



# MONTANA MENTOR

Julio Freitas' The Flower Hat workshops expose students to a balance of growing and design knowledge, with added focus on branding and business.

Photos by **Orange Photographie**

After teaching single-topic floral design courses for fans in Bozeman, Mont., where his floral studio and flower farm – **The Flower Hat** – are based, **Julio Freitas** took the leap last summer to design a curriculum for three-day extensive workshops. “We’ve had wreath and centerpiece classes, but this was the first time I opened the doors to expose people to The Flower Hat business model,” he says.

“Over the past few years, I noticed that there was somewhat of a disconnect between flower farming and floral design,” Freitas continues. “There were farmers who wanted to take on weddings as an additional revenue stream, but they had no idea where to start, how to attract clients, deal with communication aspects, how to price the flowers they grew and, ultimately, design and deliver. There was another group, who were florists who didn’t have access to local flowers, and although they had space and were willing to start growing some of their own flowers, there wasn’t a road map for them on what to grow and how much to grow, not to mention watering, fertilizing, harvesting and conditioning. And there was also a third group: industry folks just starting now who can’t find the answers to their questions on where and how to start either farming or design.”

Inspired by all the questions he received (and answered) through **The Flower Hat Exchange**, Freitas’ private Facebook group, he knew the key topics to incorporate into a workshop and developed a curriculum to appeal to all three potential

student groups. “I also wanted to give people a roadmap from beginning to end on how to do weddings,” Freitas explains. “We’ve been able to crack the code on what to grow and how to be successful and profitable. I don’t know everything, but I have learned a lot along the way.”

That educational journey began for Freitas in 2010, when he started designing arrangements for a corporate hotel he formerly managed in Billings, Mont. He then launched *Flor*, which is the Portuguese word for flower, a nod to his Brazilian heritage.

Having relocated to Bozeman as partner in **Kirkham & Company Home**, a floral design and interior design business between 2014 and 2016, Freitas rebranded as The Flower Hat in 2016. Freitas jokes that he was already known as “the flower hat guy” because he typically wore a baseball cap when delivering wedding flowers – and the new branding took off.

At the same time, his prospective wedding couples “were showing me Instagram pictures of designs with a lot of locally grown flowers that couldn’t be shipped,” he explains. “So, I added the farming component to support my design business. I feel like that’s when things really took off for me.”

Now self-described as a “florist-farmer,” Freitas started growing *Dahlia* on a tiny rocky plot behind his husband’s interior design studio in Bozeman. Fast-forward to December 2018 when they purchased a one-acre farm and took the leap to full-scale flower growing. The new farm has allowed



Julio Freitas, The Flower Hat







The Flower Hat business to vastly expand *Dahlia* tuber production for online sales to other growers, gardeners and farmer-florists. Owning his own land (versus farming on leased land) has also enabled Freitas to add permanent plants such as perennials and ornamental shrubs.

That's also when the potential for The Flower Hat workshop series became evident, and true to his high metabolism and driven personality, Freitas offered four three-day workshops last summer. He kept the courses small, wanting participants to benefit from the intimate size of eight to 10 students, while learning The Flower Hat business model. The courses included everything from writing bouquet recipes to pricing weddings.

The classroom study was balanced with plenty of hands-on design modules, guided by Freitas' idea of a "painter's board." He gave students a hypothetical wedding palette, modeled exactly on what a couple would request.

"I encouraged everyone to harvest what appealed to them in that color palette and to add their own touches," he explains. Students' bridal bouquets and centerpiece designs were photographed professionally by Orange Photographie as a take-home element of the workshop.

**Jaime Dix**, owner of Sioux Falls, S.D.-based **Thistle & Dot**, says for her, The Flower Hat workshop was "life changing." "As a floral designer in South Dakota, I highly value the summer growing season when I can buy flowers from local flower farmers. I also really wanted to learn how I can grow a few of

my favorite wedding flowers in my own backyard – especially the flowers that just don't travel well. Julio's workshop covered all the information I was hoping for, plus more. He learned the long hard way how to grow his flowers in a northern zone and is very open about his desire to assist others so they have the knowledge they need to succeed – whether it be pricing, design tips or encouragement."

The workshop environment gives attendees an experience upon which they can build their own floral enterprises and gain confidence, Freitas says.

"Throughout the whole workshop, I tried to fast-track students to be more knowledgeable. Not all of us planned on being florists," he says. "I feel like flowers just happened in our lives, and we took it and ran with it. Perhaps you've come from some background that, like mine, can morph into flowers somehow. We just have to be creative about it." ■

#### DETAILS

**The Flower Hat**, [theflowerhat.com](http://theflowerhat.com), @theflowerhat

2020 Workshop Schedule:

July 20-22

August 10-12

August 31-Sept. 2

For more details, see the "Workshop Registration" tab at [theflowerhat.com](http://theflowerhat.com).



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