

Weddings in Vogue

By Jim Cornfield



Vogue Weddings: Brides, Dresses, Designers
Introduction by Hamish Bowles
Edited by Chloe Malle
Alfred A. Knopf
www.aaknopf.com
372 pp.

Over the span of its 120 years in print, *Vogue* magazine has been our collective touchstone for all things chic. Not just women's garments and expensively sculpted coifs, but trendy lifestyles and uber-cool celebrities. When the latter, particularly the stylish ones, start marrying each other—and they do this a lot—*Vogue* is usually on the scene. Splashy wedding coverage has been one of the magazine's regular features since the nuptials of Consuelo Vanderbilt and the Duke of Marlborough appeared in an 1895 issue. Now, a recently released picture collection from Alfred A. Knopf Publishing celebrates *Vogue's* connubial heart with 400 lavish and inspiring images. It's *Vogue Weddings: Brides, Dresses, Designers*, and it should be on every serious wedding photographer's reading list.

For most of its life, *Vogue* has been a photographer's showcase. Its enduring luster owes a lot to long-term relationships with some of history's greatest shooters, many whose careers were launched in its



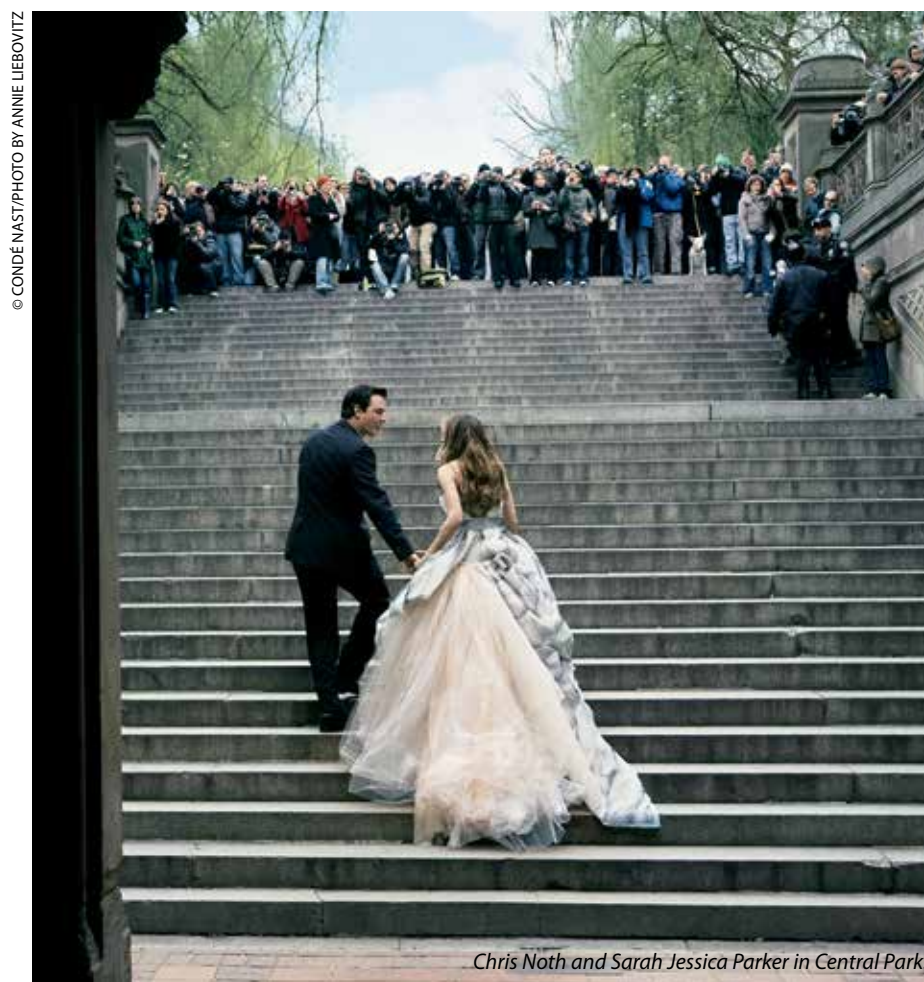
Model Lily Donaldson.

pages. Their images are the backbone of the *Vogue* brand. The list is beyond stellar: from Steichen, Penn, Avedon and Cecil Beaton to Bruce Weber, Patrick Demarchelier, Steven Meisel, and scores of others, collectively, the royal family of magazine photography. The images these names immediately conjure up are glowing fashion and glamour spreads, bold sweeps of fabric and jewelry, closeups of almost supernatu-

rally perfect makeup and hair styles, and dramatic editorial portraits of whoever happens to be making the biggest blips on media radar. When any of these celebrities ring wedding bells, *Vogue* photographers start packing their bags.

The Mythologized Moment

The late Diana Vreeland, probably the most celebrated of *Vogue's* editors and for



Chris Noth and Sarah Jessica Parker in Central Park.

many years the reigning queen of haute couture, once mused that, despite all the attention she and her editors paid to the so-called "beautiful people," the magazine's true target demographic was a lot less glamorous. Her reader, said Vreeland, was "a secretary, running to catch a bus on a rainy Monday morning, or sulking in bed with a case of the sniffles." *Vogue*, its editors still insist, is not produced for the people who appear in its pages. It's a book of fantasies, for readers who might never even see their names in the local newspaper. At least, that is, until they appear in a wedding announcement—that much mythologized moment Miss Sniffles will one day share with brides such as Audrey Hepburn, Kate Moss, Princess Grace, Jacqueline Kennedy, and the Duchess of Cambridge. This fleeting connection makes *Vogue Weddings* relevant to every modern wedding scenario—for the bride, of course, but especially for that crucial extra member of the wedding party, the

photographer. You'll see why when you first crack open one of this book's dazzling spreads.

A Cornucopia of Ideas

Wedding photography has always been a blend of genres—portraiture, reportage, glamour, even fashion—each an important tool in the skill set required to be a successful shooter. At the risk of labeling *Vogue Weddings* a "swipe file," there's no denying that it's a cornucopia of fertile imaging ideas from every one of these sub-specialties—all of them drawn from the portfolios of the magazine's pedigreed contributors, and all of them inspirational. The book isn't organized by photographic specialties, but rather by specific wedding themes. One chapter, "The Royal Wedding," for example, mixes the stiff formality you'd expect with some true masterpieces of fly-on-the-wall documentary images. Another chapter, "The Vogue Wedding," is a collection of elegant, carefully orches-

trated moments that rhapsodize on the all-important art of the wedding dress. Here, we're given Annie Leibovitz's faux-journalistic shot of a fictional newlywed couple—actors Sarah Jessica Parker and Chris Noth—dashing up Central Park's Bethesda Terrace steps toward an admiring gaggle of camera-wielding fans.

Another image in this section is Patrick Demarchelier's crisp, spartan profile of model Lily Donaldson in a backless Yves Saint Laurent creation. It's pure fashion imagery, but also a useful template for a stylized, flattering bridal portrait. In a chapter titled "Weddings by the Sea," this ever-popular marriage venue plays backdrop to a young bride on the beach in her Zac Posen wedding dress, mounted astride a well-curried polo pony; in another sequence, bride Marina Rust leads her animated troupe of flower girls down a path from her family's picturesque cottage in coastal Maine. The upside to a seaside wedding, she comments in the caption, is that "God's already done half the decorating." The downside: "bad hair."

Mostly About the Dress

One particularly useful chapter, "The Social Wedding" deals with the coverage of nuptials in the rarefied world of social aristocrats (actual or self-ordained, one isn't quite sure). *Vogue* is never shy about playing in this particular ballpark, and the imagery is refreshingly carefree for the staid members of upper crust wedding parties. Arthur Elgort's candid photo essay on the union of two wealthy South American families mixes three different styles of photography, ending with the long-legged bride tossing off the entire lower half of a stunning Nina Ricci gown that required 2,000 hours and 60 meters of silk jacquard to fabricate.

Vogue's wedding images are reminders to all photographers that this particular rite of our culture is mostly about the dress—on or off the bride. In the book's introduction, curator and fashion authority Hamish Bowles recalls the 2005 Barbados wedding that turned model and makeup artist Jemma Kidd into the Countess of Mornington, under a drenching Caribbean rainstorm. She had the good sense, says Bowles, to remove her "thistledown



Model Jemma Kidd's wedding reception in Barbados.

PHOTO © ROBERT FAIRER

Lacroix creation of cloudy tissent puffs of organza..." before most of the wedding party, led by Kidd's new spouse Arthur Wellesley, the Earl of Mornington, leaped together, more or less clothed, into the swimming pool. It was an excellent moment of pure spontaneity, and *Vogue* photographer Robert Fairer got the shot.

If the world of *Vogue*-caliber weddings seems unapproachable to most of us, it's important for photographers to remember that the opulence of these events is merely an elaborate canvas for the images that lie in every wedding you'll ever shoot. The essential idea, Bowles reminds us, is romance. *Vogue Weddings: Brides, Dresses, Designers* offers a lively compendium of ways some other photographers—great ones—have found to express that idea. **RF**

Writer and veteran commercial photographer Jim Cornfield (www.jimcornfield.net) is *Rangefinder* magazine's resident book reviewer and a frequent contributor.

Reproduction with permission from the March Rangefinder 2013 Issue