

Where flowers bloom

Within less than four years, Jess Eckford Aguilera has turned the Newcastle Food & Flower Markets into a much-loved local institution. Now she is adding a new venture, The School of Floral Design.

Story by Cornelia Schulze, photography by Muse Photography, courtesy of Newcastle Food & Flower Markets

After a successful career in events management in Sydney, Jess was keen to return to her roots, in more ways than one. Together with her husband Franco, she opened Newcastle's first flower market in 2017. Started as a wholesale business, they were supplying florists across Newcastle and the Hunter with fresh flowers, eliminating the need for them to make the lengthy trek to Sydney.

It was an instant success and a mere two years later, the Newcastle Food & Flower Markets were relaunched, now open to the general public, with a small café kiosk and the offerings of dedicated, local food vendors. In June 2019, Jess and Franco expanded with a pantry section and a larger café space while also adding more vendors.

"I was desperate to come back to Newcastle," Jess reminisces. "And I really wanted to bring the flower markets to Newcastle. We grew very quickly, did way too much at the beginning and took a lot of risks. It was a lot of hard work and I wasn't always sure that we would survive."

"But we managed to put Sandgate on the map and to become a destination in our own right. The food market was a great addition. Local is what we are really passionate about and the food market is a great way to support local growers and farmers."

A visit to the Newcastle Food & Flower Markets is a feast for the senses and the soul. Grab a cup of coffee at the café (we recommend the iced latte – it's delish!) and maybe linger over one of their famous bacon and egg rolls before you head next door and feast your eyes on the riot of colours that are the Flower Markets. Take a deep breath and savour the scent-sations of an abundance of

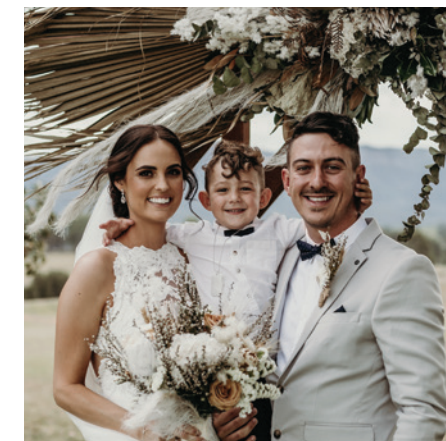


flowers and foliage, with fresh greenery and vibrant blooms popping out of every corner and crevice, and fragrant dried flowers hanging from the ceiling of a converted warehouse space that oozes rustic charm.

The vibe is warm and welcoming and it's obvious that Jess loves to share her passion for all things floral. Keen to offer more than mere minutes of creative inspiration and quick tips while expertly crafting stunning bouquets for her market customers, she launched a series of workshops. There are sessions on dried floral arrangements or on how to create

a designer-style wall piece. Spending quality time together and celebrating a very special relationship is at the core of the mother & daughter workshops, complete with the decadent delights of a stylish high tea at the end.

With the workshops an instant success, Jess has now decided to launch The School of Floral Design, another first for Newcastle. This new venture goes way beyond her offerings for home gardeners or brides-to-be and has been developed for those seeking a career in floral design. And in true Jess-style, it even goes beyond teaching the craft of floristry.



"The course will run for three months, with one full day every week. It will be very hands-on, covering every aspect of floral design and modern techniques, but also aspects of business management, branding and social media.

"I want to see a vibrant, growing floral industry, and to encourage more people to turn their passion for flowers into a career.

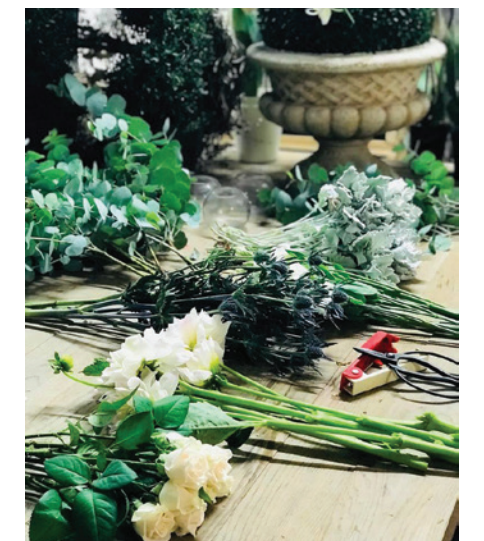
"We will mentor, inspire and support our students all the way. So when they finish the course, they will feel confident, empowered and ready to take on the world of floral design."

To quote the words of Luther Burbank (1849 – 1926), an American botanist and horticulturist: "Flowers always make people better, happier, and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine for the soul."

And very soon, Novocastrian flower enthusiasts can make a blooming career of them too!

Opening hours:
Wednesday – Friday 7am – 2pm,
Saturday 8am – 2pm, Sunday 8am – 12pm.
1 Rural Drive, Sandgate,
foodandflowermarkets.com.au

Clockwise from opposite page: The workshop sessions at the Newcastle Food & Flower Markets are hands-on and inspiring. Jess Eckford Aguilera loves sharing her passion for floristry. Brides-to-be love her stunning blooms and infallible sense of style.



SCHOOL OF FLORAL DESIGN

The first course commences on
14 April, 2021,
with classes every Wednesday
from 9am to 3:30pm.

Enrolments close on 15 March, 2021.

Fees include on-site training,
florals and floristry materials, apron,
toolbox and essentials as well as
stationery and books.

Fees:
from \$3,495 + GST,
payment plans available.