

When Annemarie Maitri left the world of sales and marketing in 2010 to open Bloom Bake Shop in Middleton, she didn't expect lines out the door of her tiny shop. But this Southern girl who grew up immersed in family dinners found her niche putting her baking talents to use.

She admits she didn't take the easy path when deciding to become an entrepreneur. At the time, Maitri had three small children and the nation was digging out of a recession. She chose to open her shop just three days a week to offer wedding cakes and desserts, all featuring locally-sourced ingredients.

"In the beginning, this decision brought me quite a bit of criticism and skepticism around my commitment. But, I stayed true to my values both for my family as well as my business intentions," she says.

Through all the long hours trying to balance it all, the only thing she says she would've done differently is to be gentler on herself about the hours she put in. She knew she was the one with the vision and needed to be present. As she notes, "In the beginning, one can never underestimate the amount of work it takes to launch a small business."

Word of mouth propelled Maitri's wedding cake business at Bloom, but the game-changer was the decision to start making buttermilk biscuit sandwiches for employee meals, and eventually start selling them to her customers. The next thing she knew, there were lines out the door on Saturdays and they were bursting at the seams.

The decision to open a larger location on Monroe Street in 2017 with an expanded menu and space for catering was a natural choice since Maitri lives in the neighborhood. The thought of leaving the Middleton community pulled at her heart strings though and she knew it would be a challenge to keep her family and passion for baking



THE RISE OF **BLOOM** BAKE SHOP

BY EMILY MCCLUHAN



aligned if she kept both locations.

“But the voices around me: friends, customers, business advisers, were pushing me to continue. Growth in this fashion is natural. Bloom was a success, why wouldn’t two locations work?” she says.

And it did work. In fact, both locations thrived. Using that success, Maitri decided to shift the focus of the Middleton location to be even more community-driven in 2018. She turned the bake shop into a coffeehouse and bookstore, called Bloom Bindery, with a mission to promote a

love of reading. A portion of the profits from cookie sales were donated to local literacy groups, book clubs used the space and families came together to read to each other. But after a few months, Maitri was torn.

“It wasn’t working for me, professionally and especially personally,” she says. “I constantly felt pulled between both shops, I was spending more time in a car going between both locations and less time doing all of the things I was passionate about, creating recipes, working with staff and interacting with customers.”

Although she was pushed by many to delegate more or grow her team, she knew it was the right decision to close the Middleton location in August 2018.

Now, as the Monroe Street location thrives and she has more time for her family, she considers this decision a blessing. It’s allowed her to explore other avenues for getting the brand out there, like the Bloom Bus, which Maitri’s crew uses to partner with Madison Reading Project to bring cookies and donated books to literacy events. The 1974 Volkswagen Bus can also be rented for private events.

“I have learned, as many entrepreneurs learn, you have to push down the path, but you have to be OK with changing course when it is not for the greater good for all involved,” says Maitri.

For her, she emphasizes that the greater good will always house her family, community and the quality of what she and her team bring to the table each day. 🌸

