

Natalie Stanyer

Skill: Floristry

From: Stoke-on-Trent
Competed in: WorldSkills 2007, Shizuoka
Employer: Elizabeth Floral Art
Result: Medallion for Excellence & 4th Place

Qualifications

- BTech First Diploma in Floristry (Reaseheath College, Nantwich, Cheshire)
- National Certificate in Floristry (Reaseheath College)
- Currently studying for her NDFS Level 4 (Reaseheath College)



Natalie's career in floristry started when she was just 15, taking up a Saturday job in her local florists. Immediately falling in love with floristry she decided this was the job for her. What she didn't realise however was at the age of 21 she would become part of Team UK, heading to Japan to take part in the floristry event at WorldSkills and winning a Medallion for Excellence.

So what is it that attracts Natalie to floristry?

For Natalie it's the creative nature of the industry that appeals. "Floristry is a never ending progression, nothing stays the same, customers want exciting designs and it's my job to turn their dreams into actual floral displays. I love it."

How did she get into competing?

Well for Natalie her first taste of competing came when she was at college. Her lecturers told her class about a regional floristry competition and Natalie swiftly volunteered to take part - and won. She went on to win the London finals, impressing judges with her skills and was then selected as part of Team UK.

But was she nervous about competing?

The answer is no.

"The competition style suits me. You have to improvise and create a design right there and then, which I find really exciting. In reality, the flowers tell you what you can do. You have to work with them and take your inspiration from their natural composition and use that in your design."

What about training, was it tough?

As soon as Natalie was selected for the team she got stuck into training. In fact she worked or trained seven days a week. "Luckily I have a very understanding boyfriend!" she quips. "It was tough but it was also so exciting that you could keep finding the energy to keep training and improving." Natalie also had great help from her employers, who supported her all the way and enabled her to have time off to travel the country training with leading florists. "I think it would have been incredibly

difficult to get to a World class standard without the support of my bosses and my training manager."

So what was Japan like?

Natalie had the advantage that she has been travelling overseas since she was 10 when her father worked abroad, so the culture shock wasn't as great for her as for other members of the team. She was also joined by her sister and brother-in-law, a great support which she appreciated.

"Competing at WorldSkills was amazing in every single way imaginable. On the first day it hit me how well I'd done just to get to Japan, I'd already achieved so much. It was then that I started to enjoy the competition and I loved meeting the other competitors and seeing their different styles. The crowds didn't bother me, I just wanted to focus on what I was doing and make sure I was achieving good results."

And the result?

Well, Natalie's hard work paid off. She came 4th in the competition and was awarded a Medallion for Excellence for her work, a fantastic achievement which her family and friends were all very proud of.

So has anything changed since Natalie has been back in the UK?

It's a very firm yes! "I am now very confident about my ability as a florist and customers also see that. Clients need to know you are totally in control and my WorldSkills experience has definitely given me this ability." This new found confidence has also helped Natalie in other ways, having now appeared in a number of newspapers and on TV! It's also made her appreciate and learn about associated trades. "Being part of Team UK made you look at what others were doing too and how every industry is important. We use big refrigerators to store flowers and looking at the work Matthew Lander (who competed in Refrigeration) did at WorldSkills made me appreciate the skill involved in that industry and now I make a point of learning about other things that previously I wouldn't have given a second thought."

What advice would Natalie give to others thinking about getting involved?

That's simple.

"Go for it, you'd be a fool not to. It's hard work but it's such an amazing experience and great fun. Not only do your skills improve but you get to meet such great people and become part of a team which you'll stay friends with for life. And you'll be representing your country – why would you not go for it?!"

What does Natalie think about WorldSkills coming to London?

"WorldSkills is such a great competition and I have UK Skills to thank for getting me there, they provided me with the best training possible. When WorldSkills comes to the UK I would love to help out if I can. It's a great way to show the country just how many talented people we have and how important these trades are globally... and hopefully it will give Team UK the home advantage!"

So what does Natalie plan to do now?

Well Natalie certainly won't be taking it easy. This year she plans on buying Elizabeth Floral Art from her bosses and in the future she also plans to teach floristry from the shop as well as expanding the business. With her enthusiasm, knowledge and skills, we're sure she'll go far.

A word from Natalie's employer: Valerie Barnes, owner, Elizabeth Floral Art

This was the first time Elizabeth Floral Art has been involved with WorldSkills competitions, but it was something they were pleased to get into for Natalie.

So why get involved?

For Valerie that was simple. "The main reason for us was that we felt Natalie was so dedicated to floristry that we needed to support her. Also the floristry industry is constantly changing and the demands from customers are very different now to what they were and I believe that any young people who wish to enter our world, learn and then bring new strengths into it must be supported."

Would you do it again?

There's no hesitation. "Most definitely. If a student shows the right attributes we would certainly look at supporting them as we did with Natalie. It can be tough as you need to give the competitor enough time off to train but in return we got the benefits of what she learnt and being involved has also brought great publicity to the company too."

What advice would you give other companies thinking of getting involved?

Valerie says:

"Get involved. It not only strengthens your employee's skills it also helps them to accept responsibility and understand team work, as well as encouraging strong self development. There are so many benefits to both parties that you should certainly consider doing it. Anything that can help to develop more skills in the work place is a good thing."



For more information, please contact the PR Team, UK Skills: 020 7612 9260