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THE STYLE BIBLE FOR MODERN BRIDES

WEDDING DAY



White Mischievous

THE NEW SPIN ON
BRIDAL FASHION

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& PAOLA MELONI & KNUT AKERHIELM

LA CERVARA, PORTOFINO, ITALY, 31 MAY 2003

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ELIANA MAFFEI AND BEATRICE RAGGIO TEXT BY GILLIAN HEGNEY

IT WAS A DULL, damp evening in London. Paola Meloni and Knut Akerhielm sat at home chatting about the day's events over dinner. Mid-meal, Knut laid down his knife and fork, got on one knee and proposed.

'I was so shocked,' says Paola, 'we'd been living together for a while but I'd never thought about marriage.' Knut, on the other hand, had been thinking about it for some time, 'I knew I wanted to marry Paola a few weeks after meeting her. I'd planned to make the proposal a grand gesture, but it just seemed the right time as we sat over dinner in the comfort of our own home,' he explained.

Paola and Knut had met two years earlier at a tennis-themed fancy-dress party. Knut spotted Paola through the crowd and knew he had to meet her.

'I first saw her from the back, dressed all in white with her incredible black hair, she really stood out from the crowd.' A few days later they met for a pizza and the rest, as they say, is history.

As Paola, a lawyer, and Knut, a banker, come from Italy and Sweden respectively, gathering friends and family together for the big event was going to take some planning.

Guests would be travelling from far and wide, so the couple decided to pick a location where everyone could come together for an entire weekend to relax and enjoy themselves. The luxury resort of Portofino in north west Italy seemed like a perfect choice – Paola could marry in her native country, and the place would make an ideal location for their guests.

After seeing the Abbey of La Cervara on the edge of town with its fabulous gardens and incredible views of the sea, the couple fell in love with the location. 'We'd visited a few places, but after seeing La Cervara we felt anything else would be second-rate,' says Knut.



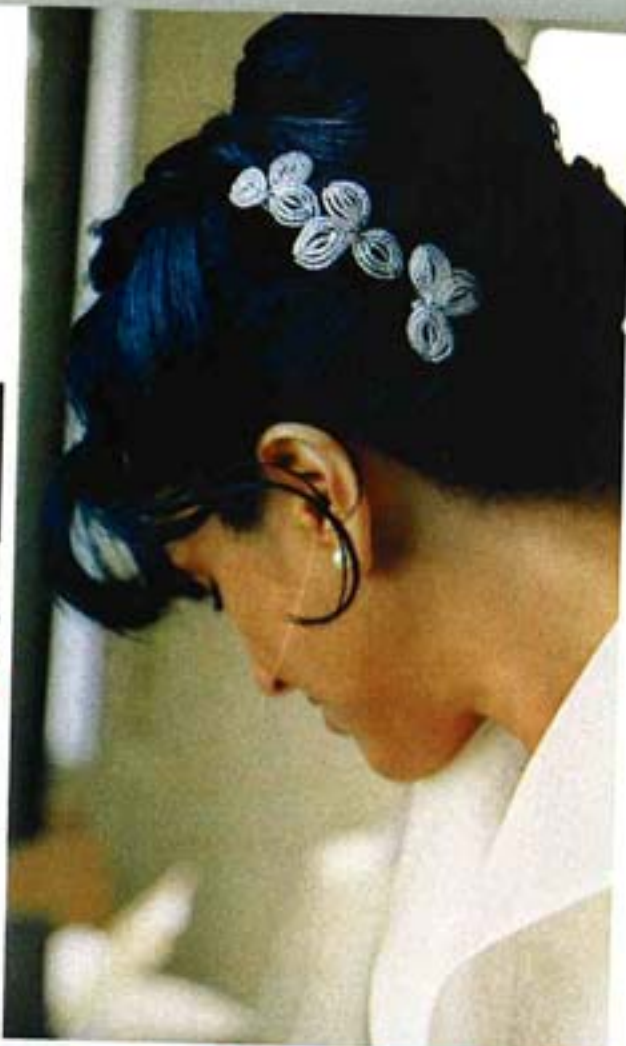
La Cervara dates back to 1361, when the first stone was laid for a new monastery to be dedicated to San Girolamo. Its designers and first residents were Benedictine monks, for whom the monastery was a place of meditation and introspection. Travelling up the road to the Abbey, the tall, ancient Mediterranean woods envelop the monastery and, with the rugged coastline beyond, it is easy to understand their attraction to this stunning locations.

La Cervara continues today to be an idyllic destination ➤

TOP RIGHT Paola's final preparations
are recorded for posterity

ABOVE The beautiful gardens at La
Cervara overlook the winding,
jagged coastline of Portofino,
providing stunning views and
a magnificent backdrop for a wedding

INSPIRATIONAL WEDDINGS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
The wedding favours were glass animal figurines. Paola's fabric headdress. A bar refreshment. The Italian tradition of throwing rice and confetti. The wedding cake was made with berries. Apéritifs and champagne were served in the Abbey gardens. An evening dress worn by one of the guests at the wedding



for those who want a peaceful but breathtaking location and, although sometimes a long and stressful process, Paola admitted she found arranging the wedding relatively stress free. 'All we had to do was decide what we wanted and the people at La Cervara organised it.'

Although the wedding plans weren't a source of concern, Knut did begin to grow worried about Paola's choice of wedding dress when she started making comments like: 'What's wrong with getting married in red? It's a nice colour,' and even hinting that the wedding dress may be more of a wedding bikini than a glamorous gown.

As Paola's sister, Antonella Meloni, was designing the dress, it was easy for them both to plant the seed of doubt in Knut's mind. However, Paola opted for an elegant full-length ivory gown with lace insert on the skirt and an organza coat. Antonella also designed her own dress for her role as bridesmaid – a beautiful yet contemporary mauve gown with embroidered ribbon detailing.



Most guests arrived on the Friday evening before the ceremony. They were welcomed by the couple and then whisked off to the neighbouring village of Paraggi to catch up and enjoy drinks by the sea. In keeping with the laid-back feel of the weekend, the ceremony was to take place in the early evening of the following day and the reception was going to be a relaxed dinner party.

On Saturday, the day of the ceremony, both bride and groom had rooms in the Abbey where they could get ready. ➤

TOP Paola and Knut exchange their vows before Father Gianpiro Gambaro at the altar. ABOVE One of Paola and Knut's favourite memories of the day was entering the chapel and walking down the aisle together

In what might be many a bride's nightmare, the couple met while making their way to their rooms. Instead of fleeing from the sight of each other, they tried to stop for a chat. However, the best man Peter, Knut's brother, was determined to heed age-old tradition and promptly ushered them off in different directions.

This was not the last time the couple would meet before the ceremony, however. As Paola has lost both her parents in recent years, she and Knut decided that they would meet outside the chapel and walk down the aisle together. This is one of both Paola and Knut's favourite memories of the day.

'I think Knut was relieved that I was dressed in white and fully covered up,' says Paola. 'She looked so glamorous and beautiful coming down the stairs. It was very intimate, just us on our own before we entered the chapel. Well, except for the photographer!' says Knut.

The ceremony was in both Italian and English, and ran without a hitch. On leaving the chapel, the guests gathered



to throw rice over the couple. 'That was really intense,' says Knut, 'it was amazing to come out and be surrounded by all our friends and family.'

The reception was a glamorous affair. 'In Sweden guests tend to come in eveningwear for weddings,' explained Paola, so when it came to the dinner party reception everyone was aptly dressed.

In keeping with another Swedish wedding tradition, speeches were numerous and included the bridesmaids, ➤



OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: The bride's sister, Amanda Wilson, DOTHAM in Sweden, guests usually wear custom-tailored wedding suits to add to the glamour. THIS PAGE: The evening reception centered around the buffet

best man, four witnesses, and Knut's mother and father.

The cutting of the cake was another high point for the couple. Guests gathered on the balcony surrounding a garden courtyard and the cake was set up in the middle. What was once a vegetable garden for the monks in the monastery is now the only Italian-style monumental garden in the Liguria region, extending over two levels that are connected by arbours and steps. On the lower level, cone-shaped hedges surround a 17th-century marble fountain.

'When the cake was cut, everyone was upstairs looking down at us,' says Paola, 'it felt like Hollywood with all the camera flashes.'

The evening was spent outside in the garden, where an impressive bar, which was under-lit bright blue, provided the drinks. After a night of dancing and drinking, Paola and Knut had arranged for a day of rest and relaxation for their guests. The next day they hired a boat to accommodate everyone and spent the entire day moored off the coast of Portofino, where they swam in the sea, ate lunch and drank the champagne left over from the wedding.

While Paola had spent the time running up to the wedding trying to convince Knut her wedding attire would be less than traditional, Knut was also playing his own game. 'He told me we were going fishing in Finland for our honeymoon,' laughs Paola, 'I didn't completely believe him, but I did start to worry.'

After the weekend in Portofino, the couple flew to their flat in the South of France to drop off their presents and more champagne. Knut still hadn't told Paola his real honeymoon plans, 'I'd arranged for us to fly to Copenhagen with Scandinavia Airlines for a night before setting off on our actual honeymoon. I think this was when she started to panic.'

In fact, Knut had booked a trip that would take them to South Africa on safari, followed by a road trip from Johannesburg to Cape Town, and was finally topped off with eight days relaxing in the Seychelles.

'We don't get to go on holiday often due to work, so this was a great break,' says Knut.

And Paola got to wear her bikini after all ■

HOW IT WAS DONE

VENUE As well as offering a stunning venue, La Cervara can also organise everything for ceremonies and receptions, from food to photography, music to seating plans. The abbey dates back to 1361 when it was designed and built by Benedictine monks. The buildings house an impressive church, dining room, gallery area and a 16th-century cloister. There are numerous garden areas offering views over the sea and coastline including the Wisteria court, Gardenia Garden, the Monumental Garden and the stunning Portofino Terrace that juts out over the Mediterranean sea below. It is located 36km from Genoa Airport.

La Cervara, Abbazia di San Giuliano al Monte di Portofino, Italy
www.cervara.it or 0039 0185 293 139

PHOTOGRAPHS Studio Eliana Maffei

Based in London and Italy, Eliana Maffei and Beatrice Raggio specialise in wedding photography in a reportage and fashion style. They pay particular attention to spontaneous shots and inspiring detail, and have a portfolio which covers weddings from around the globe. They are the official photographers for La Cervara.

www.elianamaffei.com; 07833 988 972 or 0039 010 2518 202

FOOD All food on the day was prepared by the cooks at the venue. Paola and Knut opted for a traditional Italian menu, taking advantage of the fresh sea food available in the local area.

Menu

Pansotti with walnuts
Risotto with champagne and prawns
San Peter fish with artichoke
Champagne sorbet with strawberries
Fruitdishes and coffee

For a taste of Italy at your UK reception, Italian Secrets, a UK-based caterer, specialises in authentic Italian cuisine made to age-old recipes. They can also create traditional Italian wedding cakes, similar to Paola and Knut's cake, as an alternative to the usual tiered cake seen in the UK, which consists of a base of short crust pastry, filled with vanilla custard and topped by cream and fresh fruit.

13 The Broadway, Penn Road, Beaconsfield, Bucks, HP9 2DP
www.italiansecrets.co.uk or 01494 676 136

FLOWERS Paola used red tulips for her bouquet. As these were out of season a supplier had to be tracked down by the florist. It is best to contact your florist well in advance of your wedding to discuss what flowers will be in season, this ensures you will not be disappointed at the last minute with what will be available.

Il Giardino di Mara, Genoa, Italy 0039 010 246 7496

DRESS Designed by Antonella Meloni (antonella.meloni@fastwebnet.it)

Created by Sartoria Grimaldi, Genoa (www.grimaldisartoria.it)

Organza coat by Ray Harris, London (020 7221 8052)

HAIR Equipe Giorgio, via Palazzo della Fortezza, Genoa
0039 010 414 043

TRAVEL DETAILS The nearest airport to Portofino is Genoa. Ryanair fly a regular service to Genoa from London Stansted (www.ryanair.com). Holiday Autos offer good-priced car hire and you can pick up your hire car from the Genoa airport (www.holidayautos.co.uk).

If it's luxury you're after, The Hotel Splendido is perched above Portofino with fabulous views of the town and coast. Double rooms from €823 (www.hotelsplendido.com). The Hotel Eden offers reasonably-priced accommodation in this resort (www.hoteledenportofino.com).

WD GUIDE



WEDDING PLAN

All you need to know and do before the big day from sending out invitations, to finding the perfect venue and honeymoon destinations