The New Indian Express
FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2011
CHENNAI
INDIGE
VOL: 4 • NO: 13

food & drink P8&9
Wedding cake specialists, a case for *falafel* and more

the it list P6

home & design P24
Beds go OTT for newlyweds, with horsehair and gilt

Expat photographers Sephi Bergerson, Christophe Viseux and Andrew Adams are turning our weddings into a narrative essay and everybody's loving it | PAGE **16-17**

THE WEDDING ALBUM

MIND & BODY : Top pre-wedding beauty rituals and make-up packages across the city. And how to rock the aisle as a boho bride | P11,15

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS, CHENNAI
FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2011
INDULGE

As the country launches into the wedding season, professional photographers, especially those with an eye for detail, rituals and intimate exchanges, are in most demand. That these 'documentary' photographers happen to be foreigners is sweet irony. By **Mithra Suresh**

LOOK WHO'S *Watching*

photographers

Sephi Bergerson

Andrew Adams

Christophe Viseux

My photos are an extention of me. I go to a wedding to have a good time — to have a drink and to have a chat. If the locations are great and if the people are fun, it will show in the photograph

— Sephi Bergerson

GONE are the days of plastic poses and fake smiles at the altar or mandap. These photographers believe in spontaniety and present the wedding family in all its splendid glory. From candid dressing room shots to the tearful goodbyes, these are the 'documentary photographers' who tell a story, your story, on camera. They say their pictures speak for themselves and the truth is, they are becoming hot property in the elite wedding market. Meet Sephi Bergerson, Andrew Adams and Christophe Viseux, who say that staying natural and simple make for the prettiest pictures.

Life as I see it

Preferring the handle of 'documentary photographer,' because that is what he does, whether it be food (read his 192-page coffee table album, *Street Food of India*, which features mouth-watering pictures and recipes of say, bread *pakoras* and crispy *jalebis* on paper plates) or travel, Sephi Bergerson, born in Tel Aviv, got into wedding photography, after established 'art' photographer, fellow Israeli and friend, Amir Weinberg showed him the ropes, plus shot Bergerson's own wedding. We also like his feature on Indian trucks, soon to be released through a coffee table book.

His style? "I have a photojournalistic approach. I do not use a flash, so as to capture the right ambience. And if there are other wedding photographers at the venue, I include them. I am at a wedding to document it as it is," he says. In fact, Bergerson's wedding photography is all being poured into his research for his coffee table book in progress on Indian weddings. "Weddings in India, although all being Indian, are completely different, and I have to say, I have seen more weddings here than an Indian has!" he laughs.

Some interesting rituals that he has witnessed involve exchange of household rations as was the case for a Kashmiri Pundit wedding. "Yes, what they actually need, such as sugar, butter or wool. And people actually write down details of the gift in a book, so that they repay their guests with interest, at their wedding," he recalls. "Also part of the celebration, was where a male dancer dressed in women's clothes and makeup, danced all night to the same music, and for what? To seduce and entertain the men in the room!" he exclaims.

Most of his clientele are in their early 20s, usually non-resident Indians, who would like to get married in India, and know exactly the kind of photographs they do not want. And why Bergerson for your wedding? "You pay for the pictures that show you what actually happened. I will never make people smile for me, but if they happen to be smiling, the genuineness is what I capture on print," he explains.

Bergerson will not reveal his charges off hand and much depends on discussion, and reading an extensive PDF document which details his terms, conditions and how he works. But a basic ballpark figure would be Rs 1.5 lakhs for a day. Details: www.fotowala.in

Let the pictures speak

A man of few words, Andrew Adams from Toronto, Canada of Katha Images has a favourite wedding tradition that he likes capturing. "The post-wedding ceremony, that is the *vidaai*, presents some of the most beautiful, most intimate moments in India. The goodbyes, the tears, throwing of the puffed rice when the car with the bride and groom, leaves for their new home, with all the relatives standing behind is what one would like to remember about their wedding day," says Adams.

So, how does Adams go about warming up to the couple and the relatives? "I do not prepare, and I do not always have time to do background research. I usually let the family connections unravel, and focus on those moments. It's interesting then, because the couple and their families tend to treat me as one of them," he explains, adding that it is easy to see who the key members in a family are. As for the multi-cultural nature of most of his wedding shoots, they do not really surprise him. "I am Canadian, mixed weddings are really common there. In fact, a lot of my shoots in India are either for Indians living in Canada, or where one of the couple is Indian," he says.

And any particular wedding apparel that stands out in his mind? "The shoes! You can never see the shoes in an Indian wedding, but they are also one of the dressiest items in a bride's wardrobe," he says.

Adams charges Rs 1,20,000 for a day, considering an eight-hour duration to the day, with other arrangements such as airfare and accommodation accountable for separately. Details: www.kathaimages.com

Need to know

- Strike a relationship with the photographer. If he understands you, he knows how to represent you on print
- Let the photographer get as close as possible during the proceedings. Beauty is in the detail, they say
- It is better for the photographer to stay in the same hotel as the bride or groom and the relatives. Besides being able to observe various family ties, it helps to get a discount on hotel rooms while booking in bulk
- Allow pictures of food, but not of people eating

Mixed is best

Based in Paris, Christophe Viseux has documented 25 weddings, across the world, across religions and ethnicity, from Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Muslim to Jain and Humanist. While, the trend of documentary photography in weddings is more popular abroad, particularly in the US and in European countries like Paris, it is getting popular in India, he says.

But then mixed weddings make for the most colourful pictures. "They are also the trickiest. I have witnessed the combination of the unexpected cultures and unusual rituals that follow, such as Jain-Catholic and Portuguese-Cambodian unions," he offers, adding that the latter was particularly interesting. "There was a hair-cutting ceremony, to represent the start of a new life together. After that, money is placed in the hair by the relatives, so as to be 'found', which means that the newly-weds are being blessed with wealth and prosperity," he recalls.

A member of the Wedding Photojournalist Association (WPJA), Viseux got into the field by accident. "I was a travel photographer. My brother had asked me to photograph his wedding, and at the time I rejected it. When he finally convinced me to do it, I remember enjoying it, especially that special feeling from being privy to so many intimate moments that no one else could see," he recalls.

And of course, who can discount the wedding apparel and accessories? "I would think, for a man, the most interesting one was the Scottish kilt, with the Tartan pattern, which looks fantastic in pictures. And for the bride, the bejewelled and multi-hued saris with the bangles, work better than the Western traditional white gown," he says.

Viseux, while he charges 3,000 US dollars for the whole event (including say, a *mehendi* ceremony, wedding and reception, also provides additional services. Visit his website, to see package offers, such as deluxe leather bound coffee table books, poster and fine art printing, video screening and HD video reportage of 20 minutes. Web galleries are also possible.

Details: www.christophewedingphoto.com

— indulge@expressbuzz.com