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CAPE COD LIFE

MARTHA'S VINEYARD & NANTUCKET

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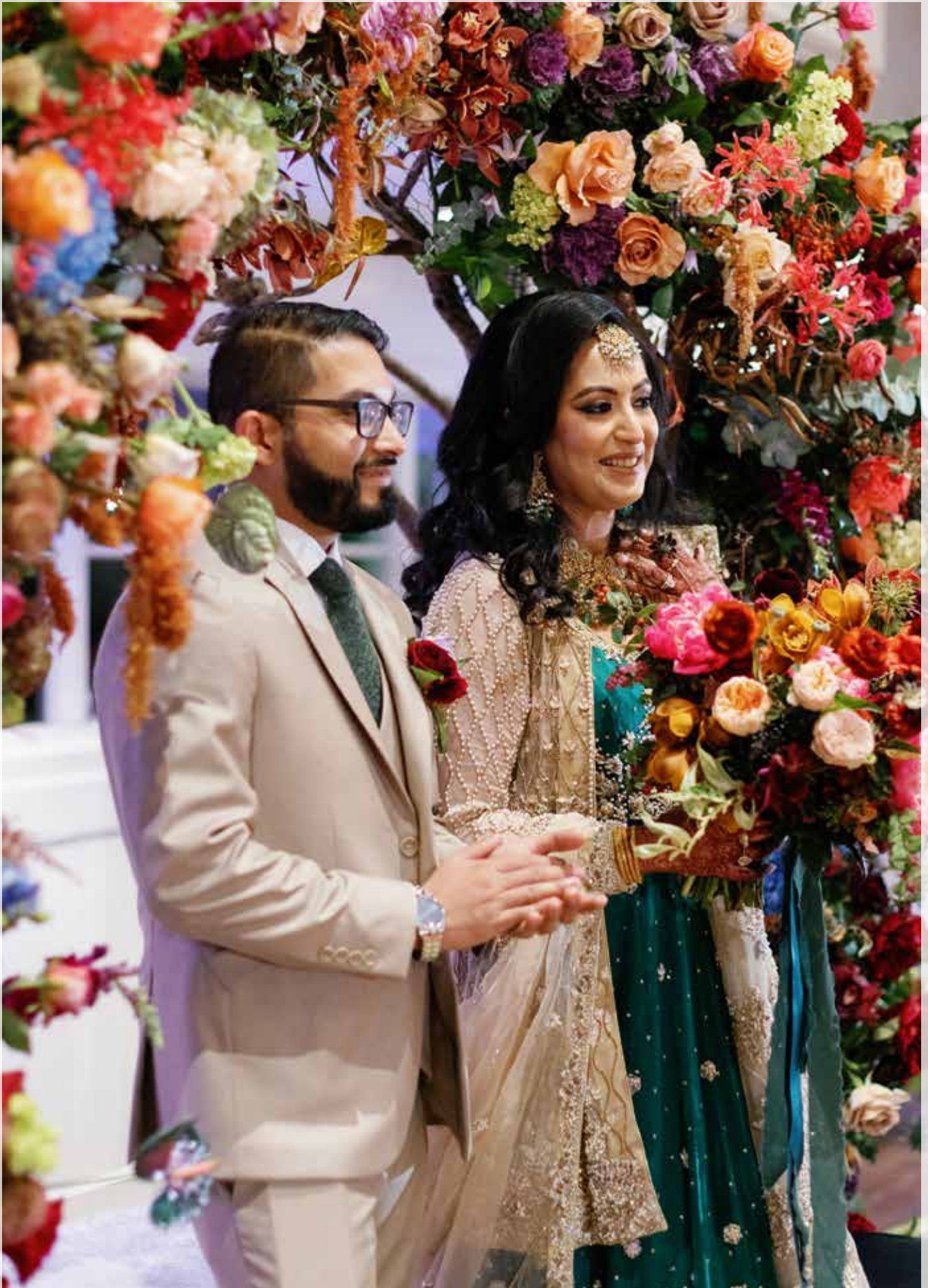
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A BRIDAL BOUQUET

It was nothing short of a kaleidoscope of colors for florist Hira Rafiq's own wedding.

By Sarah Serota

Photos by Katherine Brackman
Photography

While Hira Rafiq was waiting for the Mashpee Public Library to open in the spring of 2017, she first walked into Verde Floral Design in the Mashpee Commons looking for a part-time job. With the hustle and bustle of Mother's Day arrangements right around the corner, Rafiq was quickly hired. Her work at Verde Floral Design started out as basic prep work needed to make the store run smoothly: washing buckets and processing flowers.

In 2020, Verde's founder and previous owner Jeff Sawyer, handed over the baton to Rafiq, who is now the current owner. Taking over the business marked a moment of significant pride for Rafiq, as she was the first woman in her family to own a business. "The majority of my family, all of the men are entrepreneurs. They've all had their own small businesses, and most of the women in our family have been homemakers," she notes. She said she hopes to inspire her seven nieces that they can and should pursue whatever path is out there for them.

At Verde, Rafiq creates arrangements for a wide variety of events: memorial services, baby showers, birthday celebrations, and, of course, weddings. "Every big moment that a client has, we feel that we're a part of it. We celebrate whatever they are celebrating or share in their grief as well with them. That's a really fulfilling job."

Rafiq found that each customer comes in with a differing level of floral knowledge and may or may not have an idea of what sort of arrangement they want for their occasion. Regardless of the customer's level of specifics, Verde seeks to tailor the planning process to every client. "Some customers come in without any knowledge of what they want,

and they're looking for an expert to be able to guide them and they allow us the freedom to do it, which is wonderful," Rafiq says. "We love being able to create using our imagination...and other times, they have guidelines we need to work within, which is also really helpful because it narrows everything down. When it comes to creating floral arrangements,



there are so many different options of flowers, of color palettes, of design elements.” The process starts out with discussing what occasion the florals are for, what the space will look like alongside height restrictions, if the event has a theme, and if there is a certain color palette the client has in mind. Then, Rafiq uses her honed skills to bring the planned arrangement to fruition.

While Rafiq is a seasoned expert in creating floral bouquets and transforming a space to create a magical wedding, she faced uncharted waters when imagining the florals for her own wedding. This past November, Rafiq married her then-fiancé Jithin Palooparambil at The Ridge Club in Sandwich. Each with packed calendars, the couple had one open, and therefore perfect, weekend to allot for their wedding.

Their chosen date left them with only two months to plan the festivities, including their floral arrangements. “Initially, I wanted to elope because my biggest concern was I didn’t know if I could make my own bridal bouquet,” Rafiq shares. “I didn’t know if I could narrow it down. There are so many different flowers that I love. I would have kept adding and never stopped.” Despite her worries, the couple decided to hold a traditional ceremony so they could celebrate their special day with their families.

For Rafiq’s two bouquets, she decided to use Flowers by Semia to create them; a local business she respected and trusted. Rather than a traditional Cape Cod wedding that uses a blue and white color palette, Rafiq wanted radically different florals. “I wanted a lot of color, and that was the cornerstone of our design for the wedding. I



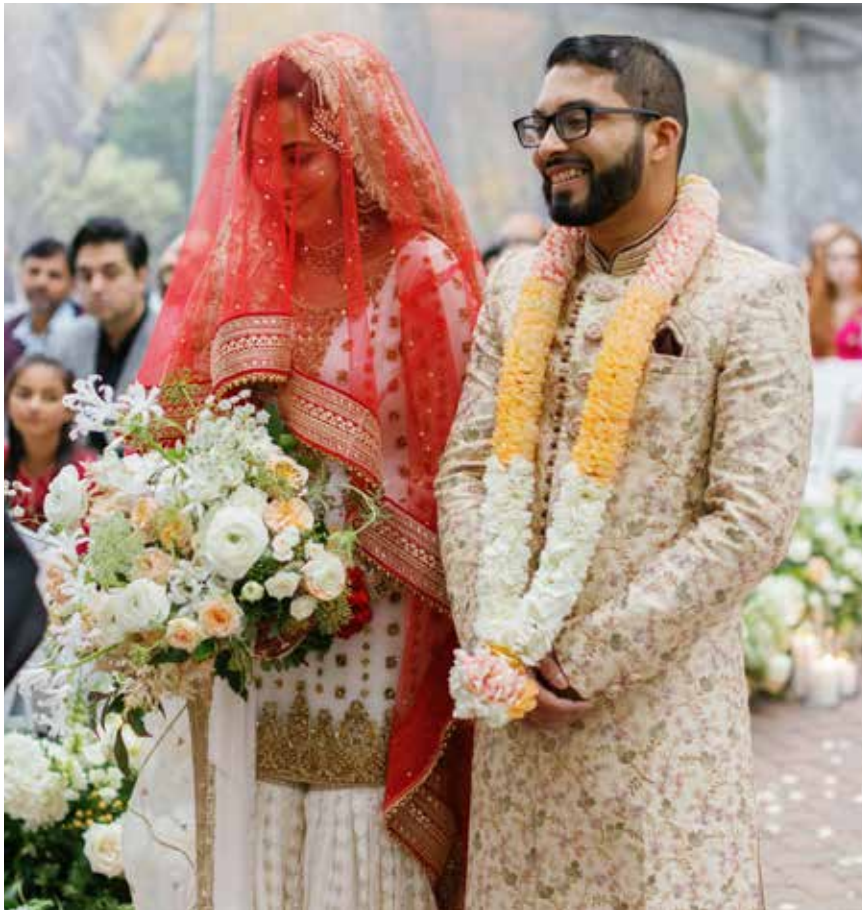
wanted it to be moody. I wanted it to be extravagant. I wanted it to be colorful dark and bright jewel tones,” she notes.

Alongside her Verde team, Rafiq created the rest of the floral decor for her wedding. The florals were a major focal point of the wedding, with breathtaking jewel-toned floral arrangements decorating each table and a vibrant arch. “I barely slept, I continued working on clients’ projects as well as working on everything related to my own wedding. I wasn’t just a bride. I was still the florist,” Rafiq says. “I was there at the crack of dawn, loading stuff into vehicles, driving it over to the venue, starting the prep working, starting the setup, and directing everyone. So my morning didn’t start out as the typical morning for a bride.” Rafiq even notes she hardly searched for dresses because her main priority was getting the flowers just right. Despite the chaos of making sure every single flower was in its place, the space all came together for the ceremony and the celebration. The space and the flowers showcased both Jithan’s Kerala heritage and Rafiq’s Pakistani heritage. “I think our wedding really just embraced all of it,” she says.









Creating florals for her own wedding not only made Rafiq's dreams come to life but also taught her more about the art of creating arrangements for weddings. "It helped me gain more experience. I did things that I hadn't done before and it was a great learning experience," Rafiq explains. Her wedding also held

emotional value for her entire team at Verde Floral Design. Each member of the team put their own touch on the celebration by creating a unique arrangement to adorn the space. "[My team] really enjoyed the process as well, because this was something that they were emotionally attached to and I didn't give them any kind



of restrictions," she says. "For every wedding, I always create a recipe for each arrangement, so they know exactly what goes in—instead, I wanted everyone to showcase their own design style."

For any wedding Rafiq works on, she takes pride in being able to make an important moment more beautiful. "I like knowing that I'm a part of this moment in a family's life. They don't need to worry about it. They can rely on me to follow through and create everything that they wanted." 🏡

Sarah Serota is a rising junior studying journalism at Northwestern University.

