The desire to reflect the changing seasons of her region through local flowers began when floral designer Kelly Shore began shopping at her local farmers market several years ago. She was enchanted by the unique, fresh, just-picked flowers on offer and struck up friendships with the vendors, becoming a regular customer at the Olney Farmers & Artisans Market in Olney, Md.

Having started her career at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus flower shop in 2000, Kelly later worked in retail and freelanced as a wedding and event floral designer while her boyfriend (now husband, Joe Shore) was deployed in Iraq. Kelly and Joe moved to the Washington, D.C., area in 2010, where she expected to put her Education M.A. to work as a teacher. But classroom positions were hard to find, so she returned to floristry, not realizing it would become her lifelong profession.

“I had written off floral design; I didn’t have my license, and all my supplies were still in storage,” Kelly admits. “I had never even been to a wholesaler in Baltimore.”

Yet when a friend asked her to design her wedding arrangements, Kelly’s floral future was cemented.

“I went to a flower show at Potomac Floral Wholesale in Silver Spring, Md., and there I met Laura Williams of Loda Floral Design, who told me about the Chapel Designers, an international collective of wedding and event floral designers. Laura became my mentor, and I became fascinated with Holly Heider Chapple’s business. I read her blog, and I felt empowered by it. I decided I wanted to be part of what she was part of.”

Joining Chapel Designers and attending the organization’s 2014 conference rooted Kelly in the business of weddings. It introduced her to a new floral design model, one that fit her lifestyle while raising young children and working from a home studio rather than being tied to retail hours.

“I’m connected with all these people who share the same passion. I can pick up any magazine or blog and somebody I know is featured and making positive waves in the industry. I don’t feel alone anymore.”

Kelly’s business, Petals by the Shore, serves wedding clients in Maryland; Washington, D.C.; Virginia; and Pennsylvania, a densely-populated area where, Kelly says, “everybody seems to come back when they get married.”

And while there are upwards of 25 fellow Chapel Designers in the region, “we are all so busy — there are that many brides,” she says.

Hungry for fresh botanicals unique to the region, Kelly isn’t likely to purchase flowers that she hasn’t first personally inspected. “I don’t trust anything to be delivered to me. I’m a very visual person, and I like going to the flowers.”

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This attitude has also deepened her relationships with local farmers, including Plant Masters’ Leon and Carol Carrier, who produce a wide variety of annuals, perennials, bulbs, flowering bulbs, succulent plants and ornamental branches, nearly year-round in Laytonsville, a suburb of Bethesda, Md.

“We first thought I could just buy flowers from them and a few other local growers at the farmers market; I didn’t know I could go to them,” Kelly recalls. “Visits to Plant Masters (Kelly’s favorite Dahlia source) and to M&M Plants in Comus, Md., are common during wedding season. Kelly also spent time walking through greenhouses and fields with Dave Crowing, a former Maryland cut flower farmer who now markets wholesale flower bulbs and serves as president of the board of directors of the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers.

Through these relationships, Kelly began to realize the incredible diversity of product available within minutes from her studio. “The new floral movement — especially the one embracing local and American grown flowers and the relationships cultivated between the farmers and the floral designers — has changed my world,” she says. And while many shops, studios and designers source locally at the peak of season, when ephemeral or heirloom varieties are easier to find than during January or February, Kelly suspected there was a way to be local in all four seasons.
It was after learning more about the Slow Flowers movement (full disclosure: This writer is the founder of this campaign and slowflowers.com), that Kelly asked herself, “What would happen if I made a bouquet in every season on someone’s farm?”

The idea for her four-season project germinated for a few years until she mentioned it to Katie MacGregor of Rose Gold Events & Styling, a friend and local wedding planner based in suburban Maryland. Together the women approached photographer Audra Wrisley, and recruited a friend and local hair-make up artist, Lori Nansi, who both agreed to participate in the concept photo session during December 2015. The venue: Plant Masters.

The resulting imagery involved contributions from a vintage prop rental vendor and a local caterer, together conveying the nostalgic, wintry scene in Kelly’s mind’s eye. And with Leon and Carol’s vivid stand of red holly as the backdrop, the creative team didn’t have to worry about things looking stark or barren.

“The scene involves a beautiful table set up with locally made soup and artisan bread from one of our caterers who participates in our weekly farmers’ market. We also showcased a display of Plant Masters’ holiday wreaths,” Kelly explains. “The bride for this shoot has a floral crown and bouquet made from Plant Masters’ greenhouse and field products, including cut poinsettias and succulents.”
Kelly set out to plan her springtime photo shoot. Joy Michelle, another photographer with whom Kelly works, stepped in, and the team focused on telling Kelly’s narrative of a young bride gathering flowers from Plant Masters’ fields and greenhouses to create a dreamy, garden-inspired bouquet.

“Our story focuses on a girl who is out in the flower fields picking every element of her wedding flowers and then designing them. Then we see her transition into a more formal attire as she is photographed around the farm and inside hoop houses with her bouquet, among the flowers,” Kelly says.

Rosalind Elles, Kelly’s intern, agreed to model for the story. Recently graduated from high school, Rosalind works for Petals by the Shore part-time while taking college classes.

“She’s very much excited about working with locally-grown and American grown flowers,” Kelly says. Rosalind’s bountiful bouquet of sweet peas, foxgloves, peonies and lilacs looks poignant and beautiful as she is captured standing in front of Plant Masters’ mock-orange border. Elsewhere, she is photographed against the “grittiness of the working greenhouses,” Kelly says. “You definitely know these flowers are from the farm.”
Kelly’s summer story involves a real-life couple among a sea of Plant Masters’ ‘Lime-light’ paniculata Hydrangeas, portrayed as they are getting ready for the ceremony and also wearing formal attire.

“We wanted to tell a different part of a wedding story with this shoot, so we began with a nature-inspired boudoir session in the fields of ‘Limelight’ Hydrangeas,” the designer explains. “Then we see her transition to her wedding gown with a classic side chignon adorned with flowers from the farm.”

For a fun “summer party” element, Kelly asked Picnic Pops, a purveyor of artisanal frozen treats in Catonsville, Md., to bring artisan flavored ice pops “as a way to not only reflect the season on the farm but also incorporate other locally designed or American-made products that couples can use.”

An epic storm rocked the area in the middle of shoot, but that didn’t stop the creative team. “We didn’t end up photographing the ceremony, but we did get amazing shots of the couple in the Zinnia field. It actually turned out better than we originally thought.”
The project concluded just months ago, when Kelly and photographer Kristin Smith, who also photographed the summer story, captured the height of harvest at Plant Masters. Repeating elements echo those of earlier seasons, such as the agricultural nod to hoop-house architecture, which Kelly likes. Fall-blooming Celosia and a few late-season ‘Café au Lait’ Dahlias that Leon and Carol saved for Kelly set the color and texture story for the shoot.

“With another ‘real-life’ couple, we told the ceremony part of their story against a backdrop of Hydrangeas with leaves in autumnal tones, reflecting the cooling weather. We also see them inside the hoop house among the incredible rows of cabbage and Mexican sage and later as they walk among the marigolds.

The intimate sweetheart table reflects fall as well. Set in what is a lush peony field in June, the couple sits at a bountiful table of seasonal vegetables, gourds and pumpkins while enjoying miniature pies made with fruits from a local orchard.

“Kristin saw the farm in a different way than the other two photographers. They’re all really talented, and I like how it turned out. If I’d had the same photographer each season, it might have become boring. Each saw cool elements of the farm that the others might not have seen,” Kelly says.
**FOUR SEASONS OF FLOWERS | MEET THE FARMERS**

Leon and Carol Carrier grow flowers 20 miles north of the nation's capital in Laytonsville, Md., and they sell their products at numerous farmers markets, including Olney Farmers & Artists Market in Olney, Md., and the Montgomery Farm Women's Cooperative Market, a year-round venue in Bethesda, Md. They are high school sweethearts who migrated from ornamental horticulture (Leon) and the fashion industry (Carol) toward flower farming.

Leon recalls the moment when he decided to add cut flowers to his nursery-and-bedding-plant business back in the early 1990s: “I would see farmers bringing truckloads of basil and petunias to the farmers market and watch people in a frenzy over them. And I knew that’s what I wanted to do.”

The couple purchased their first farmstead in 1988, where their few acres soon were not enough to contain the explosion of field crops and greenhouses. Leon approached several neighbors and soon established “satellite” parcels across four other gardens, adding up to four acres of growing ground. Today the conjured lots resemble anything but a open-field farm.

“It’s kind of like an arboretum here,” Leon acknowledges. “I love plants. I love unusual plants. As you can imagine, having lived and farmed on the same property for so many years, we have an amazing variety of plant material.”

The Carriers embraced flower farming at a time when specialty cut flowers were viewed as an auxiliary crop to vegetables. The family business soon drew in Carol, who began managing sales at eight area farmers markets each week while raising the couple’s three children.

“We’re proud of ourselves for staying in the flower business — it’s not easy to do long term,” she says. “All of our kids have worked on the farm over time. They had fun, and they also had to work hard and find out what they’re made of.”

With more than 100 plant types and varieties; one heated greenhouse; two hoop houses; and fields of woody, perennial and annual crops, the farm is experiencing another growth mode. Leon and Carol recently expanded by purchasing a nearby five-acre farm with their eldest, Leon Carrier 3rd, who joined the family business a few years ago. Plant Masters sells about 80 percent of its harvest through farmers markets, with the balance going direct to florists and DIY brides.

“We’ve seen an explosion of brides coming to our market. They don’t care too much about specific flower varieties; all they want are local flowers,” Leon says. “We’ve seen an explosion of brides coming to our market. They don’t care too much about specific flower varieties; all they want are local flowers,”

“The Carriers encourage florists to reach out to flower farmers in their region (see “Resources” on page ?? for sourcing suggestions). Sourcing from local flower farms definitely requires a certain flexibility and the ability to adjust design expectations due to bad weather or crop failures, Carol says.

“Sometimes it’s not easy for us to say exactly when something will bloom, but when designers are willing to work with local availability and color palettes instead of specific flowers, they aren’t disappointed.”

Kelly agrees, although she says that adopting this mindset has coursed over time, especially as she has forged friendships with the farms in her area.

“For example, I wanted to use burgundy Dahlias for our fall shoot, but when I got out to the farm, most of the Dahlias were finished except for two. ‘Cafe au Lait’ stems that Leon saved for me. Then I saw the Celosia, and I forgot all about those burgundy Dahlias. I’d do every wedding like that, it would be really amazing.”

Carol adds, “I think people are missing out when they decide they want a specific flower without instead finding out what is best in that season. Like wines that each taste different because of their terroir, that’s how flowers are, too. If you pick a place to be married, why wouldn’t you want the attributes of that area incorporated into your wedding whether it’s Hawaii or Maryland?”

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**resources**

- **Spring Shoot**
  - model: Kelly Shore
  - flowers: Petals by the Shore
  - ribbon/fabric: Silk & Willow
  - dress: Gossamer
  - photography: Joy Michelle Photography
  - hair/makeup: Something Blu Beauty

- **Summer Shoot**
  - model: Alexandra Penn
  - flowers: Petals by the Shore
  - ribbon/fabric: Silk & Willow
  - dress: TLC bridal boutique
  - catering: Stone Soup Catering
  - invitation/paper goods: C & V
  - photography: Audra Wrisley Photography
  - coordination: Rose Gold Events & Styling

- **Fall Shoot**
  - model: Kyle and Jennifer Ertter
  - flowers: Petals by the Shore
  - ribbon/fabric: Silk & Willow
  - dress: Gossamer
  - catering: Stone Soup Catering
  - invitation/paper goods: C & V
  - photography: Audra Wrisley Photography
  - coordination: Rose Gold Events & Styling

- **Bowtie: Brackish**
- **pies: Butlers Orchard**
- **invitation/paper goods: Natalie Drake Design**
- **photography: Kirsten Smith Photography**
- **hair: Hypnotic Salon & Spa**
- **florals: Petals by the Shore**

- **Fall Shoot**
  - model: Kyle and Jennifer Ertter
  - flowers: Petals by the Shore
  - ribbon/fabric: Silk & Willow
  - dress: Gossamer
  - vintage rentals: Faccia Fresca Vintage
  - popsicles: Picnic Pops
  - calligraphy/watercolor: Scazzero Illustration
  - invitation: Little Bit Heart
  - florals: Petals by the Shore
  - photography: Audra Wrisley Photography
  - coordination: Rose Gold Events & Styling

- **Summer Shoot**
  - model: Alexandra Penn
  - flowers: Petals by the Shore
  - ribbon/fabric: Silk & Willow
  - dress: TLC bridal boutique
  - catering: Stone Soup Catering
  - invitation/paper goods: C & V
  - photography: Audra Wrisley Photography
  - coordination: Rose Gold Events & Styling
  - florals: Petals by the Shore

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