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Fiona de Lys has opened a one-woman business in the High Road.

A floral dream blossoms

By John Lawrence

When Fiona de Lys was 15 years old and working as a Saturday girl in a florist's shop in Temple Fortune, she dreamed of running her own flower business one day.

That dream has come true with the opening of her new shop in East Finchley, the stylish and impressive Fiori.

Fiona's shop provides stunning floral gifts and arrangements as well as a range of pretty accessories for the home, including lanterns, baskets, cabinets, tables and ornamental shells.

Fiori (meaning flowers in Italian) has brought a splash of much-needed colour to its corner location at the junction of High Road and Kitchener Road, formerly a dowdy insurance office.

After her early morning trip to the flower market, Fiona is there Tuesday to Saturday from 10am until 7pm, or later, to serve evening commuters.

She has a qualification in design and display and has been a florist for some years, most recently as a freelancer. The desire to work for herself has always been with her. When the High Road premises came up for auction earlier this year Fiona had to make her mind up quickly.

"I came to have a look and knew it could work. I live in Hampstead Garden Suburb

but what I've noticed about East Finchley is what a strong sense of community there is. Since I've opened, I've had so many people just coming in to wish me luck and I've been really touched by that."

But does the High Road need another florist's to compete with Tu Destino and Josephine's, not to mention Jennie Mann's in Church Lane? Fiona believes there's room for everybody.

"I'm not here to compete with anyone. We all have our own style. What I want to offer is flowers and furnishings for the home, something that's personal, pretty and unconventional."

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The High Road banking hall as National Provincial customers would have seen it in the 1930s.

The changing face of counter service

By David Melsome

The dark wood panelling, the counter-top scales and the blotting pads are from a different age of banking. Our picture shows the 1930s interior of what is now the NatWest bank in the High Road, then known as the National Provincial Bank.

The banking hall first opened in 1901 and has been through many makeovers since, most recently a fully-fledged transformation that has doubled the space available to customers and brought the facilities and décor into the 21st century.

Light wood floors, comfortable waiting areas and a new enquiry desk now greet customers, along with three accessible cashier desks and two private interview rooms.

Branch manager Anna Angeli said reaction to the revamp has been positive. "It's light and airy and we've got twice the space we used to have. Customers have been pleasantly surprised and it's a much better place for my team to work in."

All work on the branch was carried out after hours and at weekends so that opening times were not affected. As part of the project, the NatWest cash machine will be moved from its position in Beresford Road onto the High Road. "We hope customers will feel more secure using it there," said Anna.

The East Finchley branch is one of the first in the area to be updated. It has had to cope with a huge surge in transactions since Barclays Bank on Fortis Green closed a year ago.



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