

cheriefoto

Floral Corps de Ballet

By Patricia Mues

From Canada to Colorado to California—traveling to dozens of countries along the way—photographer Cherie Steinberg Coté arrived in Los Angeles in 2002. She was lucky enough to find an amazing space, along with a separate studio, within minutes of Beverly Hills, Westwood and Santa Monica. A year later, Hedley Jones, traveling from Jamaica to Canada to California, brought his skill for shooting people and architecture to LA. A multimedia artist in Toronto, Hedley had wide experience in radio and music, as well as photographing for *MacLean Hunter* magazine and *The Toronto Sun*. They became partners in Cheriefoto, creating a brand known for beautiful, sexy and inventive images. A top name in high-style wedding photography, portraits and commercial assignments, the studio's work has been featured in many publications, including *Grace Ormonde*, *Bride & Bloom*, *Los Angeles Weddings*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Magazine*, *Town & Country* and *Palm Springs Life*. Disney, PhotoWorks and Random House are just a few of their commercial clients and they've been happy to have their work featured on *Entertainment Tonight*.







To understand the Chierifoto style, you must first consider three of Cherie and Hedley's favorite photographers. Helmut Newton is first. Cherie sees his photographs as "sexy without being pornographic," while Hedley admires the way he worked. "He didn't worry about when the light was right. He pursued it any time of the day and made a style of it." Their second choice, Irving Penn, inspires them to work in many fields. "He wasn't pigeonholed. He did a lot of different kinds of photography. Fashion for *Vogue*, then his wife's vase, he really photographed life," says Hedley. Their third choice, Man Ray, stands as an icon for the early days of modern photography. "He was before everything. He was

the master of it all," says Cherie.

Cherie and Hedley, the yin and yang of Chierifoto, love to experiment. This means that when they shoot a wedding, the images are unique to that day. Take a look at their portraits and you'll find sweet, sexy, over-the-top and edgy. And though they've shot hundreds of bridal bouquets, when they decided to play around with flowers, the results were anything but traditional. "We've always done flowers. Flowers are a part of weddings," says Hedley. "But this is a personal project." Because of their hectic schedule, they couldn't just close down the studio and concentrate on flowers. Instead, when they found a bit of time, they grabbed it.

For each shoot, they began by tracking down the freshest flowers. That meant a trip to the flower market in downtown L.A. They looked for incredible colors, sensual shapes and intricate structure. But they also had to pick carefully to make sure their choices would stand up to the lens' scrutiny. "The flowers really have to be perfect," explains Cherie. "Any imperfections are obvious to the camera. They are delicate and much harder to photograph than people imagine." Once they were back in the studio, they began to consider the many ways flowers had been and could be photographed. They decided to experiment with light and lenses. Over time, the results were a series of flower "portraits."

The formal portraits, which captured the essence of an English garden in the style of the Dutch Masters, are the most familiar. For each shot, they used a vase in a classic shape, in which they arranged a single flower variety, with a second as a subtle accent. A matte black urn, filled with blushing roses, is wreathed in ivy that leads the eye down to a petal-strewn table and then up again. Working in low light with dark backgrounds, the results are timeless.

The casual portraits are contemporary photojournalism. "We wanted to get images that were really clean and sharp," says Hedley. "I wanted the light to come through the flowers," adds Cherie. "I wanted to see





the veining. I wanted to see the details. I wanted to see everything.” Working between two large, standing lightboxes, they were able to make that happen. The results look like the flowers have been caught in the act of being themselves. A pair of chrysanthemums seems slightly surprised, their pale outer petals forming translucent halos, while the burgundy-dotted inner petals embrace a golden glow. A line of violet lisianthus, from tiny bud to full bloom, appear ready to dance out of the frame, a floral corps de ballet. For white flowers, a dark background provided the necessary

contrast, while lightboxes illuminated the subjects from both front and side. Delicate lysimachia, also known as gooseneck loosestrife, form a gaggle of blooms, elegant heads craning forward on slender stems.

The third group, close-ups, finds the character within each cut flower, sometimes bordering on the abstract. Colors are saturated, shapes are darkly defined. The olive green and yellow of an unopened sunflower shows the essence of Provence, while a russet calla lily petal shows both sunset and seduction.

For a final set of photographs, Cherie

stepped away from portraits. She wanted to capture an image that was like the flowers you’d see in a dream. She created a lush arrangement in white and jewel tones, then set it against a soft blue-green background. Using a selective focus Lensbaby lens, Cherie focused on a single flower near the center of the bouquet. In the final image, that center flower is sharp while the rest of the arrangement blurs progressively toward the edges. The result is decidedly dreamy.

Cherie and Hedley plan to continue shooting flowers in all their guises. Every wedding gives them a chance to see what’s available, while their close relationship with floral designer Eddie Zaratsian of Tic-Tock Couture Florals allows them to see what is new and exciting. In Hollywood, the movie industry recognizes Eddie as one of the best, so he’s constantly called upon to create amazing arrangements for the top stars. Cherie has been collaborating with him on a book, which is an ongoing project given their busy schedules.

Weddings remain a Cheriefoto specialty, but there is no longer the need to spend time and money pursuing clients. “We are more established now, so we work with wedding planners and word-of-mouth referrals,” says Cherie. As members of the WPPI, Cherie and Hedley have given workshops to international





audiences. Recently, Nikon named Cherie one of the world's top photographers, featuring her work in *Nikon World* magazine as well as the Nikon website. Cherie has been asked to speak for Nikon starting this year, and both she and Hedley will be speaking at several trade shows, sharing their work and techniques.

Despite all their success, when you talk to Cherie and Hedley, you can hear that they don't look back; they're always interested in tomorrow. "We go a thousand miles, we are always trying to do something different," says Cherie. Hedley finishes her thought, "We never stop looking for the next magical moment." Whether that's the bride and groom about to step through their door or a hot pink rose that has yet to bloom, it is sure to be an interesting image.

Cherie Steinberg-Coté will be teaching a platform program on Monday, Feb. 16 at the MGM Conference Center, titled "Connecting the Bride and Photographer." The program will be held in Rm. # 318 from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Patricia Mues is a freelance writer living in Escondido, CA. Her work focuses on the creative and decorative arts and has appeared in HOW, Inspired House and Living in Style. She is a regular contributor to Rangefinder.

Cheriefoto's Camera Bag

Cameras: Nikon D3, D700, D300, D100, D2X, D70

Nikon Lenses: 14–24mm f/2.8, 24–70mm f/2.8, 70–200mm f/2.8, 28–105mm f/3.5–4.5 macro, 50mm f/1.4, 85mm f/1.4, 60mm f/2.8 Macro, 105mm f/2.8, 24mm f/2.8 Shift Lens, 45mm f/2.8 Shift Lens, 500mm f/8 Mirror Lens

Nikon Digital Lenses: 10.5mm f/2.8, 12mm f/2.8, 17–55mm f/2.8, 18–200mm f/3.5–5.6

Lensbabies: Lensbaby Original, Lensbaby f/2.0, Lensbaby 3G

Light Meter: Seconic Flash Master L-358, Seconic L-28

Software: Adobe Photoshop CS3, Nik Filters, Nik Professional Suite (complete set of Filters including the new Silver Efex Pro), Microsoft Expression Media, Lightroom 2.0

Computer: Quad Power Mac G5 with LaCie 20TB Storage

CompactFlash Cards: Hoodman Professional UDMA CF Cards, Lexar Professional UDMA Cards

Other: Epson P3000 Multimedia Storage Viewer

Bags: Domke, Tamrac and Think Tank