



# Preserving the ARTISTRY of NATURE

NO LONGER LIMITED TO SIMPLY PRESSING DAISIES BETWEEN THE PAGES OF AN ENCYCLOPEDIA, THE PROCESS OF FLOWER PRESERVATION PRODUCES KEEPSAKES THAT LAST FOR GENERATIONS WHEN CRAFTED BY THE HANDS OF AN ACCOMPLISHED ARTIST.

TEXT KAREN CALLAWAY PHOTOGRAPHY MARCY BLACK SIMPSON

*Opposite: Blooms sandwiched between the layers of a press await botanical artist Anne Blackwell Thompson's dexterity. Specimens are carefully dissected with a scalpel, then painstakingly put back together on a canvas. This page, center right: Anne searches her garden for materials.*



**A** delicate, blue lacecap hydrangea stands poised on a pristine white background, its serrated leaves outstretched like the graceful arms of a ballerina. Although at first glance it may appear to be a watercolor painting, upon closer inspection, the finespun veins and subtle gradations of color reveal its true essence.

This beautiful floral composition is the work of botanical artist Anne Blackwell Thompson, a native Texan who resides in Richmond, Virginia. Her travels throughout her adopted state, from the Shenandoah Valley to Chesapeake Bay and the Piedmont plain, supply endless materials for her aesthetic endeavors.

“My goal is to give an almost ancient art form—the pressing of flowers—a modern, fresh spin that engages the imagination,” says Anne. “I consider my pieces to have a sculptural element beyond their obvious botanical nature.”

A former historical decorative painter, she discovered her new vocation while recovering from a serious illness that left her homebound—and

*Above: Simple seaweed becomes elegant art when matted and framed. Right: The muted hues in these pressed samples not only complement one another, they also inspired the palette of the sitting room’s furnishings.*



Above and right: Among Anne's tools of the trade for collecting her botanical bounty are scalpels, tweezers, clippers, axes, machetes, scissors, ladders, and even "snake boots, for good measure," she notes. Her curated materials range from flowering plants and curving vines to wispy seaweed.



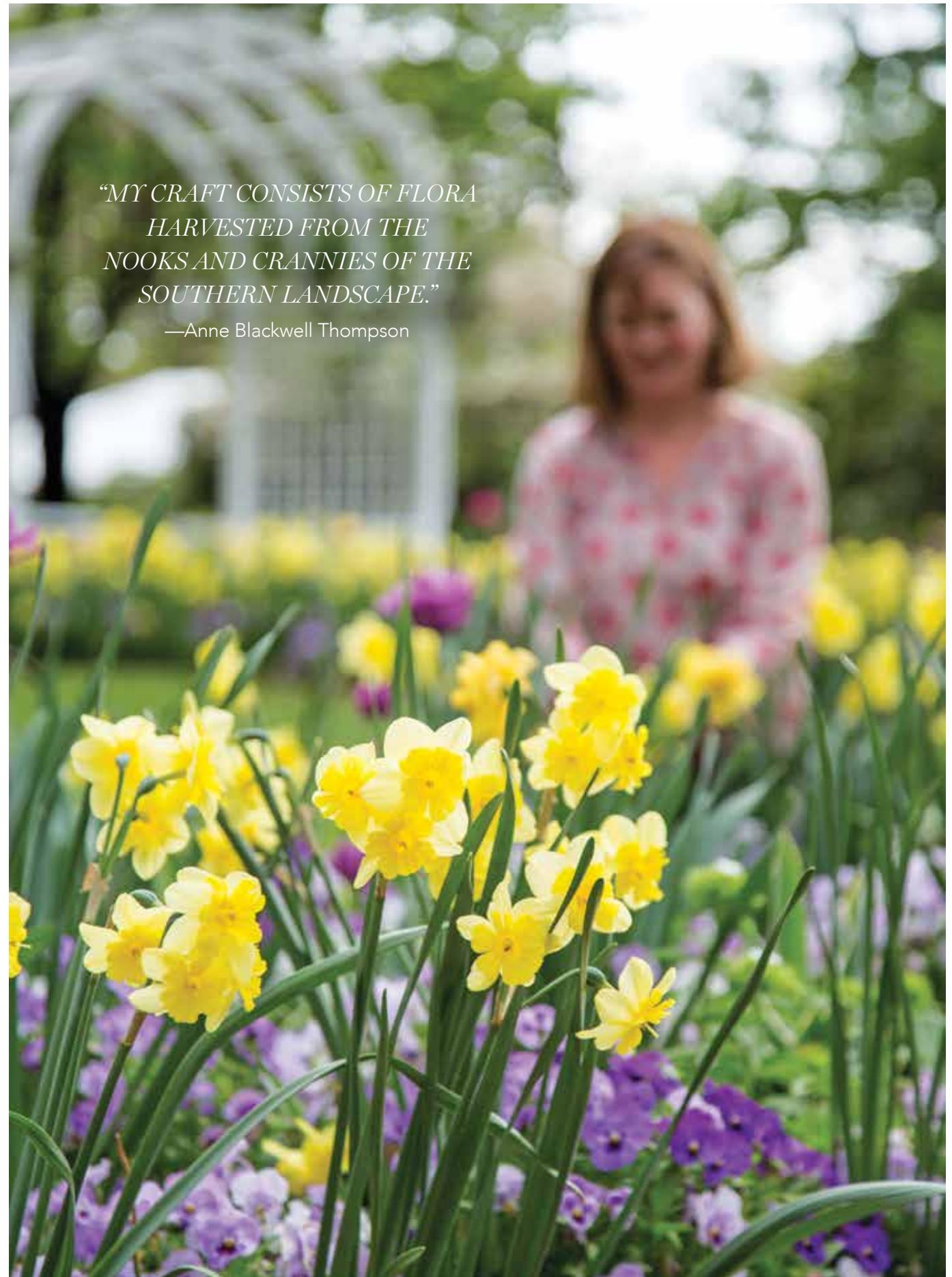
bored. Friends eased her ennui by sharing their home-and-garden magazines. While perusing one issue, Anne noticed an Oscar de la Renta ad that featured stunning botanical panels in the background. Immediately taken with the images, she tore out the page and tacked it to the wall beside her bed.

Later, she came across a blog that, to her surprise and delight, showcased Stuart Thornton, the very artist who rendered the florals that had captured her attention. Unfazed that he lived in Turin, Italy, Anne phoned him. The two had an enjoyable conversation, she says, which ended with her offering to become his apprentice—a proposal he readily accepted. Three weeks later, she was on her way to Italy and a ten-day crash course with the master.

"I learned centuries-old techniques to preserve vibrant blooms and exquisite foliage for

*"MY CRAFT CONSISTS OF FLORA  
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NOOKS AND CRANNIES OF THE  
SOUTHERN LANDSCAPE."*

—Anne Blackwell Thompson





generations to come,” the plantswoman explains. “I also learned the intricacies of species, plant identification, Latin names, and time-tested techniques to ensure their preservation.”

This newfound passion not only led to the development of a successful enterprise, it also gave Anne an opportunity to combine her two great loves—art and history. This year, she was appointed as the artist-in-residence for Richmond’s Tuckahoe Plantation, the boyhood home of Thomas Jefferson.

“I’ve always been in awe of the many layers of nature, its endless nuances and complexities,” Anne notes. “My work is a snapshot of the natural world—a gorgeous blossom or a composition of leaves that is frozen in time.”

*“For a dedicated gardener, there is nothing more heartfelt than a collection from their own garden,” Anne maintains. She has also created a grouping of marsh grasses for an avid duck hunter—procured from his favorite hunting spot.*



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