



INTERVIEW: Wedding planner Stella Inserra

By Beth Livesay - BridesTelevision.com

Published May 08, 2008 03:48:15 AM

Any loyal “Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?” viewer knows there is a who’s who of regular planners that entertain and educate every week. But viewers don’t always get to know the planners personally, because the brides and the weddings take up so much air time. Not that we mind watching brides-to-be, but I can’t help but wonder what a “Whose Wedding” planner is really like. So, I recently interviewed the stylish Stella Inserra, New York wedding planner extraordinaire, to get a glimpse at what exactly goes on behind the scenes. While show confidentiality agreements keep her from telling me about future episodes, Stella offers a rare look at her past experiences and expert advice on all things wedding.

Brides Television: How did you get started in the wedding business?

Stella Inserra: I worked as a banquet manager for a large catering hall.

BTV: What process did you go through to get on national wedding TV?

S.I.: The show called me, based on my website. They had me come in for an interview, and the network approved me for the show.

BTV: Who selects the participants to be included in an episode? Is it you or the network?

S.I.: Both.

BTV: What is it like working within the framework of “Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?”

S.I.: It’s great. The shooting schedule is condensed, and this adds to the excitement of working the weddings. I personally enjoy it.

BTV: What other “Whose Wedding” planner would you like to work with?

S.I.: I've met most of them. I would like to work with all of them; they're all great people. I think we are all kindred spirits. I can't pick out one – I would want to work with any one of them.

BTV: Can you offer any sneak peeks at upcoming "Whose Wedding" episodes that you'll be in?

S.I.: I can't offer any sneak peeks at upcoming episodes, because the network makes us sign confidentiality agreements.

BTV: Have you received a lot more business now that you've been on "Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?" How has being on TV affected your business?

S.I.: Since I've been on the show, I get more inquiries from people who want to become wedding planners. To those who dream of becoming a wedding planner, it is not the glamorous job television makes it out to be. This job is not for the faint of heart. I've had many assistants who, after working a wedding, decided that this line of work was not for them. I do get a nice amount of [wedding] inquiries from the show, but it's not as many as you'd think, because there are so many planners across the nation. It's not 50 calls a day.

BTV: Do people recognize you when you go out?

S.I.: No, people don't recognize me when I'm out. I prefer it that way. I mean, I like the show – it's a how-to for brides by observing – but I prefer that people don't recognize me while I'm out.

BTV: How would you describe your signature style as a planner?

S.I.: My signature style as a planner is elegant, fun, and colorful.

BTV: What if a bride wants you to plan her wedding, but she's not New York-based?

S.I.: It depends. If I'm familiar with her wedding location and my schedule permits, I will take her on as a client. I'm comfortable with destinations like Hawaii, Mexico, and Aruba because I know enough vendors there and have planned other weddings in those places. Otherwise,

I will refer her to a reputable planner. I would refer her to any of the other planners on the show.

BTV: How do you cope with brides who don't keep appointments?

S.I.: My clients are very good about keeping appointments. I also conduct conference calls with clients who are unable to meet with me in person. I continue with the appointment the best I can, based on what the bride has communicated to me. I then go back to her and show her what was discussed. Visuals are a part of good communication. I have used digital images for floral arrangements, and even a web cam. I need to make sure we have the same visuals in mind.

BTV: What's a wedding planner's biggest challenge?

S.I.: Communication is the biggest challenge. Everyone – vendors, clients, and planner – has to be on the same page. One miscommunication or misunderstanding will definitely, guaranteed, snowball into an unhappy client.

BTV: What's your favorite wedding location and/or destination?

S.I.: My favorite wedding location has been Amalfi, Italy. The location is breath-taking and so romantic. The people, food, and wine were fabulous.

BTV: What was the biggest problem you've experienced on a wedding day? How did you deal with it?

S.I.: One of my brides hired a bargain DJ she found on her own. The DJ did not show up for her wedding. I asked the venue for a mic, and all the guests to go to their cars and bring back any CDs they had. I emceed and played CDs throughout the whole evening. I introduced the bridal party, the bride and groom, the first dance, cake cutting, garter belt throw, etc. My assistant took care of everything else that I would normally do. You have to be resourceful. It was some evening, but my bride was extremely grateful.

BTV: What's the weirdest request you've ever gotten from a bride?

S.I.: The only thing that comes to mind is a couple who came to me with a hall already

booked ... and it was a dump. They wanted me to completely transform it, but they didn't have the budget. That was just not a logical request. I can only do so much. There are planners that say they can do anything with anything, but that's not true. We can only do so much within a budget.

BTV: What is the best time-management advice you can give to a bride?

S.I.: The best time management advice I can give to a bride is to pull out her calendar and set aside time to plan her wedding. It's the same as setting aside time for working out, or getting your hair or nails done. A bride shouldn't be planning her wedding 24/7. One to two days a week or one to two hours a day is enough – that's 10 hours a week. A lot can get done in 10 hours a week. Also, break your time down per vendor. Don't be the bride who calls every vendor in the area who fits your style; only call five vendors. You're not going to accomplish anything by calling any more, because they are all going to be around the same price. So don't waste your time calling everyone in town trying to get a bargain.

BTV: Do you feel that wedding planners are an absolute necessity for everyone, or is it possible for some people to plan a wedding successfully on their own?

S.I.: I think it is possible to plan your own wedding of course – but if you do, I guarantee it will be the most stressful experience. Wedding planners are necessary for those who do not have time to plan their wedding. Wedding planners are also necessary for those to whom design and decor are of utmost importance. Planners plan numerous events every year. Planners have established vendor relationships, and the experience to pull the event together – saving the client time, stress, and money. Last week, in another interview, I was asked if I had a planner for my wedding. And I answered, "No, but I wish I had!" I think I would have enjoyed my friends and family more if I had not done everything on my own. This is not a glamorous job.

BTV: How can people identify a worthwhile planner? What should he/she bring to the table?

S.I.: A good planner is a good listener and communicator, because they have to listen, then reiterate the bride's vision to a vendor. If you don't listen or communicate well, things could snowball, and you could end up with an unhappy client. A good planner should have amassed a good portfolio, excellent vendor relationships, and a solid background in the hospitality industry. Also, a good planner can't push her own ideas on a client.

BTV: Describe a favorite wedding that you've coordinated.

S.I.: My favorite wedding that I've coordinated involved a very organized bride who booked a venue that was professional and very helpful. I had to make sure this bride's mother-in-law, who was very ill, made it to the wedding and was comfortable throughout the evening. The bride didn't want her groom to worry about his mom throughout the wedding, so it made me happy that everything went smoothly and no one worried. There was a lot of running around behind-the-scenes on my part, but the evening flowed without a hitch. I recently called this bride to wish her a happy first anniversary; we still keep in touch. This bride was a breath of fresh air – she's a doll.

BTV: What celebrity wedding would you like to plan/have planned?

S.I.: I have actually planned a celebrity wedding; only the information is not on my website because of a privacy issue. I planned Alex Lundquist's wedding – he is a top male model. He's a real jetsetter; he would always be coming to meetings with jet lag. He and his fiancée were a really sweet couple to work with. But I would love to have planned a Jennifer Lopez wedding. I like her style and I think we would work well together; she's a Latin diva, and so am I.

Thanks to Ms. Inserra for taking the time to chat with Brides Television. You can catch Stella in action on episodes of "Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?" on the Style Network.