

by Evan Grossman

# A New World

Marcela Lopez Vallejo, AIFD, discovered new opportunities in the United States

**Marcela Lopez Vallejo, AIFD**, owned her own shop in Costa Rica, but when she and her husband came to the United States in 2011, a new world of possibilities to advance her career was created. Marcela took advantage of several educational opportunities offered at the Floriology Institute in Jacksonville, Florida – including the “Certification and Competition” course. In that class, she learned design skills, tips and tricks, the best way to create a portfolio, how to write a bio, and strategies for successful job interviews. In addition, Marcela went on to achieve Professional Floral Design Evaluation (PFDE).

“It changed my vision of the U.S. floral industry,” she says. “When I took the class, that was my second or third year in the United States. We’re all florists around the world, but each country is different. That class really opened my mind and I learned a lot. I especially visualized in that class that in this country, as floral designers, we have many opportunities, many fields to work in. Not only in a shop, but you can be an educator, you can work in product development, or you can be freelance, which doesn’t exist in my country.”


Marcela has run with the opportunities she discovered in her new home. She currently focuses her exceptional design talents on hand-tied bouquets while also serving as a mentor and volunteer for the American Institute of Floral Designers.

In addition, she is a member of the AIFD National Membership Committee’s international committee. “That’s my way of giving back to the organization,” Marcela says.

In Costa Rica, Marcela owned and operated her flower shop for 11 years. However when her husband got an opportunity to pursue a PhD at Virginia Tech, they closed the shop and moved to the United States. Marcela also advanced her own education and earned AIFD designation, which was a game-changer for her career.

“Once I was inducted into AIFD, many opportunities opened,” she says. “I haven’t been in retail since I left Costa Rica. Here in the U.S., I’ve had the opportunity to work in product development, which is pretty interesting for me because it’s not being in a shop.”

Marcela says she is often asked to teach about tropical flowers, which she worked with back home professionally for more than a decade. “In Costa Rica, they are everywhere,” she says. “We had tropical flowers in the backyard. Here, a lot of people don’t know what to do with tropical flowers. They’re expensive, and people are afraid to use them the wrong way.”

Teaching is just one of the many new things Marcela is doing in the world of flowers. “In Costa Rica, basically the only thing you can do as a floral designer is work in a shop,” she says. “Education has not really started yet in Costa Rica. There are a couple of schools, but you cannot be a full-time educator. Here, you can work as a freelancer, you can work in education, and what I love the most is product development.” 

 For more about Marcela and her designs, visit [marcelafloral.com](http://marcelafloral.com).

## FAST FACTS

**Designer:** Marcela Lopez Vallejo, AIFD | **Location:** South Carolina

**Experience:** 18 years | **Achievements/Exposure:** South Carolina Florist of the Year 2015; Director for Smithers Oasis Latin America



