

Rachael Ann Lunghi of Siren Floral Co. demonstrates a hand-tied bouquet featuring garden roses.

The Gathering Rose

Expert rose growers design a different type of floral workshop that gives back to fellow creatives.

By **Debra Prinzing**

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Last April, fifteen rose lovers traveled from around the U.S. and Canada to take part in a two-day workshop at **Rose Story Farm** in Carpinteria, Calif., just outside of Santa Barbara. Unlike most educational events in the floral design world, it was 100% financed by the organizers.

The purpose? According to **Danielle Hahn** of Rose Story Farm and her collaborator **Felicia Alvarez** of **Menagerie Farm & Flower**, based in Live Oak, in the Sacramento Valley, they created the one-of-a-kind workshop “to bring together people for a sharing of knowledge, exchange of ideas, formation of deeper connections and global inspiration.”

The women wanted to teach the foundations of farming, designing a rose farm or garden, selecting varieties for floral design and growing and designing with companion plants. Like gathering roses for an arrangement, they wanted to gather other artists and growers to join them as workshop presenters.

The genesis of **The Gathering Rose**, as the project was named, began as series of conversations that occurred when Alvarez traveled from her Northern California farm to visit Hahn’s farm on the state’s

central coast. The two realized they shared mutual values as fellow growers of garden roses for the floral marketplace. “We began talking about how much we both were interested in providing education about rose growing and sharing our knowledge,” says Alvarez, who, like Hahn, fields a steady stream of near daily inquires about rose farming, cultivation and harvest from florists and entry-level farmer-florists.

“There is a burgeoning farmer-florist movement in the U.S, and a lot of people who are coming from different backgrounds that may not necessarily have farming or agriculture experience. Many are just starting from scratch,” Alvarez explains. “And many are discovering that there is a big difference between a field-grown garden rose and a conventional greenhouse rose.”

Hahn, who started Rose Story Farm in 1998 and was inducted into the **Great Rosarians of the World** in 2014, has a similar passion about sharing her decades of experience – including best practices – with others new to the profession.

“Roses are a vehicle to bring people together at



our farm,” Hahn says. “Farming is collaborative, not competitive. I think that Felicia has very much that same mindset.” The two brainstormed about a workshop that would provide rare access to their combined expertise, and pair equal parts instruction with encouragement – not to mention inspiration from the sensory beauty of garden roses. Essentially, Hahn and Alvarez wanted to “pay it forward,” and share their knowledge with others hungry to learn more.

They unveiled details of their first workshop, “A Rose for All Seasons,” on February 12th, inviting followers to apply to the scholarship-based, no-fee-structure model.

The announcement read “*To kick off this inaugural event in the series, we wanted to pay it forward to the farm and flower communities that have mentored us along our farming journeys, and offer all 15 tickets to the workshop complimentary with a scholarship application process.*”

The very short window between application deadline and the actual workshop on April 1-2 did not deter interest. Hahn figures about 1,000 people sent in applications from around North America and beyond. Each answered just a few questions about who they were, their profession or business category, what it would mean to attend and how the workshop would help them in business or life.

“We reviewed the entries blind, so we didn’t know who had applied,” Alvarez explains. “We ended up selecting a diverse group of people at different levels of growth. We had everyone from an interior designer to someone who owns a catering company and event space, as well as other flower farmers and florists.”

As a guest of The Gathering Rose, I arrived like most attendees on Sunday, March 30, for an intimate welcome reception in the former stables-turned-great room at Rose Story Farm. We met the other instructors, including rose specialist and floral artist Fallon Shea, wedding and event designer, **Rachael Ann Lunghi** of Siren Floral Co., and fine art photographer Jona Christina.

With her husband **Bill Hahn**, our hostess led a walking tour of the 15-acre farm’s beautiful production fields. And later, she and Alvarez led a roundtable session where each scholarship winner shared his or her story and passion for roses. The workshop continued over the following two days with presentations on growing, garden design and arranging with roses. Students hailed from Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and British Columbia, Canada.

Jeni Nelson, manager of **The London Plane**, was ecstatic to be selected as a scholarship winner. “Since learning about Rose Story Farm and receiving their boxes of gorgeous roses at our

Felicia Alvarez of Menagerie Farm & Flower leads a presentation on rose care.



Design instructor Lunghi with student Jeni Nelson of The London Plane





Danielle Hahn, Rose Story Farm







Seattle shop, I had a desire to visit the farm. Of course, I jumped on the opportunity to apply for The Gathering Rose,” Nelson says. “I gained a renewed purpose in my work of spreading beauty into the world. The work of growing, as well as floral design, is a labor of love and The Gathering Rose workshop reminded me of why I do what I do – because beauty matters.”

After the workshop, Nelson made a significant sourcing change for The London Plane. “I decided that moving forward, we would only source American-grown roses. Mother’s Day was the first opportunity following the workshop to ship in our roses solely from Rose Story Farm. We were deeply inspired by our design material this year, and it showed in our work.”

Floral designer **Jenn Pineau**, owner of **Nature Composed** in Middleburg, Va., says the workshop provided her with much-needed R&R, as well as a newfound appreciation for “the people behind the roses,” which deepens the experience of every arrangement she now makes. “After the workshop, I ordered some bare root roses from Felicia at Menagerie Farm. They’re in the ground and blooming now. I’m inspired to keep adding to my rose collection and I plan to sell rose plants at my shop next season.”

The attendees’ comments resonate with both Alvarez and Hahn, who say their own farms have benefitted from students’ increased understanding of their roses. The experience was meaningful in other ways, Alvarez notes. “We wanted to make sure people had the opportunity to learn from us and from each other, and I know those connections are still happening. I learned a lot from the participants as well, which helps me become a better grower and educator.”

The positive experience has inspired Hahn to begin planning a second edition of The Gathering Rose in the future. “We’ve received a tremendous amount of positive energy and feedback from hosting this event,” Hahn says. “It has been amazing to have people with new eyes look at what we’ve done and share their enthusiasm.”

DETAILS

The Gathering Rose: thegatheringrose.com,

[@thegatheringrose](https://www.instagram.com/thegatheringrose)

Rose Story Farm: rosetoryfarm.com, [@rosetoryfarm](https://www.instagram.com/rosetoryfarm)

Menagerie Farm & Flower: menagerieflower.com,

[@menagerieflower](https://www.instagram.com/menagerieflower) ■