

“*Beautiful & Marvelous*”



Once upon a time, there was **Vanessa Velásquez**, posing, turning, and smiling for the camera. Sounds like a fashion model's life, eh?

But, alas, like most things in a fashion model's life, her life was busy, grueling at times, always looking gorgeous everywhere she was. In 2020, her brand, Vane Velásquez Uno, got her to Reinado de El Salvador, a national beauty pageant in El Salvador, Central America, where she earned the title that put her on the platform to represent her country at the 69th Miss Universe pageant, held on May 16, 2021, at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, Florida.

BY MARITZA COSANO
PHOTOS: ADDIEL PERERA

VANESSA VELÁSQUEZ

Miss Universe El Salvador 2020 talks about the pageant being a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and the real-life challenges it presented, mostly perfection every second of it.

On the right,

Vanessa Velásquez sits in one of the Ambassador Suites at Hilton West Palm Beach. Velásquez is a Salvadoran Model and social media influencer who won the Miss Universe El Salvador 2020. She represented her country in the 2020 Miss Universe pageant.

Clothing is by ZARA

Stylist: Vanessa Inojosa
@vanessa_inojosah

Her shoes are **Toronto Sneakers** by Veronica Herrera
by Giannina Azar @veroherreraoficial



What was it about this 24-year-old that impressed the judges at the Reinado de El Salvador? Certainly, her beauty, her svelte 5'10 tall body frame, photogenic smile, and elegance, but more than anything, her answer to the question, "What is the most precious gift that we receive as human beings?"

"As human beings, I consider our mothers to be the most precious gift we receive," said Vanessa. "Our mothers sacrifice everything for us. They are always there, and definitely, there is no one more loving, more dedicated, and more compassionate in our lives. That's why our mothers are the dearest gift that we have."

At Work

Vanessa Velásquez enters the Hilton West Palm Beach. Her marvelous beauty commands attention. She's here for a photo shoot for WPB Magazine. She is closely followed by fashion designer Verónica Herrera. A few makeups and wardrobe fittings later, Miss Universe El Salvador appears in the resort pool area dressed in a white sporting outfit paired with Verónica Herrera's newly released shoe line. Velásquez quickly begins to do what she does best: modeling for the camera for a day-long shoot. Each take is better than the next. And as she does so, she directs, poses, and articulates her view to the photographer, ensuring each take is flawless.

Vanessa Velásquez

models during a
photo shoot at the
resort-style pool of
Hilton West Palm Beach.

Clothing is by ZARA
Her shoes are comfortable
Santorini Sneakers by
Veronica Herrera
by Giannina Azar
@veroherreraoficial





Behind the Camera

A smile fills Vanessa's face as she sits in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel West Palm Beach, wearing an electric azure blue ensemble. And, for a few minutes, the beautiful model representing not only the famed brands such as Dior, Chanel, Lancôme, Express, and Nine West, but her country and Miss Universe El Salvador, seems at ease in her surroundings, talking to me.

What was Miss Universe pageant like?

It was one of the greatest experiences of my life. It was definitely challenging, but it pushed me out of my comfort zone. The pageant makes you grow so much as a person in so many different areas. But the most beautiful thing about being Miss Universe is representing your country. You are able to showcase that to your friends and family, and to the rest of the world.

It's unbelievable how much of your country you can bring into a platform that gives so much opportunity. It is not about the girls who take part in the pageant, but about all the countries represented.

I'm used to doing modeling and being in front of a camera. But, the pageant world is very extreme in the sense that it requires a lot of perfection every second of the day. There are many challenges that you face when competing in the Miss Universe pageant with all the other girls. You sleep very little.

Was it something that you always knew you wanted to do?

That's a funny question because I never considered that I'd do something like that. I actually was not a pageant girl. I had never watched Miss Universe when I was growing up. It was not a dream of mine. But modeling opened so many doors for me internationally. My country had somehow noticed me as a beauty icon who could represent El Salvador. I had a relatively big following and people who supported me and wanted me to participate. There were also many Missosology pages on the internet that were sharing my photos and saying, "She's a very pretty model from El

Salvador." "Vanessa Velásquez should be in Miss Universe." They were all asking me to do it for almost five years. I'm someone who has very high expectations of myself. When I do something, I do it wholeheartedly—when I put myself out there, I give more than 100 percent. So, I decided to take the challenge.

What was the biggest challenge?

Staying true to myself. There were many expectations from so many people—from those who are knowledgeable in pageantry, most of all. Some things were not exactly how I would normally do them, so I'd say, "But, that's not me, that doesn't feel right."

Things like changing my hair color, for one! [laughing] They wanted me to be a brunette because, they said, I'd represent the rest of El Salvadorians better. "I'm an expert in pageantry, and I know that if you're not the typical image of your country, you're not qualified to win because you're not representing it well," they told me. I am one hundred percent Salvadorian. I was born in El Salvador and lived and grew up there. Both my parents are from El Salvador. All my grandparents are Salvadorans. This is who I am and I represented my country as a Salvadoran. So, ultimately, I told them that I would stay true to myself. If I had not been myself I would not have been able to portray what I grew up being. Nobody can tell me what a Salvadoran is or how to represent myself because nobody else knows how to do "me" better than myself!

Learning and taking advice, but doing "me" was the biggest challenge for me.

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Vanessa Velásquez poses in front of a cabana by the pool at Hilton West Palm Beach.

Clothing and sunglasses by ZARA. These sunglasses elevate Velásquez's outfit.

Stylist: Vanessa Inojosa
@vanessa_inojosah
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Vanessa Velásquez likes to visit different places in the Palm Beaches when she is not working. Popular spots like Hilton West Palm Beach and **The Square (Right)**, the newest neighborhood featuring local shopping, restaurants, events, and inspired living downtown West Palm Beach are two of her favorites. Clothing is by ZARA. Her shoes (right) are **Paris Sneakers** by Veronica Herrera by Giannina Azar @veroherreraoficial





“I love to share my personal brand. I consider myself a brand. It’s the way I carry myself. I work every day for myself and on building my image. My parents gave me a great foundation—how to carry myself, how to treat others with love, kindness, and respect.”

What’s your biggest takeaway from the experience?

It’s difficult to answer this question because the pageant was a big learning experience.

Most of all, I learned so much about my culture and my own country. I visited more of my country than I had ever before. El Salvador has many beautiful natural habitats and I was able to visit many of them. But something that I did take from the experience was being able to have my parents go with me to certain parts of our country.

My people are so beautiful, so humble, always smiling. So, it was wonderful traveling all around El Salvador meeting so many people, especially through such difficult times. Being able to help, doing projects that exposed the needs of others, especially during COVID, was very meaningful.

Have you been able to use the pageant as a platform to pursue your dreams?

I am thankful that I’ve always been able to do what I love. Miss Universe is a platform that has opened up more doors, helped me to make more connections with other brands and other people.

No matter how challenging it is, I have always believed you will achieve your goals, no matter what they are. I’ve always loved modeling and working with brands. I have developed strong relationships with brands such as Dior, Lancôme, Express, Nine West, Purificacion Garcia, Channel, and now Verónica Herrera with her brand-new shoe line. So many amazing brands. I’m thankful for all of them. They’ve put their trust in me, giving me the opportunity to represent them, to be their collaborator, influencer, and model.

Are you open to doing movies or TV?

Absolutely! Before, that’s not something that I’d consider, but now I’m ready for anything. I feel comfortable talking to people.

This leads to my next question. How do you feel about being an inspiration to other women, most especially younger women? And, not only as Miss Universe El Salvador but as a young female entrepreneur in a very multi-cultural world.

It’s an amazing feeling. Shivers run up my spine as I talk about it. I am so happy about the number of girls, and not only girls but guys too, whom I have been able to empower or impact in some way. And not even by talking to them but by doing what I do.

I receive so many messages from girls and women saying, “Wow! You inspire me. Thanks to you, I started my brand.” “Thanks to you, I decided to do this or that. . .” And they tell me about their lives and what they’ve been able to achieve. I even had a boy reach out to me two days ago who said, “You inspired me so much. I was depressed because I didn’t have a job. I see you following your dreams, doing everything that you do every day, and thanks to you I’m paying for my studies and following my dreams.”

I hear you have a foundation, Angel Hands by Vane.

Yes. I love helping people with health issues. I fly them from El Salvador to where they need to go to get care. We also assist moving people or building houses during natural disasters like hurricanes. Experiences like this have not only allowed me to empower people but also to give back to those in need.

How do you feel about living here in Palm Beach?

I love it! It’s amazing how much we can learn about people’s cultures, experiences, values, countries. . . Living here gives me a chance to transmit to others all the things that are unique and beautiful about my culture. I’ve never met anybody from whom I didn’t learn something of value. And as people meet me, they get a chance to see how the people in my country are—charismatic, humble, loving, and friendly.

Sharing and taking the most valuable things from others is beautiful to me. I love the diversity of cultures that we have in South Florida, and in Palm Beach. It is unfortunate that there isn’t as much tourism in my country as there is here.

In El Salvador, we don’t have that multi-cultural feeling or trade of values and experiences that come from a variety of cultures. Here, you’re trading that every day! The first thing I ask someone is, “Where are you from?” And I learn all kinds of things, from their accents to the foods they eat to what they enjoy doing. It makes everything so interesting.

I don’t know if Palm Beach will continue to be my base because I fly a lot for work. But, for now, it’s home. It’s a beautiful place. I have fallen in love with it. The beach is amazing! And the fashion and dining . . . It’s nice to have a place that gives me the tranquility I need when I come home.

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