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CHERIESTEINBERG COTÉ

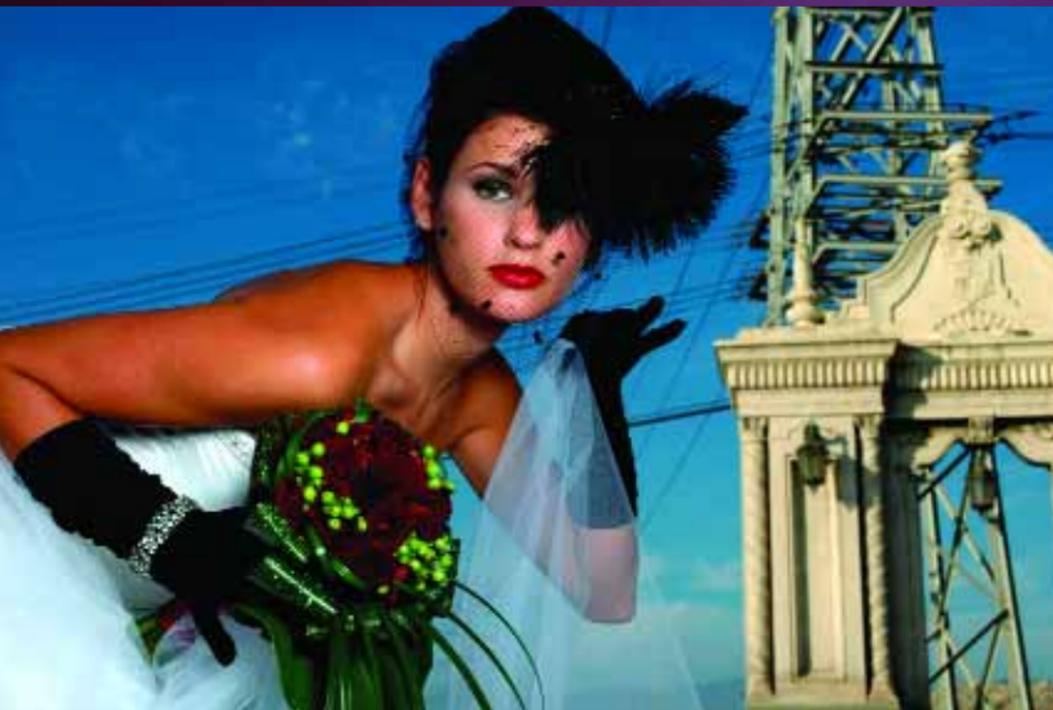
PLAYING THE ROOM



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CHERIE STEINBERG COTÉ

“I KNOW WHAT I WANT TO ACCOMPLISH. I’LL ART DIRECT THE SITUATIONS, COME UP WITH PROPS, LOCATIONS, IDEAS FOR SETTINGS.”



Heidley Jones

“If you want to do this job, you’ve got to play the room,” Cherie Steinberg Coté says. “This job” is weddings, events, portraits and models’ headshots and portfolios. And “play the room”? Well, we’ll let Cherie tell you.

“When you have ten or 15 people in front of you to do a wedding formal, and none of them want to be there, you have to dazzle them. You’ve got to wake ‘em up, shake ‘em up and make them look at you and want to smile. You have to play with them. You can’t be shy.”

She’s not. “I’m like a comedian,” she adds. “I’m on stage, I’m performing.”

She plays the room, and judging by the pictures, she does it to perfection.

Of course, it helps to have outgoing clients. “When a shy bride picks me,” she says, “the only thing I can think of is that she chose me because she saw that I’m the kind of person who can take over the situation.” People who are not shy pick her because, in her words, “they want to come and play with me.” They want the pictures to capture their spirit, their exuberance, and they sense—*they know*—that she’ll get it.

The guys can be a different story. “When I do engagement photos, the girls are usually really into it and the guys don’t want to be there. What I do is just be myself and try to create an environment that’s really cool and fun. We play great music, and I make it like a club situation and loosen them up. We end up having a good time and by the time we get to the wedding, we’re buddies.”

And if the bride isn’t into it? You work harder...or you get lucky. “It was a wedding in Santa Monica, we were outside, beautiful setting, beautiful day, but the bride wasn’t giving me anything. She didn’t want to be in front of the camera. Then this guy walks by with these three dogs. I say to him, ‘Hey, can I use your dogs?’ ‘Okay,’ he says. He brings the dogs over and we put the three dogs with the bride and make some cool shots. The guy is cool, and the dogs are well behaved, so I get his card and call him later. Turns out he’s an animal trainer. So later on I do a shoot with a model and his dogs for some stock shots. Only in L.A.”

Cherie started out as a photojournalist for the *Toronto Sun*, and at one point traveled the world for seven years, photographing, as she says, “whatever was going on.” Asked if her newspaper background has influenced her work today, she says, “I don’t know what my style is. The newspaper work was a long time ago, and when I traveled I took pictures that were photojournalism in the sense of capturing what was happening. If capturing what’s happening is photojournalism, then that’s my style. When I do a wedding I photograph what’s happening, and I try to do it really creatively.”

Which brings us back to playing the room—and using whatever else her imagination and sense of adventure tells her will work. “Sure, people come to me for the outgoing, playful personality,” she says, “but I know what I want to accomplish. I’m not just a photographer. I’ll art direct the situations, come up with props, locations, ideas for settings.”

Sometimes she’ll enlist one of her brides as a model. “The girl on the bridge, with the black hat—I photographed her wedding, and she was so great and we had so much fun. I knew from the engagement session that she loved to be in front of the camera, so a few months after the wedding I called her and said, ‘Put on your wedding dress and let’s go out and play. I have a bridge I want to show you.’ We shot all day; it was a photographer’s dream— incredible blue sky, gorgeous subject. Sometimes photographers get into a zone where everything is perfect, and that was that day. I took pictures of her that were magical.”

Ultimately, that’s what the job is in its best moments: magical. “It’s very cool when you’re photographing people who want the pictures to be special, who want you to capture the part of them that loves to be in front of the camera.

“I’m really lucky. I get invited to the wedding, which is so cool, and they’ve trusted me to be part of this incredible day with them, and I feel an obligation to them, so I’m on—when I go there, I’m on stage, I’m performing for these people to make it the best day it can be.”

Note: Cherie’s website, www.cheriefoto.com, features an extensive selection of her images.

ABOUT THE PHOTOS

Cherie used a D100, a D70 and a D2x to take these photographs. She likes to work close with a wide-angle zoom like the 12-24mm f/4G ED-IF AF-S DX Zoom-Nikkor, and also frequently uses the 18-70mm f/3.5-4.5G ED-IF AF-S DX and the 17-55mm f/2.8G ED-IF AF-S DX Zoom-Nikkor. The 85mm f/1.4D IF AF Nikkor is a favorite portrait lens. For longer ranging glass, it’s the 70-200mm f/2.8G ED-IF AF-S VR Zoom-Nikkor, and when her imagination calls for something a little more extreme, she’ll rent the 10.5mm f/2.8G ED AF DX Fisheye-Nikkor.

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