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COUNTY

A bride in a white gown and veil stands in a room with a checkered floor and a large vase. The bride is holding a bouquet of flowers. The room has a checkered floor and a large vase on a stand.

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A Decent
PROPOSAL

The 'B' Word
BUDGET

Romantic
RENDEZVOUS

COUNTY Exclusive

A Bride's Best Man

Couture in the Northland

By Susanna Hickman Bartee
Contributing Writer

"I can't help but think in terms of the finished photo album."



All photos courtesy of
MICHAEL NOLTE

Your boyfriend popped the question and you immediately said, "Yes!" There's no doubt he is the man of your dreams. Now it's time to meet the man who will make some of those "happily ever after" dreams come true. His name is Michael Nolte and he has more than 1,000 weddings in his portfolio. Nolte can guide you through the foreign land of wedding planning allowing you to still smile as you walk down the aisle.

Nolte, who owns Nolte's Bridal Collections in Briarcliff Village (as well as the original store in Overland Park), discovered the niche of weddings as he worked his way through college earning a degree in photo-journalism.

"I saw weddings through the lens and wondered why someone hadn't helped these people realize what would have been better in proportion or color," he explained. "People say I have a gift of visualization. Thankfully I am able to communicate what I envision."

A recent bride was at a loss as to how to begin selecting her dress. Nolte pointed out that her venue, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, has one of the highest elevations in the city. He recommended the bride have an extended and elaborately embellished train because of the way it will be viewed throughout the ceremony. "I can't help but think in terms of the finished photo album," Nolte said.

Nolte, who quit counting weddings almost two years ago, said he designs weddings in the range of \$50,000 to \$300,000. But the secret to a wonderful wedding, he said, is not in the dollars spent. He said the happiest events are always the ones when the parents endorse the nuptials and the couple is "respectfully and kindly in love."

"I enjoy helping a young woman that is more focused on her life as a wife than in her role as a bride," he said. Television shows have made brides think the more



upset they act, the more they are acting like a "celebrity diva."

Nolte gently and frequently reminds couples that what really matters is that they end the day married. Things will inevitably go differently than planned but that doesn't make it a crisis, he counsels. "Don't stress about the logistics and the minutia," he advised.

"The excitement of the day should be that you are getting married," Nolte emphasized. "Not the pomp and circumstance surrounding it."

That said, Nolte has plenty of experience with pomp and circumstance, and a lot of great stories about all those weddings. He will be sharing many of those stories in a book he is now writing that will be published in 2010. It will be in celebration of his 30th year in the wedding industry and serve as a retrospective as to how planning and customs have changed.

He is hesitant to pick a favorite story but is quick with what he remembers as his most challenging venue. It was an out-of-town event where the only building large enough was the Moose Lodge. The lodge had 10-foot ceilings, periwinkle cinder block walls and an enormous moose head on the wall.

"We installed rods, draped the walls and ceiling with miles of white organza and a zillion tiny clear lights," Nolte remembered. "Aside from the gravel parking lot, people could not believe they were in the same building. It was transformed from bingo hall to ballroom."

Some families stress about not having enough time to plan a proper wedding. Nolte tells of the event he coordinated in just 10 days. The groom's job was transferring him to Tokyo; not to return for two years. The bride wanted to accompany him as his wife and didn't want to sacrifice a traditional wedding. They called Nolte and he gratefully recalls that the Thursday afternoon affair for 400 guests, complete with four attendants in matching dresses, was a beautiful success.

Nolte has the same question for all incoming couples. "What are three adjectives you would like departing guests to use describing your celebration?" The second important point is to be clear about a realistic budget.

"I am never at a loss for amazing ideas and can spend people's money quicker than they can make it," Nolte says. "But I end up with a disappointed bride and a frustrated father when she learns one of those 'amazing ideas' is not in her budget."

The Briarcliff shop just opened last year and Nolte is very appreciative of the loyalty Northlanders feel to spending their dollars in their community. It was risky to be such a pioneer, but he is truly an entrepreneur, he said.



All his expertise will be put the test when he has to balance the role of "wedding coordinator extraordinaire" with that of "father of the bride". Nolte has three daughters at home. He is very aware of the expectation that the community sometimes hints of when comments like "I can't wait to see a Nolte daughter's wedding..." are made.

He doesn't want the girls to feel any pressure to get married because it is "expected." With the U.S. divorce rate being the highest in the world, he asks only that "If you should choose marriage ..." he has but three requests.

To keep the comparisons in check, he hopes they will choose three different seasons, three different venues and three different times of day. "I can design beautiful weddings anywhere, anytime," he said. His other hope is that like most fathers, he doesn't see his daughters in their gowns until the day of the wedding. "My wife has exquisite taste. I would like to just set up some appointments for them with my favorite designers, send them to New York and let them go for it."

In the meantime, the girls help out at both salons—the Briarcliff shop which he oversees, and the salon at Hawthorne Plaza which is managed by his wife, Barbie.

For everyone who wishes she could have Michael Nolte on call 24/7, the good news is he has co-authored a book with fellow Briarcliff shop-owner Mary Carol Garrity. *Nell Hill's Stylish Weddings* was launched January 4th and is available at both shops as well as most local bookstores. Garrity addresses color schemes and theory while Nolte gives practical advice about choosing vendors, timelines and budgets. A goal of the co-authors was that unlike most coffee table books previously available, this book would have advice that would apply to all budgets and styles of weddings.

As for Nolte's favorite wedding, the truth is it may just be the one in which he married his own bride. That was on May 24, 1980 – the first day of their own "happily ever after."

You can find Nolte's Bridal Collection online at www.noltesbridal.com.

All photos courtesy of MICHAEL NOLTE