

# flower power

It's a blustery winter day on Prince St in the East Village. I'm on my way to meet Yael Alkalay, the owner of Red Flower, a well-being company offering a new approach to the fragrance, beauty, and lifestyle market — a company whose approach is founded on the principles of ritual, celebration, and wellness aesthetics. But it's so cold that I almost breeze past the store.

As I catch a glance inside the large glass storefront, there's a warm glow that pulls me in.

The sign outside is simple, gray, with unassuming small red letters. Opening the door, I enter an urban sanctuary. The space is snug, spare, yet injected with urban chic. Eyeing the teal blue velvet couch, you'd hardly know you were in a beauty boutique. It feels more like your first apartment: cozy, small, and simple. Intense scents from candles, creams, and scrubs infuse the air and are intoxicating. The décor has an earthy quality — a swath of sand and pebbles; a wooden totem pole wrapped with red string; and a steel sink for testing out floral-scented soaps. This isn't a frou-frou glamour parlor.

"I draw a bohemianism from all of the places in the world I've traveled throughout my life," Yael says. "There is an element of privilege that doesn't come from money, but from access to a way of living that I happen to be born into. My father's family is from Turkey and Bulgaria and my mother is from Argentina. They met in Israel. I draw on complexities from all these places."

Yael's experiences result in the products and the store — between comfort and luxury, a mix of Latin

HOW Yael  
ALKALAY  
CREATED  
A BEAUTY  
BUSINESS  
FROM THE  
POWER OF  
SPIRITUAL  
HEALING.

American culture, Turkish sensuality, and Japanese simplicity — a remnant of the five years Yael spent living and working in those countries and regions. The names of her signature candles are just as worldly: Japanese Peony, Italian Blood Orange, Thai Honeysuckle. The experience started in 1999, when she earned her MBA from Columbia University and was awarded a grant from the Eugene Lang Fund in addition to other entrepreneurial awards that helped launch her product line.

"Red Flower is less about us and more about the actual real elements," she says. "In naming the products, I wanted to give credit to the places where we're drawing the essential oils and flowers from."

You won't find a cheery department store perfume-pusher here. Every candle, copper prayer bowl, and 7-step bathhouse treatment has a deeper purpose — to nourish a woman's inner self and create a richly soothing experience.

"If you're not healthy, no matter how great you look on the surface, it's not going to last," Yael insists. "I really believe in a more lasting sense of beauty which comes from the internal, the emotional, the deeper sense of well being. I wanted to bring back rituals to create a sense of presence that is inherent in appreciating life and keeping us alive."

Yael has the goods. Red Flower has been a wildly successful brand, having grown 100% since its 1999 launch, even amidst times of economic turmoil.

"Something that undermines a lot of businesses is lack of planning," she says. "You can be in such an

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enormous rush to get started that you miss the essential phase of planning effectively with a deep sense of self-criticism."

Yael was born with the entrepreneurial spirit. "I've always wanted to have my own business. From the time I was about four and used to wonder why more people weren't at the local pizza parlor, or think how bottles of water would be good things to sell. I guess you could say I was driven to have the lemonade stand."

"I come from eight generations of rabbis and Kiev musicians. My grandfather was the first dermatologist in Bulgaria. I have farmers on my mother's side. I have all these loves of land, spirituality, and a sense of science and medicine that are deeply rooted in my blood. Red Flower is my calling."

Future plans for Red Flower include expanding internationally, with a goal of opening 10 stores across the globe by 2007. "The real challenge," she says, "is how to take that genuine feeling and make sure that it is alive throughout everything we do as we grow — keeping it small, but keeping it growing at the same time."

Yael is also launching her third bath treatment collection based on the northern hemisphere, and she'll be taking a foray into face and skin products. She is even tossing around the idea of opening up her very own spa.

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