

MODERN



NOMAD

One young Palm Beacher traverses fiery landscapes and frozen expanses to unlock her passion and purpose

By Mary Murray // PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARISA MARULLI // Portrait photography by Emily Klarer



MARULLI SOUGHT TO CAPTURE THE WAY THE SHADOWS ZIGZAG ACROSS THE LEFT SIDE OF THE CANYON IN THIS IMAGE SHOT IN CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK IN UTAH.

OPPOSITE PAGE: MARULLI IN ARCHES NATIONAL PARK, UTAH, MAY 2018

“

I'M ALWAYS TRYING TO MAKE
THE THING THAT EVERYONE SEES
LOOK A LITTLE DIFFERENT.”

—MARISA MARULLI



ABOVE: “THIS ARCH IS ONE OF THE THREE MOST SPECIAL PLACES IN THE WORLD TO ME,” MARULLI SAYS OF DELICATE ARCH.

RIGHT: MARULLI DESCRIBES THIS AREA OF DEAD HORSE POINT STATE PARK AS HER PLAYGROUND. “IT REMINDS ME OF WHEN I WAS A KID AND [MY] SURROUNDINGS SEEMED LIKE THIS ENDLESS ADVENTURE, TOO LARGE TO EVER SCALE,” SHE SAYS.

LEFT: AFTER A 4 A.M. DRIVE TIME, MARULLI AND HER PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP ARRIVED AT THIS LOCATION, LOOKING THROUGH MESA ARCH INTO CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK, TO CAPTURE THE SUNRISE.



On a May day in Moab, photographer Marisa Marulli descended into a canyon. Dwarfed by massive monoliths, she searched for one particular viewpoint she just couldn't seem to find.

More than 300 million years ago, water covered this area. The seas evaporated and refilled, evaporated and refilled for centuries. Eventually, the water refused to return. The residual salt beds had their way with the region and, with help from Mother Nature and the luxury of time, created domes, ridges, and arches.

It's here, in the ancient geography of Utah's Arches National Park, that Marulli hunted for the perfect picture. She followed Park Avenue Trail,

a posh name for Mars-like terrain dotted with sandstone structures with equally impressive monikers: Queen Nefertiti strikes a regal profile, the Three Gossips sew secrets to the wind, and the Tower of Babel stands tall with mute truth. It's all visible from the road, but Marulli wanted more.

Roughly 45 minutes into her hike, she still had not happened upon her promised land. Then, her path turned and opened up into a vast void with swirling rocks that hinted at an aquatic history. “It looked like you were in a dried-up river,” Marulli recalls, adding that it exemplified how “places can change over time.”

It was not the exact locale she was looking for, but she'd let that go. No, this discovery would do just fine, for while it was not what she sought, it

turned out to be exactly what she needed. “I spent so much time in there and it became meaningful to me, journeying through and letting go of the fact that I wanted it to be something else.”

A week later, she was no longer a lone wanderer but the leader of a cohort of shutterbugs who'd joined her on a landscape photography workshop. The explicit intent was to augment their skills and take impressive snaps of otherworldly sites. Beyond that, Marulli aimed to broaden their horizons, through the lens and on a personal level, too. She began by asking a few questions: “Why are you here? What do you want out of this? What are you trying to do in your life?”

It wasn't long ago the 30-year-old Palm Beach native was posing these

same big-picture questions to herself. Until recently, Marulli felt the way many people her age and those far older feel: adrift.

The youngest of five children, Marulli spent her youth on the outside looking in. “I did a lot of observing as the fifth child, and I think because of that, I didn't do so much,” she says. “I didn't really put movement forward, one foot after the other.”

This feeling continued through college, when she pursued a business degree at Suffolk University in Boston, and afterward, when she worked as an advertising account manager in Miami and San Francisco. Following a romantic breakup, “I came back to Florida to regroup and figure out what I wanted,” she says.

"WE ARE RUNNING OUT OF PLACES IN THE WORLD WHERE WE CAN ACTUALLY SEE THE TRUE NIGHT SKY, UNCOMPROMISED," SAYS MARULLI, WHO SHOT THIS IMAGE OF THE MILKY WAY IN ARCHES NATIONAL PARK.

Her first step forward came in the form of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a questionnaire that identifies personality types and corresponding careers. It pinpointed potential fields of interest for Marulli, with the most appealing being movie directing, baking, and photography.

"I started putting feet forward in every single one and investing in each of the top three," she explains. "They all fell aside and photography grew and grew and grew."

"It just kind of took her over," says photographer Robert Swinson, who taught Marulli at the Armory Art Center in West Palm Beach. "She's enthused about photography and the process, and also about the adventure that can come with it."

This potential for adventure infiltrated Marulli's imagination. Soon, she was booking trips to places like Iceland to study under established photogs and shoot landscapes utterly unlike the palm trees and swamplands she was used to. But as she was teetering on the edge of self-discovery, her sister was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

During this difficult time, Marulli turned to photography not only as a coping mechanism but as a way to honor her sister. This manifested in a desire to live life *now*. In a need to embrace opportunities, say yes to unconventional experiences, and ignite momentum behind her ambitions.

Jessica Marulli Criddle passed away in February 2016. A month later, Marisa Marulli was driving across a frozen lake in Siberia, her camera by her side.

"I'm creating life out of her death and that's it. There's no other option for me," Marulli says. "I'm just going to keep going



SUNSET ON LAKE BAIKAL, SIBERIA, RUSSIA, MARCH 2016. "THIS PHOTO EPITOMIZES FOR ME THE IDEA THAT ONLY IN OPEN PLACES IS THERE THE SPACE TO CREATE SOMETHING NEW," SAYS MARULLI.



"THESE CRACKS IN THE ICE SHOW THE TRUE DEPTH OF LAKE BAIKAL," EXPLAINS MARULLI. IT MEASURES A MILE DEEP AND IS THE LARGEST FRESHWATER LAKE BY VOLUME.

and do the things I'm scared out of my mind to do and get on those flights to the other side of the world because I'm not going to let Jess' death just be a death. That's what pushes me."

Siberia represented the next chapter for Marulli. Having determined a new purpose, she was now hunting for meaning—and she would forge ahead no matter what.

Flying there was frightening enough, but then Marulli chose to sit in the passenger seat of the lead car in a caravan cruising across a solid Lake Baikal. For 10 days, she called the ice home. She and her fellow photographers would drive a few miles and then stop to commune with icicles, taking step after trepidatious step toward crystalline environments they'd only seen in their dreams. While exploring this foreign land, Marulli began to tap into her inner spirit and find the answers to her questions.

Though Marulli's journey is far from finished, she's already reflecting upon how she can help others follow suit. And photography is her means of achieving this goal.

Her May trip to Moab was the first workshop she hosted under her own business. With help

from Swinson, she guided a group of eight to sites in Arches National Park, Dead Horse Point State Park, and Canyonlands National Park. They rose long before the sun and retired far after night settled in. They awed at storm clouds and trailed star paths. They hiked to gravity-defying arches and channeled the energy of travel into their photos. They left their worries at home and focused on themselves, their cameras, and the emotion of the moment.

"My photography expeditions are like retreats," she says. "It's hard to change who you are when you have been in the same routine. ... My goal once they're out there is the unraveling of who they are."

For Beth Potocsnak, a mother of four from Illinois, the workshop allowed her to turn her attention inward. "This was more like an adventure," she says. "Even though we were hiking and huffing and puffing, it was a really nice time to just breathe, take things in, and enjoy your surroundings."

Marulli wanted Potocsnak and the others to shift their mindsets right away, so she kicked



MARULLI NOTES THAT ICE FORMATIONS, PATTERNS, AND CRACKS ARE WHAT ATTRACT PHOTOGRAPHERS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD TO SIBERIA. SHE PHOTOGRAPHED THIS ICE FORMATION JUTTING OUT OF THE CURTAIN-LIKE SNOW, AS WELL AS A HAUNTINGLY WHITE BIRCH FOREST (ABOVE) ON THE SAME EXPEDITION IN MARCH 2016.





ABOVE: MARULLI CLIMBED UNDER ICICLES TO PHOTOGRAPH ICE HANGING OFF OF ROCK FACES ON LAKE BAIKAL.

OPPOSITE PAGE: IN ADDITION TO THE ROCK FORMATION IN THE MIDDLE OF LAKE BAIKAL, MARULLI WAS ATTRACTED TO THIS SCENE FOR ITS ICE CRACKS THAT CREATE LEAD LINES THAT ARE "A DELIGHT FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS," SHE SAYS.

off the expedition with a hike to Delicate Arch, an icon that appears on Utah license plates. The trek required a significant ascent—and yielded the ultimate reward.

"I raced everyone up there because I wanted to see all of their faces for the first time," says Marulli, who believes the experience of getting to a location should inform an image. After hiking for an hour, her students were not only able to create memorable photos, but imbue them with a sense of achievement. "Imagine if I had taken them on a bus to shoot that," she adds. "It would have been completely different."

"The feeling is not just about getting the pictures," adds Swinson. "Sometimes, it's testing yourself against the elements and seeing that you can still get to the top of the mountain. You have to accomplish getting there."

As someone who once described herself as "directionless," Marulli now prioritizes paths. But these paths aren't fixed. They are paths of chance and spontaneity. Of travel and growth. Of bringing meaning to an empty picture frame.

"You want your photography to have a message," explains Marulli, who says her message is one of change. "My way

of doing that is to create a paradigm shift in the way people think so they can live, so they can truly set themselves free."

She also plans to motivate change as an environmental advocate. She's currently focusing those efforts on enlightening her clients to the wonder around them, but she hopes one day to start a widespread conservation project. Her next workshop, which takes place this month in Alaska, exemplifies the need for global action to protect our planet and its natural beauty. Because if these remarkable landscapes disappear, so too will their ability to inspire.

For Marulli, the power of inspiration is tied to the Earth. Even today, having grown as a photographer and businesswoman, she acknowledges how a serene scene of Icelandic glacial lagoons compelled her to embrace this modern art form. The photo she took might have been a bit amateur but it showed her promise—and with it, the potential for a more fulfilling life. "The skill you learn, but it's the eye, the composition, your view that's really important," she says. "It's not my best photo, but it is the most meaningful to me." ◀◀

