



"The lipstick and that necklace were dynamite," Cherie Steinberg says, "but I thought the image needed one more thing. I told her what I wanted to do and she trusted me. The mask is actually a piece of fabric that's part of my bag of goodies, and this is one of my all-time favorite pictures."



Photos © TheBoudoirCafé

Very Alluring

CHERIEFOTO'S SUCCESSFUL BOUDOIR PHOTOGRAPHY BUSINESS PROMOTES SENSUALITY AND SELF-IMAGE BY BARRY TANENBAUM

BOUDOIR IS ONE of the fastest growing segments of the photography industry, but it's not exactly a new thing for some pros. "We had been doing boudoir photography for a long time before that term became popular and the photography became a big thing," Cherie Steinberg says. "We" is Steinberg and Hedley Jones, her husband and partner in CherieFoto and The Boudoir Café. Their main business "a long time before" was weddings, and many of their



boudoir shoots featured engagement photographs or were sessions with brides whose weddings they'd photographed.

"We'd do a nice shoot, and I'd put it up on the blog and talk about it," Steinberg says. They never thought there was anything special about what they were doing until one day, on a whim, they Googled themselves. "We saw that we were the number one boudoir photographers in Los Angeles," Steinberg says. "We had no idea. We



On location at the client's apartment, the photographers found not much to work with. "But there was the ocean, and the cat," Jones says. Team CherieFoto has lately been doing a lot of "unidentified subject" photos. "The client can order a print, a large one, and put it up in her house, and no one knows for sure it's her," Steinberg says. "This type of art image has become really important for us. We sell more prints and bigger blowups."

looked at each other and went, 'Really?'"

Along with the look and the question came thought that it might be a good idea for them to promote their boudoir photography more than their weddings.

If you find yourself at the crest of a wave, ride it.

THE SHOW

How CherieFoto got to the top of the wave has to do with their signature images. By turns moody, sensual, suggestive, edgy, mysterious, and sly, the photographs are always flattering, always immediately recognizable.

But maybe even more responsible for their popularity is the team itself. Says Steinberg, "We have the kind of dynamic that makes many people we're photographing say, 'You guys should have a reality show.'"

The show has developed over time, growing naturally from their personalities. Theirs is a rapid-fire exchange of suggestions, ideas, references, one-liners, and tales both tall and true. They often talk over each other and often finish not only each other's sentences but paragraphs as well.

"The people we're photographing like watching us," Steinberg says. "We're the entertainment." Jones says, "But it's not just entertaining, it's relaxing. Our subjects get caught up in the flow, and if they started out nervous or self-conscious, they forget about that. Now *we're* the subjects, and they're at ease."

In fact, the show seems to spur most of their recommendations. "Read our

Yelp reviews," Steinberg says. "We're getting bookings on those reviews," Jones adds. "People who read them come in with a good idea of what we're like and how they'll be treated."

In boudoir photography, there's no underestimating the importance of trust, and if recommendations begin the process of building a client's confidence, a pre-shoot interview cements it. Self-conscious people, conservative people, shy people—Team CherieFoto works with them all, and the photographers find that their personalities, and the appeal of the show, trumps hesitancy every time.

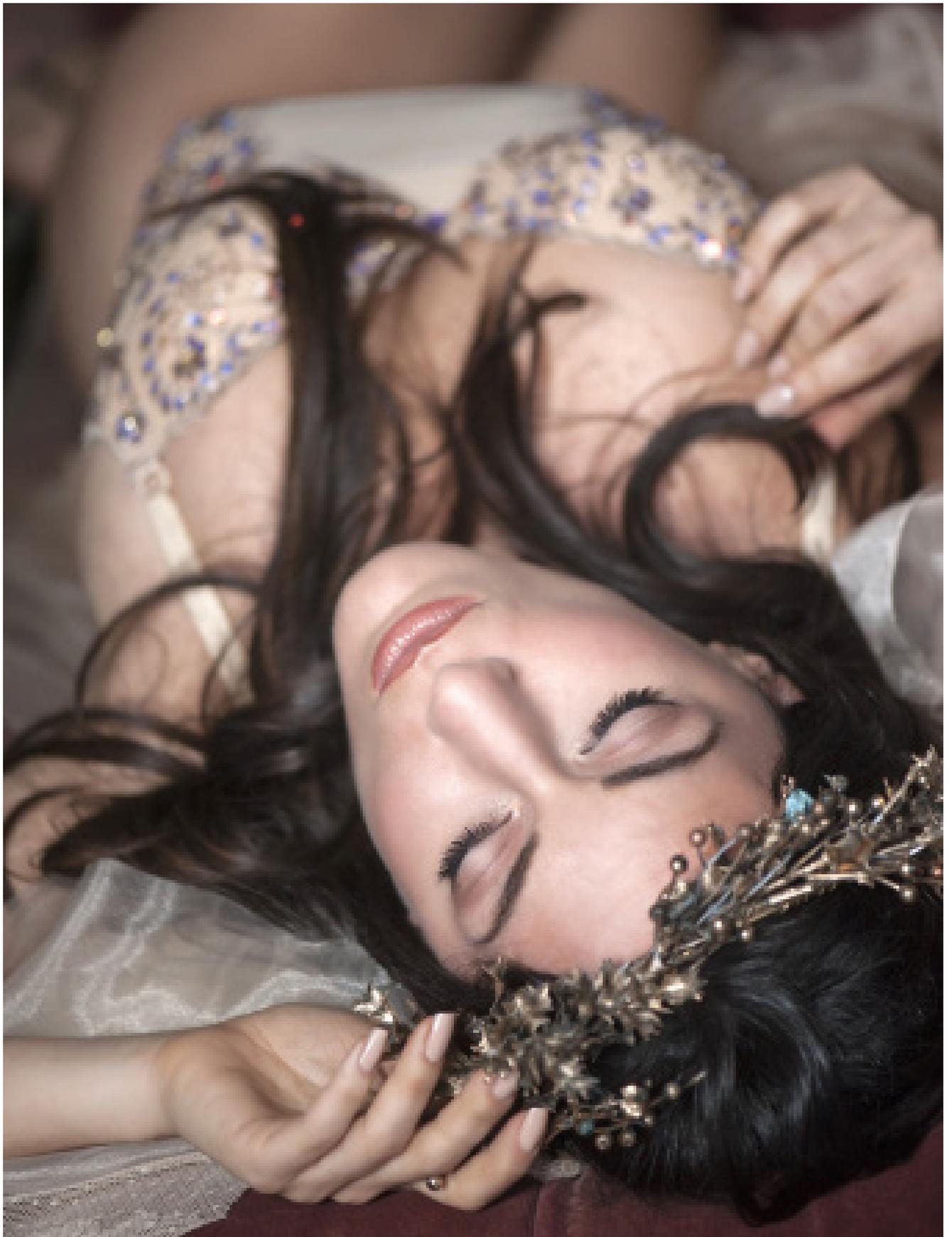
The fact that there's two of them helps. "Hedley sets out all the cameras and lenses on a tray," Steinberg says, "and we're always going back and forth, changing lenses, cameras, getting a prop, moving a light, arranging a pose. Hedley will be talking to the girl while I'm changing lenses, or he's moving a light and I'm talking." Rapport is maintained, the banter continues, the show goes on.

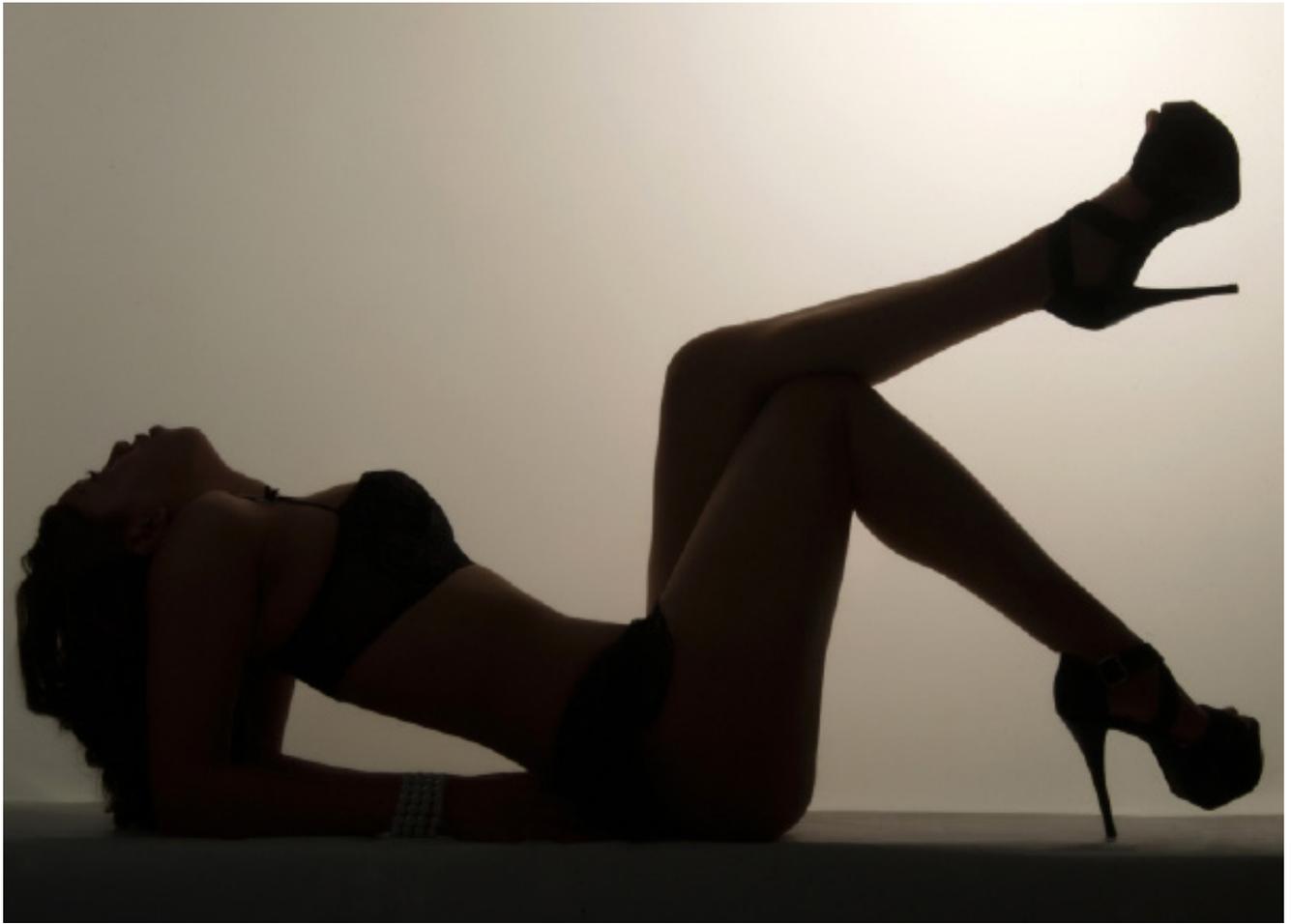
UNDENIABLE PROOF

Ultimately what Team CherieFoto is delivering is a result greater than photographs or a memorable day. The photographers realized early on that what they were really providing to a client was a heightened self-image. Simply put, they were making their subjects feel good about themselves. They emphasize the subject's strong points, and they are skilled at using light and shadow, posing, and composition to



The photographers know that not all of their subjects can bring off upside-down shots, but they love to take them when they work. This one was made in their studio using only window light.





"We were setting up, telling her about the pose and how to get it, and we just experimented with taking a shot before the front light was turned on," Jones says. "Now it's a technique we can use regularly."

deal with problem areas. As Steinberg has suggested, their session is an hours-long fantasy of allure and mystery that ends with photographic proof that it actually happened.

Their clients almost always provide the clothing; everything else, including hair and makeup, is the photographers' domain. Steinberg and Jones suggest the direction of the shoot, pick props and backgrounds, choose the lighting methods and effects. They are able to respond to their clients' wishes technically and creatively, and there's always lots of room for improvisation.

"I have a little bag of goodies," Steinberg says, "and when the clients get dressed and have their look together, I might think of a necklace that I have that would be so cool for the shot, so I go and get it, and I say, 'Do you like it?' and she goes, 'I love it!' and puts it on. Then it might be, 'Oh, I have these gloves that would be amazing on you!' I just build it up like that, adding things that are my style and sensibility. Often we introduce things the clients have never seen and most likely would never think of, but that's why people are coming to us, for



"We always shoot the client's shoes while she's in makeup," Jones says, "but there's usually only one or two pairs. One girl came in with so many, we had to shoot them all at once."

our artistic expression, and that kind of attention."

If it seems that Team CherieFoto is making a lot of it up as they go along, very often that's pretty much how it is. They have their standard procedures, setups, and prop ideas, but those are just the beginning. They build images as they go, as ideas come to them or are offered by the client. "The session is an organic

thing," Steinberg says. "It develops as we see what works and what fits with a subject, and what we and the subject can make work."

And if you think that sometimes there's a bit of "How far can the three of us push this to make really cool images?" involved, then you're starting to get into the spirit of a CherieFoto boudoir shoot.



"We have a lot of fun things in our studio," Steinberg says, "and when you're in a creative mood you start to notice, or look for, all the things you can be creative with." Jones adds, "The whole world is really a prop, isn't it?"

THE CLIENT BASE

"Here's something new that's happening for us," Steinberg says. "Men are beginning to book sessions for their wives."

"A man came in," Jones explains. "He'd completely checked us out, and he said he wanted to give his wife a special present. He said, 'She has everything and can have anything she wants, but I really want to give her this, some sexy pictures. Can you guys do it?'"

There was a pre-shoot meeting between the photographers and the couple. "We had a good chat," Jones says, "everybody was comfortable, and she was ready when she came in, and a week after the shoot we all went out to dinner together."

"So now we're marketing to men," Steinberg says. "This guy changed our minds about who we're marketing to. What do you give the woman who has everything? You give her a boudoir shoot with Cherie and Hedley."



"The client brought us to Vegas, to the Bellagio, and we had a great day and a great shoot," Steinberg says of the session that produced this natural light, one reflector image. "I guess you can say we do destination boudoir."

Of course, not every client offers them the same...well, let's say opportunities. "For someone who doesn't set off sparks, we'll always come up with something," Jones says. "The

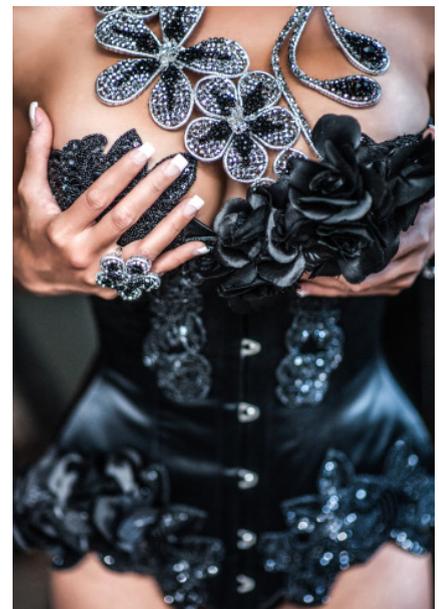
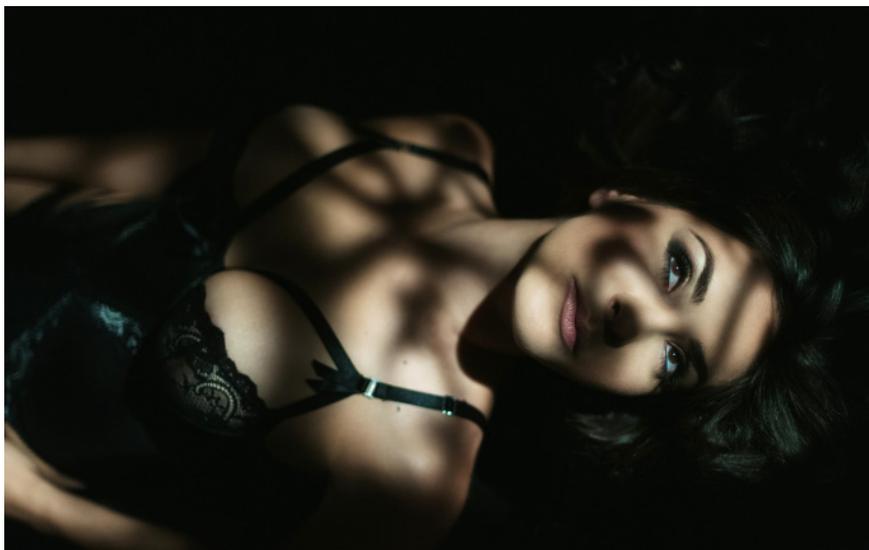
more difficult ones are the ones that we strive the hardest for. Maybe she's self-conscious, maybe she's not as thin as she'd like to be. It doesn't matter—I'm going to make her look great, and I



CREATIVITY

PROFILE

Team CherieFoto shot this in their studio using a number of lights and techniques, including bouncing light into a mirror and directing it back onto the subject. Even though their lighting schemes are often complicated, it takes the duo only five minutes to set them up in the studio or on location. "We've spent a lot of time devising different looks to our lighting," Jones says.



"Cherie's fantasy is to always have shadows in the picture," Jones says. "We create gobos and shoot through them, or sometimes we'll use our hands in front of the lights to create shadow shapes. It's a way to add drama and mystery."

"Our client wanted what she called 'a boudoir fashion look,' so we called in a stylist who also does makeup," Steinberg says. "He brought outfits and jewelry and put it all together for us."

reassure her that she's going to have great photographs. I start by taking her mind off the worry. If she'll trust us, and follow our lead, she's going to get a great result."

While building the business is always on their minds, Team CherieFoto is also sincere and serious about doing a great job for their clients and having fun as

they go about it. They need to be satisfied with their effort. Their self-image is tied to the self-image of their subject.

They are, after all, the number one boudoir photographers in L.A. ■

The boudoir and wedding photography of Cherie Steinberg and Hedley Jones, and their blogs, can be found at CherieFoto

(www.cheriefoto.com) and The Boudoir Café (theboudoircafe.com). Their eBook, The Art of a Wedding: How to Get Award-Winning Photos at Every Wedding, is available online at Amazon and other sources.