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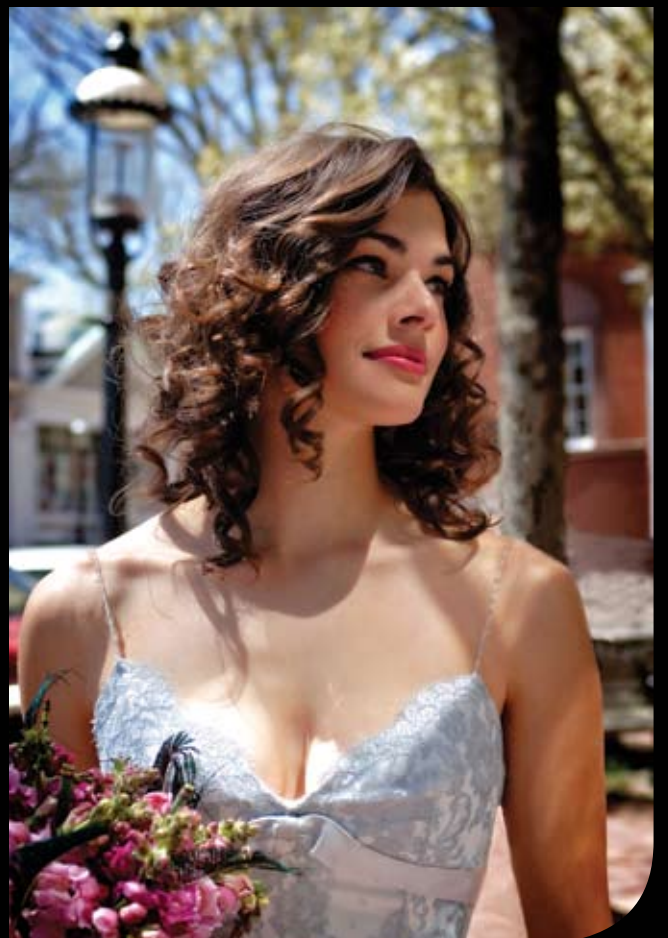
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*Claudia Kronenberg
Creates Her Own
Bridal Fashion Shoot*

By Laura Raskin



Claudia Kronenberg

There were two brides in white running down the island of Nantucket's cobbled Main Street one sunny day this spring, but not because they were having second thoughts.

The brides—actually bridal models—stopped at about seven locations on the island, from a greenhouse to a yacht club to an old-fashioned soda fountain, trying not to drag their *haute couture* dresses on the ground or smudge their impeccable makeup as they were photographed at each location. It was all part of Nantucket-based wedding photographer Claudia Kronenberg's master plan.

Part savvy promotion piece and part creative exercise, the idea came to Claudia after she was inspired by a burgeoning style of wedding photography that combines old Hollywood glamour and the vibrant energy of a bride on her day in unexpected locations.

Claudia has been shooting weddings since 1993. It was on her home turf of Nantucket that she decided not to wait for a wedding day, but to stage a bridal fashion shoot. Well known Boston videographer Genie Seybold of Afterimage Productions filmed an identical shoot on the streets of Boston. The savvy marketing scheme would be a promotional piece for Claudia's studio, and in the process she would have the freedom to explore a cutting-edge style of photography without the constraints of the wedding day.

While many wedding photographers have an exceptional eye, they don't always have one for self-promotion. Claudia managed to merge business and style in a groundbreaking new way as she networked with Nantucket's and Boston's best vendors.

Claudia explained the genesis for her idea. "One late night after an intense all-day seminar with Australia's Jerry Ghionis, I had an inspiration to create my



own bridal fashion shoot," she says. The next day her assistant, Brea McDonald, called top wedding dress designers like Vera Wang and Reem Acra for loans for the shoot. The designers were excited to have their work photographed on the island—a premiere wedding location with its sweeping beaches and amber-colored moors.

A buzz perpetuated as Claudia and her staff contacted make-up artists, an event planner and other vendors to lend jewelry, shoes and flowers. Fourteen gowns showed up at the studio's doorstep from all across North America on the day of the shoot. Nantucket's glossy *N Magazine* picked up the story for its cover and ran an 11-page spread. The island's two local newspapers ran stories and photos and the local television station filmed as the models—two local landscapers cleaned up and out of their Carhartts—ran to the various locations. The photographs were picked up for the 2006 *Grace Ormonde Marriage*.

The photographs themselves are a stunning result of the process. The models are sultry and sweet, playing it up for the camera in places like Café Vittoria in Boston's North End and Bartlett's Farm on Nantucket. There is an emphasis on a sense of place and glamour.

The originality of the project has sparked an interest that continues. Claudia is a platform speaker at the WPPI Convention in Las Vegas later this month.

She cannot emphasize enough the importance of creating her own buzz. (All of the vendors involved received a CD of images after the shoot to use for their own promotional purposes, which continues to carry the studio's name wherever it goes.)

Claudia and Brea have kept in contact with vendors and have contacted national magazines and other high-profile photographers about the project. "It

turned out to be this fantastic network of vendors,” says Claudia. People are already asking when she’s going to do it again.

The exponential excitement from the shoot has translated into Claudia’s real wedding work. “The feedback was so positive. It gave us a whole new spirit and energy. When we meet with brides, we expound on the concept of taking wedding photography one step farther,” she says. “That allows us to push our creativity to the edge and brides love our enthusiasm.”

Wedding photography made Claudia and her classmates cringe as a possible career choice after they graduated from the Rochester Institute of Technology, where she received a BFA. “I thought I would land a job taking photos all around the world,” she laughs. “Shooting weddings was never considered real photography.” Her attitude has since changed. Claudia studied in Salzburg, Austria, during her tenure at RIT and then came back to her summer and childhood home of Nantucket to work as a staff photographer at the *Inquirer and Mirror*, the island’s oldest newspaper. “Between the fast pace of the newspaper and my education at RIT

I learned how to work with people and master the technical end of photography, although I didn’t have a clue about the business end,” she says.

Claudia then got married, had a baby and took a leave from the newspaper, at which time a friend asked her to shoot her wedding. She had one camera with one lens. “It was really just a great job for a mom—it was a Saturday job. My office was a little desk in my son’s bedroom next to his crib. I had no computer, nothing.”

In three years, Claudia was online and had added to her equipment.

“I realized I could mix my fine art background with my photojournalistic experience and create my own niche in the wedding world and on the island I call home,” she says.

She got an office downtown and hired an assistant. A lot of her contemporaries were getting married and her reputation spread by word of mouth. “That’s my personality. When I want something I go after it,” she says. “I realized this very quickly—I could shoot it in the way I wanted to. It actually turned out to be something I loved.” Claudia was capturing an intimate mo-

ment in people’s lives, which is what she had loved as a photojournalist. More than that, wedding photography was a bigger challenge than its reputation belied. “Most photographers don’t want to do it because it’s so stressful. Technically it’s such a challenge. You can’t make a mistake.”

Claudia now has three full-time photographers in her studio as well as a computer technician. “My goal in business is to keep our wedding photography at the world-class level,” she says. She keeps up to date on the newest technology and innovations in wedding photography and invests in the latest digital cameras and their lenses each year. She creates magazine-style album designs and provides each client with a Pictage web site.

A switch to digital took place in 2003 and her studio shoots with nothing but digital nowadays. She uses the fastest Vibration Reduction (VR) Nikon lenses and loves the super fast response of the Nikon D2X, which she and her shooters use in manual mode.

“I feel that changing lenses to capture a range of scenes is key. It’s important not to get lazy while on the job. I always shoot



Claudia Kronenberg

my weddings with an assistant and at least three camera bodies. One of my favorite lenses has always been the 105mm macro," she says.

Claudia loves to use natural light as much as possible. Brea, who is now a shooter for the studio, says, "I think the main thing I have learned from Claudia is how to utilize light. Backlight is huge for us, and knowing how to use the camera and flash to capture the ambience of a scene is paramount. It's all about taking the time to see."

The studio's prices range from \$3000 to \$20,000 per wedding. Sales were up 35 percent from 2004 to 2005, which Claudia partly attributes to the results of the bridal fashion shoot. She has also developed the website www.mynantucketwedding.com, which caters to Nantucket brides and offers a marketplace of local vendors.

To see more photos and check out the promotional video, visit the website: www.claudiakronenberg.com.

Laura Raskin is a freelance writer living in New York City. Most recently she wrote about arts and culture for a newspaper on the island of Nantucket.



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