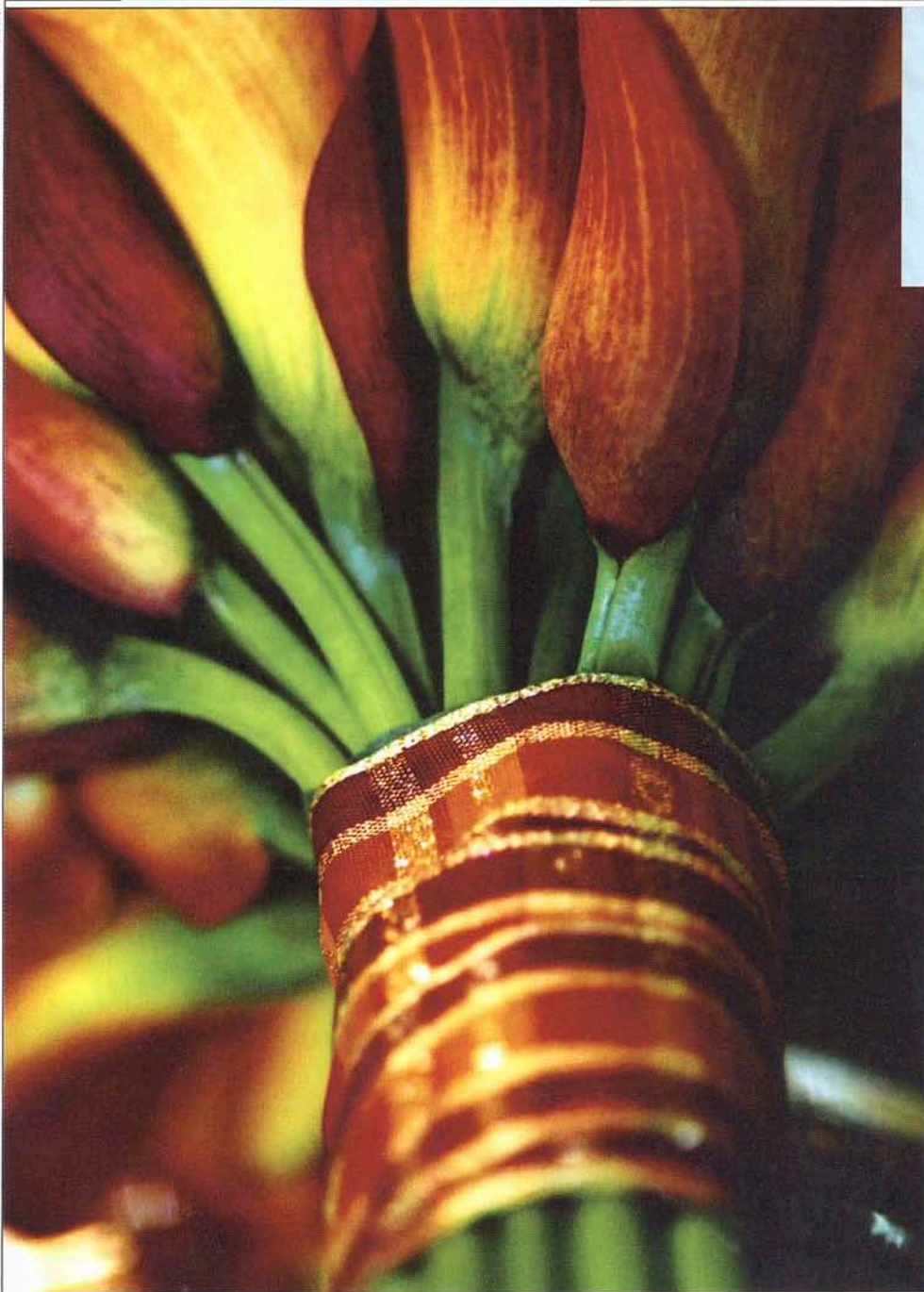


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WEDDINGS

By Jeff Kent

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Back in Action

Laurie Rhodes' transition from TV exec to wedding photographer

Photography is one of those interesting careers that draw people from all walks of life. Sure, there are plenty of second- and third-generation shooters who came into the business right out of high school, but there are also legions of photographers who started down a different career path before finding their true calling.

Laurie Rhodes is one of them. After experimenting with photography as a child, Rhodes embarked on an 18-year career in the entertainment industry. She worked in Broadway theater, got into production finance at CBS, was an executive in charge of production for two television shows, and vice president of production and programming at Paramount Pictures.

Despite her success, the pull of creativity was strong in Rhodes, and she started doing photography on the side. After her photographs of a friend's independent film were published in *Glamour* magazine, the New York-based Rhodes was suddenly thrust into the world of professional photography. People started hiring her to shoot their weddings, and calling to ask about portraits. She began to spend more time on fine art projects.

“I was always interested in photography,” says Rhodes. “To be honest, I was a little bored with television, a little bored with being an executive. I wanted to get back to being part of an artistic process.”

After a couple years shooting part time, Rhodes left Paramount in July 2000, enrolled at the International Center of Photography in New York, and dedicated herself to photography full time. Already, she's built a reputation as one of New York's finest photographers.

Transferring from the corporate to the entrepreneurial was exciting for Rhodes, who, with an MBA in finance, was eager to create something of her own.

"There were a lot of things I learned from the corporate world that helped me start my own business," she says. "Things like building relationships with vendors, maintaining integrity in business dealings and sales, and how to conduct yourself so that you are always, always representing yourself well."

Rhodes' television career also gave her artistic and technical skills that have helped her as a photographer.

"Probably my biggest influence from television is lighting," says Rhodes, who

"The process is really about seeing people and listening to people, noticing what they are doing."



learned to operate a TV camera early in her career. "It's important to know how you can change a mood with lighting. You have to know how to light so there aren't shadows under the subject's eyes. But overall, I think it's an organic, subconscious sense that I took from TV. I think the sequences I create have been influenced by my TV background. People tell me my photographs look like film stills."

While Rhodes shoots portraits, fine art projects, events and some documentary photography, her livelihood comes from her innovative, artistic wedding images. Her clientele—about 40 percent of

whom are also artists—seek her out because of her style. They want something less traditional, more like images you'd see on a gallery wall.

"As an artist, I find that I approach the different types of work the same way," says Rhodes. "The process is really about seeing people and listening to people, noticing what they are doing...I love being around people and capturing the moments that happen between them."

Rhodes concentrates on capturing the energy in those moments. For example, she wouldn't photograph a couple as they are about to break from a hug, but at the moment just before

they embrace. She feels there's greater energy in the anticipation of the embrace than in the completion.

Rhodes likes shooting with long lenses during the ceremony, using a narrow depth of field to create what she calls "a sense of a private world" around the subjects. With all else blurred or outside the frame, Rhodes zeroes in on the tender moments between the couple, or the tears of joy from the bride's mother, or the look of happiness on the face of the groom's father.

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She also likes to make shots of the couple walking away from the camera. "You can tell so much about people from behind," she remarks. "Their gestures. How they hold their hands, their feet. They are often more open and interactive when they don't know you're behind them photographing."

Overall, Rhodes terms her style artistic and photojournalistic—documentary in nature but with an artistic and fashion-shoot sensibility. The style is not about using a formula.

"Every client is different," she says. "And every client wants something different. I just try to create a sense of place, a sense of atmosphere and a sense of caring and affection between the bride and groom. Above all else, I try to photograph people the way they are." ■

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