

Ona Dnes

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ŠPERKAŘKA

Milada
BLÁHOVÁ

„Na začátku byla jen fascinace
květinami. Pak přišla touha vyrobit
nový druh květin ze stříbra a zlata.“

Fascination with flowers is what started it

INTERVIEW IN ONA DNES
MAGAZINE TRANSLATED FROM
CZECH TO ENGLISH

FASCINATION WITH FLOWERS IS WHAT STARTED IT

The desire, borderline need to change his hectic lifestyle brought the lawyer Radek Bláha to a small village of ten houses where he renovated a historic homestead. Surrounded with nature and a new family, his outlook changed completely. The rush of energy, stimulation of the senses, as well as the creativity and craft skills of his wife Milada gave him the idea to impress the appearance of meadow flowers onto precious metals, creating unique jewels.

TEXT: Mirka Srdínková, PHOTO: Anna Kovačič

The flowers you make at your homestead charmed everyone in the editorial office. They're not ordinary, indeed...

RADEK: You could say their appearance, form, and use make them extraordinary... Fascination with flowers is what started it. What followed was a desire to create new kinds of flowers. And so our silver garden centre was founded, one where we grow flowers from silver and gold. Similar flowers used to be made over the course of history but nowadays it's a largely forgotten practice. These historical flowers used to be more grandiose and ceremonial than ours—such as the Bunga Mas, flowers by Carl Fabergé, Edelsteinstrauß—but simpler forms have survived to this day. We wanted to create flowers not only for formal occasions but ones which would be an actual alternative to live flowers. "Hello, sir, would you like a violet? And do you want it fresh-cut, or made from silver?" I think that's what their role might end up being.

Who came up with the idea to make art objects when neither one of you started out as a jewellery-maker? What took you from the law and photography to making art pieces from gold and silver?

MILADA: I spent fifteen years working as a professional photographer and a few more making jewellery. Switching from photography to working with metals was natural for me since both fields have a lot in common—images, light, details... But the flowers were my husband's idea. He's the one more focused on researching, thinking, seeing things as a whole and implementing them. Then came a moment when everything within and around us joined forces. We could have never pulled the project off without one another.

RADEK: Our flowers are professional jewels but I don't view myself as a jewellery-maker. I suppose that's alright. People working outside their field are often the ones who come up with interesting stuff. If you consider yourself to be an expert, you tend to worry too much about your professionalism instead of wondering what new you could bring to the world. Even when you're creating beautiful things there's a sense of order, tools, challenges and solutions to them, dissatisfaction, searching—exactly what I knew from my previous career as a lawyer. Additionally, I was interested in silver and gold mines for a long time. I'd watch the metals be mined, the whole business process; I'd learn how new deposits are found. So when you think about it, these silver products are an interesting outcome of all this.

You began making your "silver flowers" a reality in 2019—the year of covid. Such timing couldn't have been ideal for any kind of entrepreneurship, let alone for a project as unique as yours. Didn't you find the events discouraging?

MILADA: In 2019 we just came up with the idea. The actual business has only begun now. We spent the first three years drawing, trying out wax models, improving the jewellery-making process. A lot of time we'd scrap everything and start over. Then we photographed the products, set up our e-shop, consulted specialists in botany, history, and jewellery-making. Back then what we cared about was successfully bringing it off; the project's economic side was secondary. Most of all, though, we believed our flowers were worth it. Covid couldn't touch our faith in that.

Miladu a Radka Bláhovy jsme
fotili v modelech značek
Jaeger by Marks & Spencer,
Marks & Spencer a Reserved.





My husband came up with the idea to “grow” silver and golden flowers.
But we could have never pulled the project off without one another.

Did you do any market research to be sure people would be interested in your art?

RADEK: We'd talk about flowers with many people. We'd switch up our communication style to get the rawest opinions possible, which was very interesting. Then we'd personally gift the flowers to different people in Czechia and abroad. Practically everyone loved them. Later, we engaged in long discussions on the options the flowers gave us. Online, though, people didn't really understand the concept. Users don't tend to read much online and are used to seeing the word “silver” in connection with pretty much anything; their experience was that the only flowers which can be gifted are fresh-cut tulips, so they approached the idea of silver flowers with suspicion. But it took just a brief explanation for their confusion to clear up.

And how about globally? Do you have any competition, or have you found a true gap in the market?

RADEK: We were looking to see if similar golden or silver flowers were being made anywhere else but didn't find any that would look like ours or had the same use.

How many people participate in the production and where does the work take place?

RADEK: The models, designing, and any other work that isn't the production itself is done at the homestead where we live. There are five of us. We produce the flowers in cooperation with an excellent Czech jewellery-making company which makes them from silver and gold. We'll see how it all develops; we have a lot of planned and may require a few more helping hands.

The flowers you make truly are perfect copies of the real thing. As if you were casting them. But it's likely the result of studying the details for a long time, isn't it? Can you tell us what the production looks like, from A to Z? And just to give us a rough idea, how long does it take to make a single flower?

MILADA: We tried to come close to actual flowers but there's so much variety to each species... First, we study the particular flower and decide on how best to depict it, whether it will have buds or blossoms. We really wanted for the flowers to be made entirely by human hands and nothing else. After the final drawing is made, the first model is manually carved from a piece of jewellery wax which takes a long time. I create the rough shape and then spend days detailing it under a magnifying glass. Even the smallest mistake sets me back hours. Once the wax model is done it's attached to a so-called tree, with all the other wax models. Plaster is poured over it and the wax leached. Then the first casting is made by pouring molten silver into the plaster mould. The casting is honed and polished, and the model moulded using a special rubber which can then be used to make new wax models, once again to be poured over with plaster. We use silver or gold to make our castings; they're treated, honed, polished, a stem or leaves are attached, polished again, and the blossom receives a hallmark. Finally, to ensure better shine, the flowers are galvanised with silver of almost the highest fineness possible—999/1000.

How precious metals behave when jewellery is made is one thing, but what happens during the production of flowers might be another. One question comes to mind—can't the stems break, for example? Is special care required during production and later handling?

RADEK: During production the flowers are handled as any traditional jewellery would. But users don't need to worry. Both the blossom and stem are hardy, though of course they aren't meant to be bent roughly or broken. After all, silver is a rather soft metal. Before launching production, we tested the flowers quite a bit; our own daughters helped enthusiastically and I must say the flowers could take a lot. So even if you need, for example, to slightly bend the stem, possibly for the flower to be positioned in a particular way in the vase, there's no need to worry.

No need to worry about the flowers. They're hardy. We tested them, with the help of our daughters. I must say, the flowers can take quite a lot.



People approach us and express an interest in collecting the flowers. The jewels have a lasting generational value, too.

How do you decide which kinds of flowers to make? Do you favour typical Czech plants, or are you thinking about producing more exotic species as well?

MILADA: First we chose meadow flowers which are well-known here in the country. Every year, we select new species for production, taking into account what would look well in a bouquet, how hard the production will be, or what the market for it is. Every year we make five to ten new species of well- and lesser-known flowers, basically from all over the world. The complexity and size of the blossom is the only limit. Certain flowers would be extremely difficult and costly to produce. But perhaps we'll get to them in the future. This year we're considering the lily of the valley, the Alpine edelweiss, the lime blossom, cherry, jasmine, or frangipani (an exotic plant also known as the Plumeria —ed.). Others will be picked by our client.

What kind of flowers do your customers buy the most?

MILADA: Usually a mix of all species as a part of a bouquet. In terms of individual flowers, the snowdrop, daisy, or cornflower are very popular. We've also noticed customers are highly interested in collecting the flowers, buying a different specimen each year, for example.

RADEK: There are three hundred and fifty thousand species of flowering plants. If we were to grow just one hundred thousand of them, at the current rate we'd have our hands full for the next ten thousand years. And practically speaking, we need to create a stable company and train great designers who'd continue "growing the flowers" after us. Giyou is a long-term project—we established it and there will come a moment when we'll pass it on to future generations. We're already keeping this in mind.

What purpose do the flowers serve?

MILADA: First and foremost, they make for a beautiful gift. You can gift them in person, just like you would a living flower. You can put them in your pocket and give them to a date, or mail them by post. We wanted to make the act of giving more elegant, fine, and playful. We think about these things a lot. And of course, the flowers are a lovely decoration when put in a vase or displayed in your interior spaces, no matter if they're individual flowers or a whole large bouquet. They're suitable for various special occasions, as a show of appreciation or a reward for achieving success at school or work, as a part of wedding or ceremonial decoration. What's also popular are family generation vases where generations of women gradually add silver flowers they received. Over time you have a vase that holds the flowers of your great-grandmother, grandmother, mother, granddaughter...

Considering the direction the economy is heading, many ask themselves what they should invest in order for their money not to lose value. Do your products make for a suitable investment?

RADEK: It's great if a person finds an object they like, feel good about, have use for. And if it maintains or even grows in value? Even better. I do think this applies to our flowers, yes. I myself am curious what will happen to their value once we begin creating limited collections or when the amount of flowers on the market drops. We're already being approached by people who express an interest in collecting them. But if you'd like to invest in silver or gold and don't care for the aesthetic, utility, or artistic side of things, you'd do better to invest in the commodities themselves. Still, silver flowers have a lasting generational value and become a part of your household silver. It's quite realistic than within five or ten years the price of silver or gold will double.

At the moment, the flowers can be purchased in your e-shop only. Have your customers expressed a wish to see these beauties in person? After all, we're talking about "jewels" here, and before buying jewellery people like to inspect it... Do you plan to set up a brick-and-mortar store?

MILADA: People really would love to see them. And we want to show them. Currently, customers can take a look at the flowers in our showroom; it's a twenty-minute drive from Prague. We're also getting ready to display them at not-for-sale exhibitions at selected locations in Prague, and hope that within a year we'll be able to open a store in downtown Prague. Moreover, we're thinking about setting up a permanent for-sale exhibition or a museum of silver flowers.

Let's digress a bit from flower production to your private life since the two are connected. None of this might have happened if you, Radek, hadn't decided to move from Prague to the countryside where you bought and renovated a homestead despite having a reputable law firm in the city. Did you feel the need to change up your lifestyle?

RADEK: The flowers came during a special period in our life, thanks to our new house with a garden. If I hadn't moved away from Prague and closed my business there we would have never ended up making these flowers. I felt the need to live differently, to have the time to learn what I was interested in. The change affected pretty much everything—my job, relationships, money. But it was one of the best decisions I'd ever made. People shouldn't be afraid to make radical changes; you should have a broad perspective of life.



By the way, your homestead in Saky is rather interesting historically, isn't it?

RADEK: In 1987 it was declared a cultural monument due to its classicist style. In 1999, a part of a 1495 medieval room was discovered there; one of the oldest rural rooms preserved in Czechia as a whole. The placement of individual houses is unique, too. This deep history was one of the reasons why I was deeply honoured to be able to elevate the place, cultivate it, and set up a garden there. I believe this created an unusual piece of property which sensitively combines history, music, literature, sport, and nature; one where there's place for children, work, study, and relaxation. Maybe that's why so many amazing people come to visit us.

Radek, you have a lot of hobbies. Among other things you play several instruments, love history and culture, and have managed to take these interests to a new level in your "new life". Primarily I'm talking the Secret Garden and its musical success.

RADEK: I'd prefer to keep the Secret Garden secret. But looking back, I think that being able to live in a village of only ten houses yet welcome such jazz musicians as Bob Montgomery, David Friedman, Hetty Kate, Brian Charette, or Libor Šmoldas, Jakub Zomer, Josef Vejvoda, Kryštof Marek, or Martina Bárťová is rather remarkable. But I don't view this as my success. The story of our home and people who meet in there to play music doesn't need my help to spread, and I'm always surprised who contacts me. I just feel great respect and joy that these meetings occur, that I can experience them and get to know such great people.

Milada, you too are a renaissance person, just like your husband—you're a photographer, can work with horses, come from a family skilled in crafts, and now do business while taking care of two small girls. How can one manage?

MILADA: Luckily we employ an amazing woman and her daughter to help us. Truth be told, I wouldn't manage much without them. There are things I can do while taking care of the girls, plus they love to help, but when it comes to creating models I really can't be disturbed. Being with my children is wonderful and gives me joy. They're the most important thing to me. Still, I'm grateful I can work in peace and lose myself in the process of creating. I've been missing that.

And how do you relax? Do you go for walks in the countryside, or do you find escape somewhere else?

MILADA: I've been extremely lucky to have done fulfilling work all my life. So I don't really need to relax much. As long as I can create I'm so happy that I actually find it difficult to stop working. But I do like to spend time alone, with my thoughts, plans, a book, notebook. Those are my precious moments of relaxation.

What are the future business plans you share? And how about your personal wishes, unless they're also closely connected?

MILADA: We'd like to keep working on the Giyou flowers together and develop the place where we live. Personally, I'm interested in exploring many other art techniques and fields if there's enough time. And Radek has his own wishes, from completely different areas.

**MILADA BLÁHOVÁ
JEWELLERY DESIGNER (45)**

HAVING TRAINED AS A RIDER/RACE HORSE KEEPER/RACE HORSE & SPORT HORSE TENDER IN VELKÁ CHUCHLE, SHE PURSUED RIDING AND TRAINING IN CZECHIA, AS WELL AS IN AUSTRIA AND GERMANY.

LATER SHE ATTENDED THE PRAGUE SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY WHERE SHE STUDIED PHOTOGRAPHY. APART FROM TAKING PICTURES OF HORSES (THOUSANDS OF PHOTOGRAPHS PUBLISHED IN CZECHIA AND ABROAD), SHE WON A NUMBER OF AWARDS FOR HER WORK IN FASHION AND ADVERTISING PHOTOGRAPHY. SINCE 2014 SHE'S BEEN DESIGNING JEWELLERY.

IN 2019, THE GIYOU FLOWERS BRAND WAS FOUNDED, WITH BLÁHOVÁ AS A CO-OWNER AND THE CHIEF DESIGNER.

SHE HAS TWO DAUGHTERS (3 AND 5) WITH HER HUSBAND RADEK. BESIDES HER FAMILY AND JEWELLERY-MAKING SHE FINDS JOY IN DEVELOPING HER HISTORIC HOMESTEAD AND OTHER ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES.

**RADEK BLÁHA
ENTREPRENEUR (52)**

STUDIED HISTORY AND ARCHIVING AT THE FACULTY OF ARTS AT THE CHARLES UNIVERSITY (WITHOUT GRADUATING) AND LATER TRANSFERRED TO THE UNIVERSITY'S FACULTY OF LAW.

FROM 1993 TO 2016 HE WORKED AS A LAWYER, SPECIALISING IN COMMERCIAL, CORPORATE, AND FINANCIAL LAW.

AFTER MOVING FROM PRAGUE TO THE COUNTRYSIDE IN 2013 AND MOST IMPORTANTLY CLOSING HIS LAW FIRM, HE "LOST HIMSELF" IN STUDYING (HISTORY, PEOPLE, WORLD, CULTURE, CONSCIOUSNESS).

HE HAS FIVE CHILDREN. MUSIC, HIS FAMILY, HOMESTEAD, AND GIYOU FLOWERS ARE HIS GREATEST LOVES.



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