

filmmaker on FIRE

forget dark chocolate and oysters. If you want to get in the mood, pop in a Fiore Films flick. Sharrone Calafiore's trademark steamy Save the Dates and other concept and wedding pieces could be described as Chris Isaak's "Wicked Game" meets a Vera Wang runway show set to a Lady Gaga soundtrack. Or you could just say they're hot.

And for that she was scouted by WedFACT and celebrated at In[Focus] 2010. She has risen quickly from a Howell, N.J., slide show startup to an award-winning wedding cinematography studio—all this thanks to her initial flair for photo montages and a powerful partnership with her husband, Chris.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

If they're lucky, every family has their own documentarian. For the Calafiore family, that role falls happily to Sharrone, whose artistic bent, she discovered, lent itself well to producing touching and funny postholiday photo montages.

Until recently, 4th of July weekends for Sharrone and Chris meant traveling to Atlantic City to gather with family at his mother's house. The festivities would conclude with a slide-show viewing of the weekend's fun, courtesy of Calafiore.

Heartwarming and humorous, the montages became that much more meaningful when Chris's mother passed away. But before her passing, she gave something priceless to Calafiore too. Recognizing her daughter-in-law's talent and the joy she got out of the process, she encouraged her to pursue montage-making professionally.

Calafiore says after she made a slide show for her son's first birthday in 2005, "my mother-in-law turned to me and said, 'You should really start a business doing this.'" That night, she says, "I came downstairs and said to my husband, 'Why not? We could start this from home.'"

The timing was just right; a year earlier, Calafiore had left a lucrative job at a leading ecommerce company to raise the couple's son full time. Together, they opened up a little company called Just Because Slideshows, creating anniversary and birthday montages, first on Microsoft PowerPoint and then later with ProShow Photodex.

Calafiore produced the montages, while Chris, a New Jersey state trooper, handled the more left-brain tasks such as scheduling, accounting, and IT.

FIORE FILMS



Sharrone Calafiore with her husband, Chris, a New Jersey state trooper and her partner in Fiore Films

www.fiorefilms.net

JUST BECAUSE

Home videos were the natural next ingredient for Calafiore's montages. Soon she was mixing families' video clips with their photos on Windows Movie Maker. "So I was doing photo fusion even before it became a word!" she says, laughing. "Like they put this word 'fusion' in and all of a sudden it's *something*."

By promoting the newly named Just Because Slideshows to VJs and wedding videographers, Calafiore expanded her portfolio and contact list. "I was literally calling other videographers and soliciting the photo montages," she says, which, at the time, couples often played on big screens at their receptions.

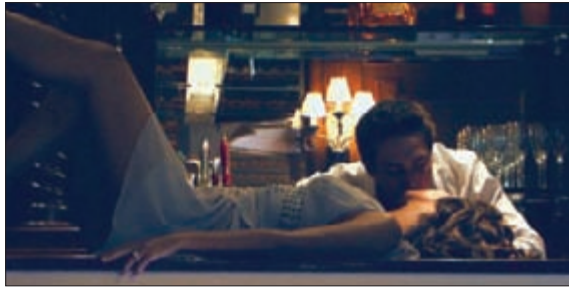
Finally, one of her clients, a wedding videographer, threw her a bone and asked her to produce a fusion montage of an engagement photo shoot in the park. Her client loved it and, from that point on, gave her weddings to edit.

Another pivotal moment came when Calafiore was introduced to Joshua Smith's Trash the Dress (TTD) work. "It was so gross but it was awesome!" she says. "It was so *me*. It was so the things that I like to do." She was dying to edit a TTD piece and begged her client to shoot one, even offering to edit it for free. "I was bugging and bugging her about it until one day she said, 'Why don't you just start your own thing?'"

"Why not?" she thought. "I was already freelancing for other videographers." Calafiore would outsource the shooting and do the editing herself, which she was now doing on Sony Vegas.

THE FIORE RULES

Outsourcing that half of her business was fine for starters, but Calafiore had a special vision for the shots she wanted. Identifying with the "if you want something



Turning up the heat
in a Fiore film,
"Danielle & Jerry
Save the Date"



Another sultry
shot from
"Danielle & Jerry
Save the Date"
at their eventual
reception venue

done right, do it yourself" mentality, she purchased a Sony Handycam and decided to learn on the job alongside her shooters.

Rather than intimidate her, she felt her lack of experience and training might even be a boon to her business. "I don't know the rules and I never have," she says. "That allows me to think outside the box. I don't even know what's in the box."

Of course, now that she and her shooters have collaborated for a while, they have a much better idea of what she's looking for. It's that sensual, flirty footage you can see in one of her first concept pieces, "Quite the Romantics."

After she posted that piece on WedFACT (now EventFilmmaker), it not only received glowing reviews but was voted one of the top 10 winners of the online community's final WedFACTION film competition of 2008, along with another of her reels, "Give Me More."

Thanks to the constructive feedback she's received "from some talented cinematographers," Calafiore says that EventFilmmaker is "the best thing that's ever happened to me in terms of education. That's where I learned *some* rules."

RUNNING TO SIT STILL

Now that Fiore Films was a bona fide wedding cinematography company, Calafiore was ready to take on the East Coast bridal industry. But she soon found out that just because her work was beautiful and award-winning didn't mean that engaged couples were prioritizing wedding video any more than they had in the past.

"I was so naive in thinking I was bringing something fresh and new to this area and that every photographer is going to want to work with us, and that every venue would want to refer us." She thought, "This is going to be a piece of cake," but soon learned that "a lot of couples just don't want to spend money on video."

Meanwhile, just running a business has proved very demanding. "There's a lot you have to do, especially mentally. I've never worked so hard sitting on my ass," Calafiore laughs. "I had no idea going into this that it would be this hard," taking into account all the work that needs to be done in terms of marketing and networking, something she'd sooner refer to as "friendship-building." As part of her boutique approach,

"friendships need to be made and maintained. That takes time! I could be exhausted from spending a full day on the phone."

IT'S BUSINESS AND PERSONAL

Her personal, boutique approach is something she tries not to stray from. But for a short time, she lost sight of this, getting lost in the mix of some of the larger EventFilmmaker regulars. "There are these humongous productions," she says, citing work by StillMotion and Kevin Shahinian, "that are done with all this crazy equipment, different lenses and cranes." At one point, because she so admires those filmmakers' work, she felt herself craving every piece of equipment she saw them use.

But it was her husband, Chris, who kept her grounded. He said, "We're not going into any more debt to buy new equipment. Let's make some money, and then buy new equipment"—which is what they did, without going overboard.

Whenever she finds herself drooling over a piece that was produced using hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment, she takes herself back to "Quite the Romantics" and reminds herself that she shot that with a Sony Handycam and a borrowed monopod "and everybody loved it."

"I really have come to embrace my style and what I do," she says. Her vision is for Fiore Films to remain boutique, accepting only a select handful of weddings each year. That way she can remain on a first-name basis with her clients, many of whom she continues to hear from as their families grow.

"I love the personal relationships that I have with my brides and grooms. I have brides who I haven't even booked yet sending me links of dresses and asking me which one I like better." Not to take away from what larger production companies do, staying couture just works best for the Calafiores. After all, she says, "When you're only two people, there are only so many names and details that you can remember." And it's important for her to give all her clients the same level of attention. It's advice she wants to pass on to aspiring wedding cinematographers, to be able to appreciate others' approach while staying true to your own vision.



Behind the scenes with Sharrone Calafiore shooting bridal prep



Behind the scenes at an outdoor location shoot for "Danielle & Jerry Save the Date"

BRINGING SEXY BACK

It's thanks in large part to the rapport she has with her couples that Calafiore can get those signature seductive shots. If, on the other hand, she employed a large crew, couples might not be as comfortable to let their hair down. "We're not a huge production shooting these sexy scenes. It's not uncomfortable," she says, bringing up one of her hotter Save the Dates that David Perry presented at In[Focus]. "That was just me. I shot that by myself. So of course they're going to feel comfortable."

Calafiore acknowledges what many people might speculate that her titillating style also comes from the fact that she's a woman. "I don't know why," she says, but what inspires her is something "sexy, passionate, and mysterious" about a female's curves. "There's something about the woman," she says, "and just as much about how much the groom is into the woman. Even if it's just seeing his hand on her waist. There's something about that that portrays how much he's into her."

INTO THE MUSIC

It's that heart rate-raising tenor that drives her vision for each piece. "I always have a vision," she says. It starts out with music, usually "a sexy or moving tone." She finds one that "absolutely moves me and then I play it over and over again and a story idea comes to me from the music."

Next, she explains her concept to the couple, "and I'm really excited about it, always." They discuss the song and its lyrics, and her clients "get really into it. I think I have a really distinct clientele. Even the ones who aren't really into being so sexy, they're definitely into something different, not traditional."

SOMEWHERE IN THE SWAMPS OF JERSEY

Calafiore has had a similar revelation about her own work, thanks to comments left by colleagues and couples on her blog. "That's what really inspires me," she says, "to one-up myself, to keep going." She thrives on the positive reactions she gets, or when a video brings someone to tears. Calafiore explains that that's her criterion for releasing a piece. "In order for me to actually release it, I have to want to watch it over and over again." Not

wanting to sound arrogant, she adds, "sometimes I put it together and I can't believe that I did that."

She laughs about a similar reaction from colleague Kristen* from Bliss Productions. After seeing one of Calafiore's pieces, she said, "I watched this, and all I thought of was, *New Jersey*?" That reaction has always stuck with her. "When she said that, it really pushed me to just stick to my style and make it noticed."

Why there aren't so many rising stars coming out of the East Coast remains a mystery to her. "My husband says they just don't have time to be on WedFACT," she says, laughing. But she can easily rattle off a list of "amazing videographers" in New York and New Jersey, starting with 5 West Studios' Spencer Lum.

That said, she acknowledges that the wedding video industry on the East Coast could be healthier. "The market especially is really, really tough," she says, with many couples settling for less or dismissing video altogether.

That's why, she reasons, as a videographer you better have a passion for it. "I don't know anyone who has become a millionaire from wedding video. You're always putting money into it, buying new equipment and so forth."

What's her advice to would-be wedding videographers? She deadpans, "Go into photography."

Joking aside, Fiore Films has no plans to offer photography. Being a specialist says something to Calafiore, not to take away from studios that offer both. "Anything can happen in the future," she acknowledges. But for now her thinking is, "If I needed surgery on my brain, I would go to a brain surgeon. You can't compare wedding video with brain surgery, but a specialist is a specialist."

Likewise, couples seeking a customized experience from a studio that specializes in steamy wedding cinema need look no further than Fiore Films.

Be sure to check out the online version of this article on www.eventdv.net to see Fiore Films' signature clip "Danielle & Jerry Save the Date," along with a special "Behind the Clip" backstory by Sharrone Calafiore.

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