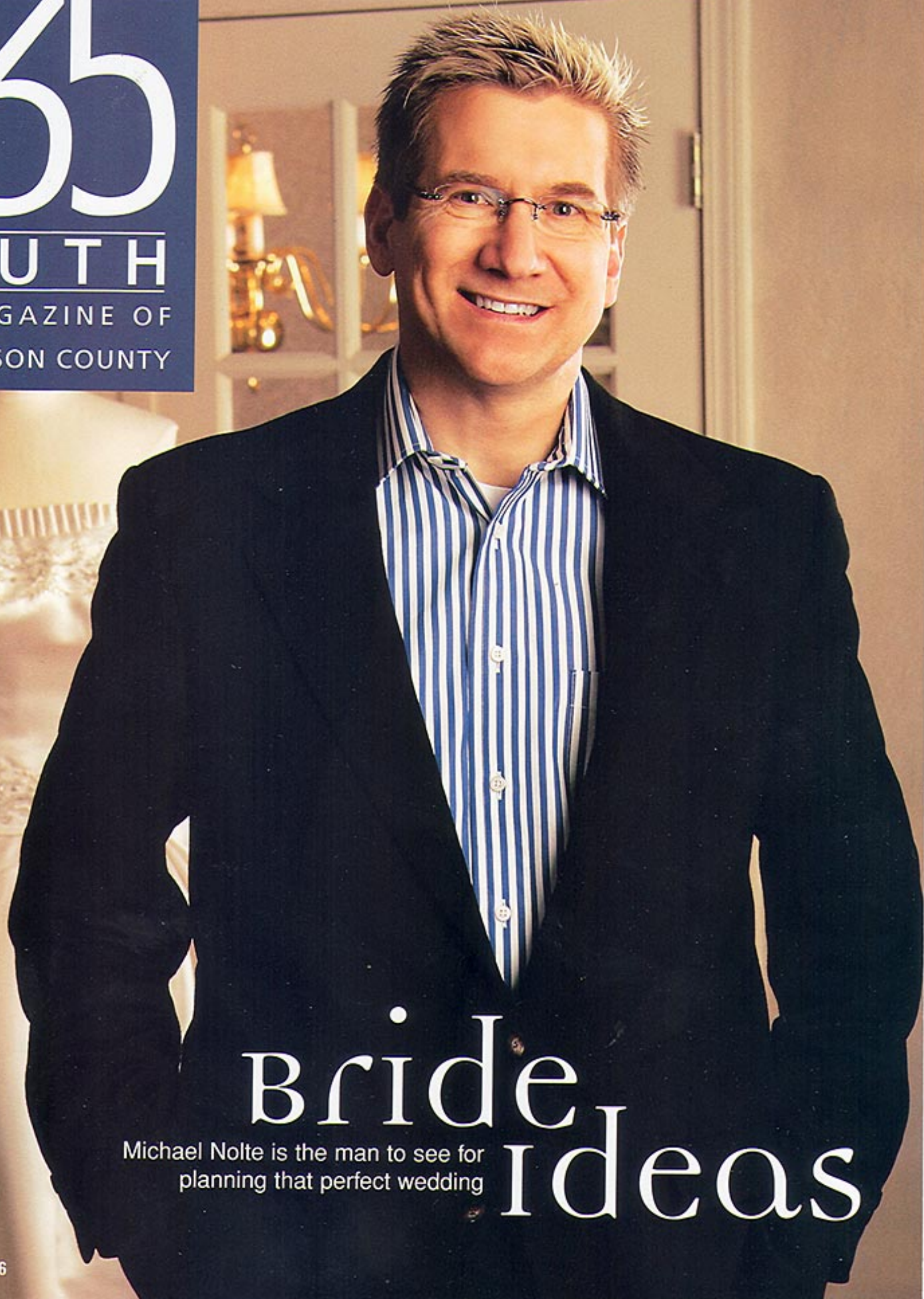


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Bride Ideas

Michael Nolte is the man to see for
planning that perfect wedding

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For 25 years, Michael Nolte has been working hard to make the dreams of brides- and grooms-to-be come true.

Nolte's background in photojournalism and communications propelled him into the world of wedding coordinators. He worked in seven related businesses before opening his own in Columbia, Mo., in 1980. It quickly evolved into a full-service florist, photographer and bridal salon.

"I became a wedding coordinator before I even knew that was a job title," Nolte says. "As I was building my business in Columbia, I was called on to service weddings, and clients asked for my thoughts and advice as they were planning. Before I knew it, my career had evolved."

Nolte's business expanded to what he originally thought would be a satellite location in Hawthorne Plaza in Overland Park in 1992. Surprisingly, the new store was "an instant hit" with Johnson County and Nolte realized he couldn't "live on I-70" forever. After two years of managing both locations, Nolte reluctantly sold his Columbia businesses to focus solely on the ever-growing wedding industry in Johnson County.

The salon, Nolte's Bridal Collections, 5057 W. 119th St., attracts an upscale client base for both wedding planning and couture bridal gowns that start at \$1,800. The store also provides tuxedos, attendants' attire and invitations. This combination is very unique as most bridal salons are strictly retail operations and most wedding planners are not retail-store owners.

Serving much like a general contractor in the construction of a home, Nolte oversees all the subcontractors and is on-site to make sure that the work is done to fulfill the vision of the "homeowner/bride and groom."

"In the first appointment for wedding coordinating, we talk about a realistic budget and wish list," Nolte says. "My goal is to make that budget fit that wish list as best it can."

Nolte, who describes himself as a "traditionalist," says he leans toward the classics in terms of the finished look of a wedding celebration. As he says, "'Trendy' is OK for today. 'Timeless' is forever."

As a result, he encourages couples to not see each other right before the wedding in

order to preserve the authenticity of the moment when the bride walks down the aisle. He also urges brides to keep their gowns a surprise for everyone and for couples to stay focused on the point of the day — getting married. He says that helps keep everything in perspective.

"I love my job," Nolte says. "I believe that we are placed on earth to lift up each other with the 'tools in our toolbox,' and I'm given that opportunity every day in my career. But I couldn't do what I do without my wife, Barbie. She's the one that lifts me up."

Nolte also has had a glimpse into wedding-day drama that most people will seldom experience. Through the years, he has weathered bridesmaids' dresses left at home (out of state) hours before the wedding, limo crashes, centerpieces that start fires on table linens and melted marshmallow icing, to name just a few.

"I've learned a lot about interfamily relationships through this business," Nolte says.

"In my history, I've seen weddings become the experience of what I refer to as the 'Three H's' — happiness, healing or hostility. Brides say working with me is kind of like Martha Stewart meets Dr. Phil. I just laugh, but they're pretty close to right."

At rehearsals Nolte asks that for the next 24 hours the bridal party redefine the word "crisis." Nolte tells them that word should be used only when someone's life is in jeopardy. Short of that, he says, it's a case of "something going differently than planned." He tells them it's a challenge, a frustration, a disappointment and "we'll get through it."

"Twenty five years of doing this and now just over 1,000 weddings to learn from, I have the peace of mind that nothing is going to throw me the day of the wedding," Nolte says. "That peace of mind allows me to really enjoy helping families with this unique life chapter. It's very gratifying to be a part of this experience."

As a member of the National Bridal Service,



MICHAEL NOLTE

