





Make your  
**market**

*Cherie Steinberg Coté carves her own niche*

BY JEFF KENT



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Cherie Steinberg Coté learned early on that success in professional photography means going after what you want. From day one, the Toronto native made a practice of being where her work is in demand, and her talents are needed. The strategy works. She was awarded a grant by the Canadian Council for the Arts, and her images have appeared in newspapers, magazines and private col-

lections throughout the world. Now Steinberg runs a successful wedding and fashion photography studio in Los Angeles that's been turning heads in SoCal for the last few years.

#### CREATING HER OWN MARKET

Steinberg got her professional start about 25 years ago shooting for the *Toronto Sun*. Fresh out of Toronto's York University, the enthu-

siastic young photographer managed to talk the male newspaper editors into letting her match the images of the scantily clad "Sunshine Girls" that appeared daily on Page 3 with images of attractive men.

That introduction was Steinberg's segue into shooting documentaries on diverse topics, from ethnic communities in Toronto to a series on women's restrooms. "The great





thing about that time was that I was creating a market for myself and my work,” says Steinberg. “I do the same thing now. I’m always creating happenings, in a way. That’s just how my mind works. I see talent all around me, and I try to incorporate these wonderful, gifted people so that we can all benefit from each other’s work and create something magical.”

Of course, living in L.A. means she’s surrounded by talent, and that suits her just fine. Steinberg’s decision to move there four years ago was equal parts attraction to warm weather and an affinity for the hustling nature of Tinseltown. “L.A. is very much a working town,” she says. “Everyone is wheeling and dealing and trying to make it. And everyone here is into pictures; everyone needs pictures. There is a ton of competition, but it’s exciting.”

Steinberg had a clear-cut strategy for breaking into this competitive market. It was a simple plan: “[When] I moved here, I just went out all the time,” Steinberg says with a laugh. “L.A. is all about who you know. If a photographer wants to be successful here, she needs to meet the right people.”

She also aligned herself with a few charities, got involved with local groups, and aimed to meet influential people. “For me, it’s all about networking,” she says. “The more people I met, the more work I got.”

## PLAYING ALONG

Steinberg assesses her style as playful. She excels at getting past the layers of persona to reach the real person. “We all have a little gift, and bringing out people’s fun side is mine,” she says. “I make a comfortable environment, put on great music, and help my subjects relax. If all else fails, I give them alcohol!”

For a recent shoot with rapper Petey Pablo, Steinberg was to photograph the hip hop star wearing outfits from a line of European fashions. Rolling up in his Cadillac SUV and exuding the hard-core character he typically

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plays before fans, Pablo was a little too stiff for what Steinberg had in mind. She started joking around with him, listened to what he had to say about himself, and used that information to create a comfortable atmosphere for him. By the end of the shoot, Pablo was laughing, making faces and having a great time. “To me, that was the real him,” says Steinberg. “He was an extreme example of what happens when you can relax someone and let them be real.”

### ORCHESTRATING THE SITUATION

Whether shooting weddings or fashion, Steinberg’s strength is setting the stage to get the best images of the subject. “People are willing to let you do that for them, because they want those pictures, but they don’t know how to get them,” she says.

Part of it is seeing what’s going on around the photographer and what’s going on with the

subject. It’s particularly important at a multifaceted event like a wedding. “I watch how things are unfolding, and then if I see something that I want to be a little different, I’m not afraid to orchestrate it,” says Steinberg. “You can’t always wait for eight hours for a magical moment to happen, because sometimes it doesn’t. If I need to step in and arrange a good image, I will.”

Steinberg says she has visions of images that she wants to make. First she finds the ideal light, then the background and other elements. In fashion terminology, this scene is known as “the world.” Once your subject enters the world, you direct him to create the images you envisioned.

Of course, there are differences between fashion and wedding shoots. “On a fashion shoot, you have a little more time to work, and you don’t have 100 wedding guests standing behind you watching,” says Steinberg. “Plus,

a fashion shoot is about clothes, and the girls are professional models. Models know how to move and pose, and then you just worry about showing off the clothes. With a bride, you have to worry about everything—the angle of her hip, the position of her leg, how she holds her flowers, her facial expression, the flow of her dress—and you have to manage this all very quickly.”

Steinberg would like to work more on the speaking circuit, sharing her knowledge with other photographers. She has a book project on the horizon, a catalog on the docket, and some charity work lined up. Despite her busy schedule, Steinberg still finds time to sit back and enjoy what she’s accomplished and where she is in her career. “I’m in a great place,” she says, “and I’m enjoying what I’m doing. Life is good.” ■

*To see more from Cherie Steinberg Coté, visit [www.cheriefoto.com](http://www.cheriefoto.com).*