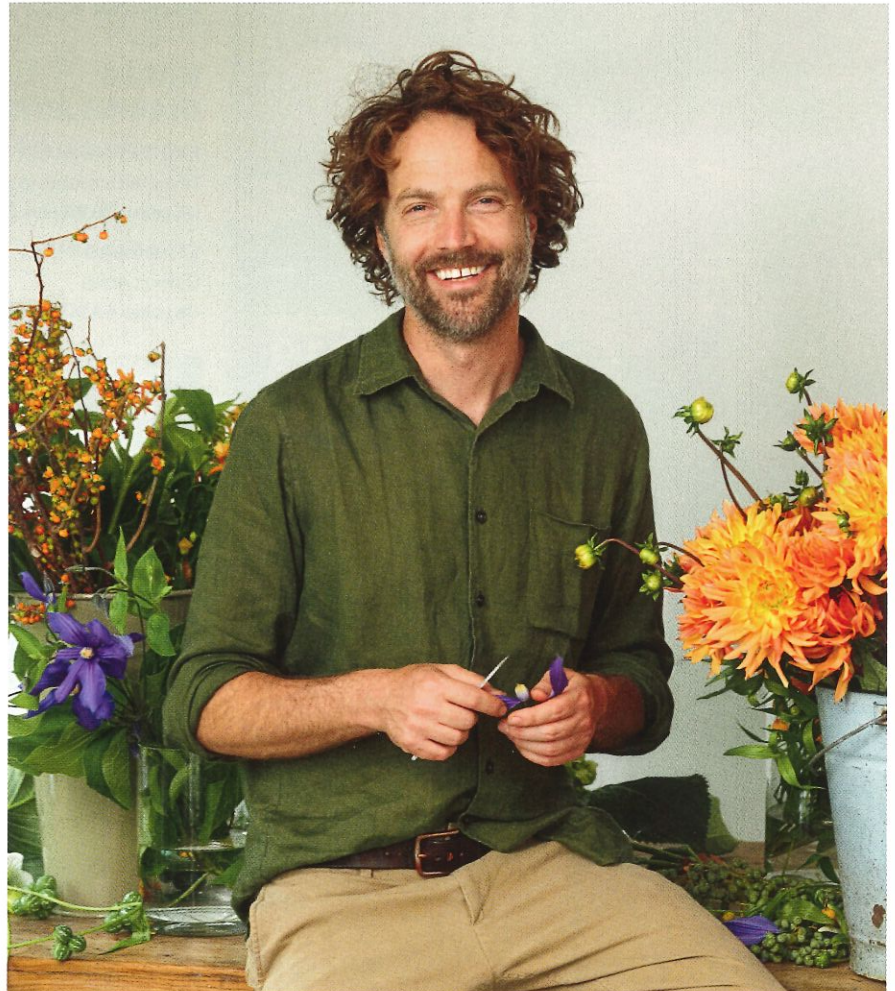
Flowers were the first thing that I was drawn to. I was given a patch of land by the time I was four, which I gardened in. It was a tiny square of the garden. As I grew up I became more specialised and got into orchids.

My great-grandmother had a great love of plants and flowers. She didn't know any of the Latin names particularly, but she had a great appreciation for nature. She said that she never felt closer to God than when she was in the garden. There was another woman who was also formative in my learning; Armenell Dupont, the former president of Rhodesia's wife. She was quite a formidable plantswoman. She allowed me to trail around her garden behind her. I was like a sponge; at six-years old I was starting to learn botanical Latin.

The floral installation that I most enjoyed creating was a catwalk involving 12,000 carnations. Mary Katrassou had a show for London Fashion Week Spring-Summer 2012 and she had photographs of tulip fields in Holland printed onto silk. She wanted tulip fields but it was August and we couldn't get tulips, so we turned to carnations to get the effect.

As an events and wedding florist I'm best known for quite concise, classic contemporary work. But now I'm moving towards a more natural, loose, asymmetrical style. It's the style that would come to me if I went into my garden, picked flowers and arranged them. I'm arranging more from the heart. Having worked so much in fashion and for large companies, I have been constantly designing for others, trying to capture their brand. I'm good at that, but it's not really arranging from the heart. I've evolved into a much looser, wilder feeling.

Robbie Honey grew up in rural Zimbabwe and now teaches in Asia. His new book *The Accidental Botanist* offers a contemporary take on botany



When I teach I often run a meditative class, which involves my teaching but in silence, often playing some classical music. The students watch me working with my plant material; I use a chicken wire base. When I've done my arrangement, they do the same thing themselves. I love sharing my enthusiasm for what I do with students.

The journey to writing my book began when I started taking pictures for Instagram; it was not something that I had planned. All the photography for the book was done on an iPhone. It's taken on grey paper - I carry grey paper wherever I go. It takes me roughly an hour to take one shot. I lay everything out on paper and then it

takes around 50 frames to get the shot I want. Then I deconstruct the flowers afresh. That helps me to get the perfect picture. It's quite a process - but I love it.

● *The Accidental Botanist:*

The Structure of Plants Revealed by Robbie Honey is out now, Clearview Books, £20 hardback

