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INTERMEDIATE

A Peek Inside the Boudoir – Ready, On-the-Set, Go with Cherie Steinberg

Featuring HEDLEY JONES & CHERIE STEINBERG



© Cherie Steinberg

“The word boudoir has been in existence since the Victorian era and early 20th century. The term was derived from the French verb *bouder*, which means ‘to sulk,’ or *boudeur*, meaning ‘sulky,’” says Cherie Steinberg, photographer and co-founder of The Boudoir Café. Today, the word boudoir loosely translates to a lady’s private bedroom, sitting room or a dressing area where she gets prepares for slumber or dresses to go out.

Having photographed weddings and events for 15 years, in 2008 Steinberg decided to shift directions to make the art of boudoir a major focus. She says it was time for a change. “We knew it was a risk, but the market was at a turning point regarding both interest and acceptance for this style of photography. At first we offered this as an additional wedding gift item to our brides.” Studio co-founder and partner photographer Hedley Jones adds, “The boudoir photography became

an instant hit. We began receiving more and more requests.”



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“For many, doing a boudoir photo session can be intimidating. The shoot’s success is very much tied to the quality of the relationship cultivated between photographer and model. Best images result when an emotional connection is shared. The model should feel super comfortable.” Photo captured with Nikon D750 & AF-S NIKKOR 70-200mm f/2.8G ED VR II lens.

Stepping into the Boudoir

Styling, pampering and primping all belong on set. The Boudoir Café team gives every client seductively delicious treatment from the moment she walks into the studio: music is playing, champagne is offered, and she’s soon escorted to a private area for professional hair and makeup styling. “We include all of these special essentials,” says Steinberg. “We have the best music in Los Angeles, fabulous furniture and we also offer wine and cheese. Our space is painted in a steel grey which gives it a very sexy vibe. It has a lounge-type feel that allows our clientele to sink into this very private place—this in turn makes them feel even more comfortable.”

While being styled, the client mixes with both photographers and describes the wardrobe items she’s brought. Nods Steinberg, “As she talks we gain even more insight into her style and persona. More than likely I’ve already spoken with her by phone, and maybe we’ve exchanged emails. By now we’ve developed a loose personality profile which will help both Hedley and I better frame her images. You can learn a lot about someone through conversations even before you see them in-person.” Steinberg also points out that if a client is comfortable with her body, then the session will generally be open and easy. All parties will move freely and photos will be more genuine. She adds that she can usually determine if that will be case for a client pretty early on.

As they chat, Steinberg is sharpening her photographer’s eye—honing in on

physical assets. “For many, doing a boudoir photo session can be intimidating. The shoot’s success is very much tied to the quality of the relationship cultivated between photographer and model. Best images result when an emotional connection is shared. The model should feel super comfortable.” Jones seconds that notion—contributing the male point of view—and mentions that both photographers strive to help the client overcome any trepidation.

The CherieShot—a Winning Look

The bedrock of boudoir photography is posing: knowing the options for moving and placing the body, knowing how to direct a model into a position, and knowing what poses work for what body, what personality type and what environment.

With thousands of photo sessions to their credit, from boudoir, weddings and fashion genres, both Steinberg and Jones agree that the studio’s A #1 boudoir frame-up is the “CherieShot.” This pose is great for almost every type of body and is simple to recreate.



© Cherie Steinberg

You can create very subtle background differences by moving closer or farther; and this can happen in as little as a single step forward or away. Photo captured with Nikon D750 & AF-S NIKKOR 85mm f/1.4G lens.

Start with a divan or small sofa that’s placed near indirect window light. “We ease our model into position by placing the length of her body away from the lens to get a slimming effect which every woman appreciates,” smiles Steinberg. “A great lens for this type of shot is the AF-S NIKKOR 85mm f/1.4G. The f/1.4 aperture renders a very shallow depth of field and throws everything but the eyes and the lips out of focus. I move close to our model—which further narrows the resulting image’s depth of field. You can create very subtle background differences by moving closer or farther; and this can happen in as little as a single step forward or away. Experiment. Notice the bokeh that results for her jewelry, outfit and background.”

Steinberg adds that the source of illumination can be any soft light source from above and behind the shooters' lens. "Whether natural muted sunlight or artificial studio lights, it does not matter. This shot can be executed in just about any environment, and that wide open aperture gives you lots of flexibility." The model is usually in lingerie and shoes are optional. Her toes should be pointed. She's either on her back or lying on her tummy. "This shot requires very little movement from either the photographer or the model."



© Cherie Steinberg

A gobo was used to create a light and shadow effect on the model. It adds interest and also covers up any body parts that the photographer may want to hide. Photo captured with Nikon D750 & AF-S NIKKOR 50mm f/1.4G lens.

The Seduction of Light and Dark

A gobo was used to create a light and shadow effect on the model. It adds interest and also covers up any body parts that the photographer may want to hide. "To create a look like this we shine a continuous light source through the gobo, in this case we used a Lowel GL-1 Power LED. A new kind of handheld photographic light source that's completely portable, it relies on LED light as opposed to tungsten. The LED is similar to what you get with a Fresnel light, which is great because we can concentrate the stream of illumination right where we like it to

land. Alternatively, we could use strobes but the continuous light source helps us view where the shadows fall. This shot can be framed working with camera on a tripod, but in this case handheld is better,” says Jones.

The Nikon D750 with an AF-S NIKKOR 50mm f/1.4G lens was used. Explains Steinberg, “Over the years I have shot with the Nikon D600, D700, D800 and the D7000. It’s as if all the best features from these cameras have come together in the Nikon D750. I love that it’s smaller and more lightweight, and its tilting Vari-angle LCD comes in handy. I can find new and novel ways to frame those close intimate looks using the tilting LCD, especially for some upcoming motion capture.”

In an Era of the Selfie

The results of a boudoir photo session are often secret—photos for a boyfriend, an album for the bridegroom, a woman’s own commemorative. And, as Steinberg reveals, some of her female clients are now sharing a digital file their sweeties may keep on their smartphones. Talk about sharing an ultimate selfie.



© Hedley Jones

Photographer Cherie Steinberg working on set with her Nikon D750 camera.

5 Must-have Props

- Styled hair and makeup
- Chair or couch
- High heeled shoes
- Lingerie
- Jewelry bling

Tips and Tricks

- Build a relationship. If your client is not comfortable on-set, chance are your photos will show that.
- For inspiration head to Instagram. Not only have we identified new trends, but we've met some really cool people there. We also love Facebook and Twitter.
- Do a daily blog post. In the past we were not consistent with that, but now we find that daily blogging is very important. We just revamped our website and created a presence which looks and feel like a blog.
- Build word of mouth marketing. At this point in time we're operating purely from referrals. We receive five to ten calls a day for people wanting to shoot with us! We have a Yelp page (from years ago) where we've earned a 5-star rating so that helps a lot.
- Get eMOTIONal. We love video clips. We pepper them on the site and call them love letters. We just got into cinemagraphs and are experimenting with these now as well.

Learn more about The Boudoir Café at www.theboudoircafe.com.

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