

It was important for both Neil and Colleen to remain true to their personal style when choosing their wedding attire. Known to her friends and family to have a distinct penchant to wearing black (and only black), Colleen defied tradition and donned her signature colour. Neil, known for his affable, fun-loving personality was comfortable wearing jeans and a blazer paired with an Italian french-cuff shirt by *Felli & Rocco*.

[COLLEEN] "Last June I saw this beautiful picture of a black *Elie Saab* gown for his fall collection—I called all the stores in North America that carried him and no one had it in stock. I contacted Lebanon (head office) and waited. In the meantime my business partner Sarji surprised me with a four day girls weekend in San Francisco. I found the perfect shoes to go with the *Elie Saab*. Once back home, I then called Paris who said they could bring it in but the timing was too tight. Again, Soha to my rescue and suggested Vancouver designer **MANUEL MENDOZA**. In less than one month he did an unbelievable job on my gown—unreal."



PHOTOGRAPHED BY KIM CHRISTIE
EVENT DESIGN & COORDINATION BY SOHA LAVIN, COUNTDOWN EVENTS
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY BRUCE PATTERSON, CLOUD NINE CREATIVE INC.



COLLEEN WINTON & NEIL SCHMIT | SEPTEMBER 29, 2006

Celebrazione Sorpresa

The story of Colleen and Neil started more than a decade ago when Neil, a greeting card sales executive, added the famed Vancouver stationery atelier *Wintons*, to his account roster. Eleven years and a friendship-turned-love later, the two paper aficionado's were finally ready to tie the knot. In October of 2005 (before Neil's proposal), the couple had planned a romantic holiday to Italy. It had been an emotional year, marked by the passing of Colleen's Mother to cancer. The couple realized that their family (including Neil's two children Aaron and Emily) needed something to celebrate. After a courtship of ten years, Colleen had unknowingly joked this trip would "be their honeymoon." Then came the proposal.

[COLLEEN] *"One day at the store—shortly after Neil and I were engaged, Kim Christie was there congratulating me and asking me questions. All of a sudden she had a unique idea. 'Wouldn't it be great if your entire wedding was a surprise?' So, I checked with Neil. He was in!"*

As every woman does, Colleen immediately shared the good news with her close girlfriends. By this point, Kim had already enlisted mutual friend (and Vancouver-based wedding planner extraordinaire) *Soha Lavin*—the principal event designer at *CountDown Events*.



COLLEEN, WITH SOHA

It was decided. The whole wedding—with the exception of the stationery (of course!) and the gown would be a surprise to the couple and would take inspiration from the promise of a trip to Italy. What follows is the gift of collaboration from fellow wedding industry colleagues to Neil and Colleen. A "Celebrazione Sorpresa."



As each surprise element unfolded (even the venue was top-secret until the week before the wedding), Soha slowly unveiled the day to Neil and Colleen in true tuscan style—relaxed, familial and layered with rich texture and taste. The grounds of **HAVERHILL MANOR** were filled with exuberant arrangements of white casa-blanca lilies (Colleen's favourite flower) hydrangeas and roses created by *Suzanne* at **GRANVILLE ISLAND FLORIST**. Soha deliberately infused the event with signature "Neil and Colleen" elements while working with the Italian inspiration. Guests enjoyed aptly named cocktails that represented the couple. "Manolo Blahnik" Martinis and "Chuck Taylor" Cosmopolitans were served along side beautiful platters of fire-grilled antipasto and mouthwatering appetizers courtesy of the talented catering staff from **DIVA AT THE MET**. No detail was overlooked including little treats for guests to find throughout the venue and glasses filled with black licorice dotting the cocktail tables.

As the couple exchanged vows, their friends and family watched with tapered candles in hand. Long-time friend of Colleen & Neil (and world-renowned stationery magnate) *Anna Griffin* was in attendance from Atlanta.

Colleen had a few surprises of her own for her guests (and Neil). To greet her guests she wore a dark green dress by *Jean Paul Gaultier* (a rare departure from her signature black). As guests mingled, she made her way upstairs for a second ensemble. A beautiful *Aria* sung by *Katy Hedalen* provided the musical accompaniment to her next surprise as Colleen made her grand entrance in the breathtaking black *Mmanuel Mendoza* silk toile creation.

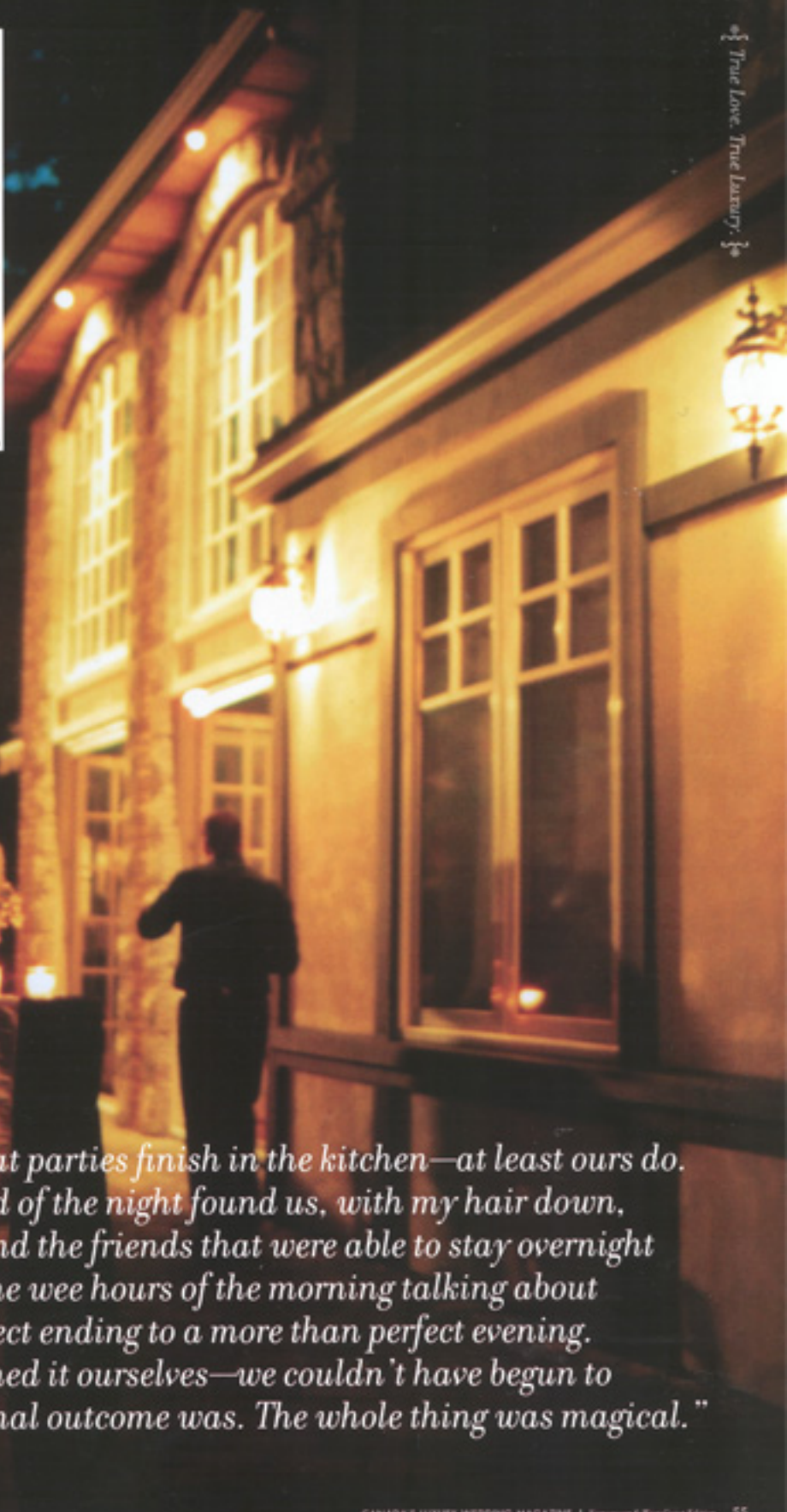


Working within Soha's Italian vision, friends of the couple and well-known event decorators *Colin Upright* and *Jay Dunlop* from **UPRIGHT DECOR** created intimate vignettes throughout the grounds that were lush, spirited and perfectly captured the mood of the evening. Luxurious black linens laden with mounds of exotic pomegranates, grapes and kiwi were draped amidst clusters of antique wine bottles (which Kim had sourced at an antique shop a few months earlier). Chivari chairs with black seat cushions completed the luxe arrangement.





Guests enjoyed dining al fresco at various locations throughout the evening. Culinary delights were freshly prepared before their eyes by the Chefs from **DIVA AT THE MET**, including a decadent array of serving stations which included a parpadelle pasta bar, carvery with breast-of-duck and a mouthwatering assortment of fire-grilled antipasto. In place of a cake, the couple was treated to a four-tiered assortment of mousse cups in mocha, vanilla and dark chocolate. As the sun began to set, guests nibbled on sugar cookies that were stamped with the signature logo (a red converse and a manolo blahnik shoe). Colleen's favourite drink (Brown Cow) was served as an after dinner delight. In lieu of a guest book, each guest was asked to write a message for the couple and hang it from the branches of a tree in the main foyer. Leaving the mansion, guests were beckoned to a charming sign that read "Pick Your Poison" surrounded by mini bottles of Champagne and Stella Artois as takeaway gifts. Although the sun had set on the wedding day itself, the fun continued all weekend with dim sum and bowling. To the surprise of no one, it was a wedding to remember. ☺



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"They say that all great parties finish in the kitchen—at least ours do. True to form—the end of the night found us, with my hair down, my Dolce shoes off and the friends that were able to stay overnight at the house up 'til the wee hours of the morning talking about relationships. A perfect ending to a more than perfect evening. Even if we had planned it ourselves—we couldn't have begun to touch on what the final outcome was. The whole thing was magical."