

THE WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND

MARIANNE VAN DEN BROEK
ON A CAREER IN THE SANDBOX

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Marianne van den Broek may have the coolest job on the island—and this is an island full of ship captains, fire dancers, scuba divers and guitarists. As the resident sand sculptor for Waldorf Astoria's Casa Marina and Reach resorts, van den Broek not only sculpts for the thousands of guests that flock to the Key West resorts, but also hosts the annual International Sand Art Competition.

"Well, you don't find an advertisement for this job, so you kind of come up with it," she laughs. She started at 18 in her native Holland, doing the grunt work of shoveling sand for a large event as a temp job. It resonated with the young artist, and she began traveling Western Europe to do sand events. She started competing as a sand sculptor in the US in 2002 and moved to Key West in 2005.

Van den Broek didn't immediately land the premier sand sculpting gig on the island. With the city's blessing, she started a space called The Sandbox on Virginia and White, sculpting striking and whimsical figures with the sand, including a 12 foot tall giraffe. Since the most frequent question she was asked was "What do you mix in to make it stick?" she named her business after the answer: "Just Sand and Water."

As a sand sculptor, perhaps her most interesting unexpected job is as an assistant to marriage proposals. She sculpted a large scroll for a proposal and the groom's daughter wandered over to look at it while the family was still dining—van den Broek had to enlist the kid into silence, trying to keep it under wraps. Finally, when Dad came over to pop the question, his other child, a boy of about three, also got down on one knee. Her attitude about the shenanigans?



"It's a labor of love." Except when it looks like rain. For her, following the weather becomes an "ongoing emotional state."

But she's become a master of going with the flow—even when an actual wave took out a wave sculpture.

"If I want to sleep well at night, I have to cover them."

Full Name? Marianne Eveline Petra van den Broek

What's your background? Hometown and/or college? Born and raised in the Netherlands, I moved to the US after graduating college in 2004. I went to the Hogeschool school of Utrecht and have a Bachelor's degree in Communication.

What other jobs have you held before sand sculpting?

My first job was stocking shelves in a local supermarket at age 11, and I have not stopped working since. Even now, I'm juggling three to four jobs at a time, from sand sculptor to boat captain, art framer to book-keeper. I don't like the feeling I'm doing the same thing every day, but I consider sculpting sand at the Casa Marina Resort is my full time job.

How did you come to Key West?

Through friends of friends. I came down on blind faith that this was the place we were going to live for two years ... that was almost fifteen years ago.

Do you have a life credo or motto? "Life's a garden, dig it!" —Joe Dirt

What's on your bucket list? According to the last the inventory: 73 buckets.

What is your idea of perfect happiness? Appreciating the moments those brief feelings of perfect happiness come along.

What is it that you most dislike? Misunderstandings.

Which TV, movie or superhero character is your alter ego? Rocket Raccoon from Guardians of the Galaxy.

What are three things you couldn't live without? Hope, love and gratitude.

If invisible what would you do? Attend the Oscars... I guess I do have a bucket list.



On what occasion do you lie? I never lie. :) **What's your favorite guilty pleasure?** Old school BBC sitcoms such as "Bottom" and "The Young Ones"

What talent would you secretly love to have? The capability to speak in public in full sentences that are well thought-out and tell a story.

Lunch with one famous person, who would you choose? Aaron Sorkin

Finish these sentences.

My friends and family would describe me as...

Thoughtful, caring, hard-working, determined, dedicated, with a temporary foot in her mouth.

My autobiography would be titled...

"The World in a Grain of Sand."

I can never refuse... A banana milkshake

When I go, I will go ... Silent... but deadly.