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CLAUDIA KRONENBERG
PHOTOGRAPHY

Crowning Achievement

CLAUDIA KRONENBERG builds a very personal business one wedding at a time



In an age where digital technology can turn almost anyone into a would-be wedding photographer, Claudia Kronenberg has found the magic to transcend in a saturated market.

Since 1993, she and her Nantucket-based team have photographed the weddings of a veritable “Who’s Who” on the East Coast. Working in digital since 2003, with a film and darkroom background from RIT, Kronenberg plays up the natural expressions and environments her bride and groom experience in celebrating their special day.

FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

“This business is all about networking,” she stresses. To build relationships, Kronenberg is constantly prospecting in different ways. “This might include attending social functions where my prospective clients meet, hosting breakfast clubs with other leaders in the wedding industry, and inviting a guest of honor who might be a person of influence in my market,” she says.

The studio regularly donates photographic services to local fundraisers, making sure the right labels and signage are provided for the items. She also talks to florists and caterers, and reads the local newspapers and regional magazines, circling the names of individuals she wants to meet. Most important, she asks for referrals.

Kronenberg has also created a resource website for brides: My Nantucket Wedding (www.mynantucketwedding.com), comprised of local vendor listings, tips, and information links for the bride. This site also generates additional leads.

To initiate her couple’s memorable experience, she schedules pre-wedding meetings with the couple and family members. Most often her new clients come from referrals, so they have a sense of Kronenberg’s work. On the wedding day, all her relationship building enables her to capture the images she and the couple desire.

THE POWER OF A FASHION BRIDAL SHOOT

Her networking savvy is clear in the clever programs Kronenberg has created to stay top of mind with brides and anyone who might refer her.

One such program generated extensive editorial coverage, including a profile in Nikon’s “Wedding Edge 2006” insert in April *Studio Photography* and a coveted assignment with *Grace Ormond*



Wedding Style, a leading publication catering to the affluent bride.

“I had this brainstorm to do a fashion bridal shoot,” she says, pointing out that she’s created and shot this style of campaign three times, most recently in May. “The first motivation was to be able to work with our own models in locations of our choice, so that we were not under the time or creative constraints of the wedding day itself. It’s been an amazing tool for networking. Not only does it reach brides through magazines, it has created a buzz among wedding vendors and editors at several publications.

This month’s *Studio* cover image was captured by Kronenberg in Nantucket this past May, during her third and most recent fashion bridal shoot. “It was a real meeting of the minds,” she recalls. “We wanted to use designer gowns for this shoot, so my studio manager, Brea McDonald, contacted shops across



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CLAUDIA'S TOP TEN
BUSINESS TO-DOS

1. Stay abreast of current technology, from gear to software.
2. Have the courage to follow your instincts.
3. Ask for referrals from vendors and clients.
4. Set, follow, and focus on your goals.
5. Prospect by attending social events, sending email announcements, updating your website.
6. Educate yourself and use your resources (mentors, books, seminars).
7. Network through breakfast clubs, fashion bridal shoots.
8. Show warmth and concern for clients so they know they're special to you.
9. Invest back into your business to gain more leverage.
10. Believe in yourself and your business.



North America, including Reem Acra, Vera Wang Boston, plus a little shop on Boston's Newbury Street that stocks Justina McCaffrey and Carolina Herrera. We collaborated with local hair and makeup stylists, made a shot list, borrowed poses from fashion magazines, and pitched the idea to *N Magazine*, a local glossy publication. The editor loved the idea and ended up funding the entire project."

For this shoot, explains Kronenberg, "It was our floral designer who had the idea of setting up a table in the woods. When we arrived, the sun was in the perfect position for gorgeous backlight. While the bride was changing dresses, the sun shifted, so we picked up the table and moved it back into the light. Without the backlight, the shot wouldn't have worked."

By this time, the models, who did not know each other, were feeling more comfortable, so Kronenberg asked the groom to look at his bride as she looked directly into the lens. On her stomach, lying in pine needles to get the lowest possible angle, while her assistant held a reflector to bounce light back into their faces, Kronenberg fired off a series of shots. *N Magazine* and *Studio* selected the same image for their covers.

"When Carolina Herrera's PR rep saw this image, she called to thank us for 'getting the dress just right.'"

Continuing to network, Kronenberg's studio threw a party for all participating vendors and gave them each a CD of images. She asked that they provide the studio with photo credits if images were used for promotional purposes.

"We then pitched the photos to national magazines and photography industry leaders, such as Nikon, Lowepro, Leather Craftsmen. Many of them now support us," she says.

Kronenberg was subsequently invited to present the fashion shoot idea to her state PPA chapter, and at the April WPPI event. As a result, she's been asked to teach a 2007 WPPI MasterClass. Grace Ormonde has hired her to shoot the fashion spread for an upcoming *Wedding Style, New England*, in late October. And the editors of Lowepro's prestigious annual "Vision" publication chose her as their sole wedding photographer for their 2007 edition.

To further boost her exposure, she placed photos and video from the shoot on her website and updated her marketing collateral to reflect the new imagery. She also distributed magazine tear sheets to customers, the news media, and vendors with whom she partners.

These bridal fashion shoots have given her yet another competitive advantage.

"I can show brides just how much fun they can have and what great shots we can get if we plan time for portraits in different places. The fashion shoots give me language to communicate to them just how special their portrait time can be."

RAISING THE STANDARD

To be tops in the market, the team stays current with trends, technology, and techniques. "It's important to invest the time and funds to keep up. And to be aware of the competition and how it affects the industry as a whole," she says.

"I think it's vital to educate prospective clients and the wedding industry about the importance of professional wedding photography. What needs to be conveyed is that the consistency of coverage, the stamina of a seasoned photographer, the quality of the file, and the end product—basically the total package—are what make a professional.

"Having your wedding photographed and just receiving a disk of images is what I equate to receiving the fabric of the wedding dress without the designer to stitch it together," says Kronenberg. "It's what we do with the fabric, or photographs, that makes the difference.

Kronenberg is as focused on technique and the technical aspects of photography as she is on the business aspects. "I love capturing the poignant moments leading up to the nuptials. When I shoot the bride getting ready, for example, I use a really fast 85mm f/1.4 lens and soak in all natural window light in the room. I want her to remember how it felt in her room that day, not just how she looked."



Kronenberg shot her first wedding in 1993, when a close friend asked her to cover the nuptials. In 1997, she attended a course taught by Denis Reggie, which had a direct effect on her career direction. He helped her realize she should and could shoot in her own style.

"I didn't have to stick to standard poses or notions," she says. Back in Nantucket, she rearranged operations, hired an assistant, and made a big trade-off: fewer weddings per year at a higher rate.

"Today, my studio shoots 30 weddings and 60 portraits from June through September. I'd like to prolong that time frame, shoot more weddings outside my immediate area, and fill my schedule with shoots year round. This will mean juggling our other activities—album design, marketing, networking, and staying current on industry standards and technology—which we typically work around our busy times."

The only thing as important as her photography business is her family. "I find that mothers who work full time have a tendency to feel guilty about working. It is very important to set boundaries. At work it's all about work; at home, it's about the kids, the family," she says. "Clients have learned that my office hours are Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, and for the most part respect that."

It's all part of the package that sets Claudia Kronenberg apart in this super-saturated market. ♦

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HER WEDDING-PLANNING
RESOURCE SITE, VISIT
WWW.MYNANTUCKETWEDDING.COM



KRONENBERG'S GEAR BOX

DIGITAL CAMERAS

Nikon D9x and D200
Nikkor lenses: 17-55mm f/2.8, 28-70mm f/2.8,
70-200mm VR f/2.8, 16mm f/2.8, 85mm f/1.4,
105mm f/2.8

LIGHTING

Nikon SB-800 Speedlight
Nikon SD-8A flash battery pack
Lowel id Video Light
Photoflex LiteDiscs

COMPUTER/DIGITAL

Apple Macintosh G5, PowerBook G4
Adobe Photoshop CS2
Epson Stylus 2200
Epson P-4000 multimedia storage viewer

ALBUM SOFTWARE

Lab Prints

PRO LAB

Millers Professional Imaging

WEDDING EVENT ONLINE HOSTING

Pictage

WEBSITE DESIGN/PORTRAIT EVENT HOSTING

Pebblehaven Company

ALBUMS

Leather Craftsmen, AsukaBooks, PictoBooks,
Willow Books (proofs)

ACCESSORIES

Nikon MB-D200
SanDisk Ultra II 4GB
Lowepro Pro Rollers and Stealth Reporter

NECESSITIES

Thomas J. Stanley's books *Marketing to the Affluent*, *Selling to the Affluent*, and *Networking with the Affluent*