



LA BELLA DONNA

Inspired by the Metropolitan Museum's celebration of marriage in 15th- and 16th-century Italy, we reinvent the Renaissance bride photographs by caroline knopf

MASTER CLASS: Reenacting Paris Bordon's 1550 creation, Venus and Mars are crowned by Victory, as Cupid adds a bit of cheek. Summoning her own muse, Vera Wang designed an ivory taffeta gown with a split-front skirt and an Empire waist with embroidered velvet petals. Earrings, Siman Tu. Bracelets, Isaac Manevitz for Ben-Amun. Maid's gown, Jim Hjelm Occasions. His jacket and trousers, Dior Homme. His ring, Chrome Hearts. For details, turn to Shopping Guide.

"IT IS UNBELIEVABLE how much is spent on these new weddings, habits have become so disgusting." That was Leonardo Bruni, writing about preparations for his wedding in 1412. During the Renaissance, the weddings of wealthy Italians were blockbuster events. In Florence, a Medici groom built a triumphal arch for his bride. A party in Bologna reached its crescendo when a wheel of fireworks ignited several guests. Reception feasts could feature 56 courses. "Art and Love in Renaissance Italy" (at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art through February 16, and at Fort Worth's Kimbell Museum, March 15 through June 14) gives us a lavish look at bridal fever 600 years ago.



[PARIS BORDON **VENUS, MARS, AND CUPID CROWNED BY VICTORY, 1550**]

Collection: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



LOVE CONQUERS ALL Mars lays aside his helmet and embraces his beloved as Victory crowns the couple with myrtle. **INSET:** Bride's dress, Vera Wang; maid's gown, Jim Hjelm Occasions; groom's ensemble, Dior Homme.

NAKED CAME THE BRIDE

Lorenzo Lotto, the "eccentric genius of the Renaissance," filled this painting, commissioned for a wedding chamber, with symbols of love and fidelity. **INSET:** dress, Cynthia Rose; belt, Joanna Mastroianni; headpiece, Debra Moreland for Paris.



[LORENZO LOTTO **VENUS AND CUPID, LATE 1520S**]

Collection: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



ITALIAN DRESSING Since there were no written guidelines regarding Renaissance weddings (a couple could simply agree to marry), a family that wanted to protect its investment in a union made it as public as possible. And so they created the *ductio*—the equivalent of today's processional—in which the bride was led through the city on a white horse. "Renaissance brides were always portrayed in extraordinary finery," says Andrea Bayer, curator of the Metropolitan show, "sleeves embroidered with gold thread, coats lined with ermine, rings set with diamonds, sapphires, and rubies—each stone having a different meaning." Happily for the bride, the garments were provided by the groom. Sadly, he would probably sell them to a used-clothing dealer a few years later.

THAT'S AMORE Wedding gifts were equally lavish—trays of gold and silver ducats, furs, ropes of pearls, and, most precious of all, paintings commissioned for the couple. As they were meant to be displayed near the newlyweds' bed, their subjects would have been amorous—even racy. "Although love rarely entered

into the equation when the great families of Italy arranged marriages," notes Bayer, "the subjects of love and attraction mesmerized Renaissance men and women." They were especially mad for the stories recorded by their ancestors, the ancient Romans. The era's greatest painters—Botticelli, Titian, Lotto—fanned the flames, portraying gods and goddesses cavorting in varying degrees of undress.

RENAISSANCE FLAIR Looking to the fabulous objects and paintings gathered in the Metropolitan show, BRIDES' fashion director, Rachel Leonard, asked 10 contemporary designers to rethink the Renaissance—both the richly clad bride on public display and the mythical maiden who might hang in a bedroom. The results are some of the most exquisite bridal gowns imaginable. *Bellissimo!*

—Sally Kilbridge

FASHION PLATE

This woodcut from a 16th-century book of clothing illustrates a bride's attire; the fitted bodice and voluminous skirt are still seen in today's most formal gowns.



[CESARE VECELLIO **SPOSE SPOSAE, 1590**]

Collection: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

THIS PAGE The multicolored hand-embroidery on an antique silk-satin gown by Lazaro conjures the elaborate needlework produced in Renaissance convents. Fabric flowers cover one of the spaghetti straps; a dropped torso and bubble overskirt complete the fantasy. Velvet coat, Adrienne Landau. Headpiece, Erin Cole Design. Necklaces, R.J. Graziano. Ring, Kenneth Jay Lane.

OPPOSITE A trio of putti—angelic babies that are emblems of love and romance—surround a *princesa* in her bedchamber. The lace Peter Langner Couture gown, with its sheer balloon sleeves and snug, low-cut bodice, is both formal and flirtatious. Earrings, Tejani. Pearl necklace, Tara. Long necklaces, Jill Jacobson. Ring, Kenneth Jay Lane. Turn to Shopping Guide.



THIS PAGE For weighty contrast, we layer treasures of an earlier age—a warrior bride’s crusader-like tunic and Byzantine cross—over a chiffon bias-cut dress with a deep V-neck. Dress, hand-beaded tunic, belt, and cross, Joanna Mastroianni. Hair comb, Siman Tu. Cuff, Jill Jacobson.

OPPOSITE Handmade Swarovski crystal beading, embroidered accents, and clouds of lace form a palazzo-worthy two-piece gown by Atelier Aimée; off-the-shoulder, elbow-length sleeves, a corset bodice, and a ball-gown skirt amplify the romance. Headband, Jennifer Behr. Necklace, Rachel Leigh. Cuff, Erin Cole Design. Turn to Shopping Guide.





I'M YOUR VENUS

A tiara from a Renaissance masterpiece and a gown of unearthly grace are the picture of classical beauty

In a remake of Lorenzo Lotto's "Venus and Cupid," our bride reclines under a seashell, a reference to the goddess of love, and holds a myrtle wreath, typically seen in the marriage chamber. Ivory silk-chemise gown burnished with gold details on the bodice and side panels, Cynthia Rose. Corset belt embroidered with stones, Joanna Mastroianni. Headpiece, Debra Moreland for Paris. Necklace and square ring, Isaac Manevitz for Ben-Amun. Cuff and other rings, R.J. Graziano. Turn to Shopping Guide.



THIS PAGE Like the robes of a Botticelli maiden, this gown flutters in even a whisper of wind. Silk-chiffon pleated dress with waist embroidery, and silk-chiffon bolero with extended sleeves, Reem Acra. Necklace, Isaac Manevitz for Ben-Amun. Ring, R.J. Graziano.

OPPOSITE The Renaissance groom would send his intended a box filled with jewels and other treasures. Tulle A-line gown with ruffled back, David Fielden. Earrings, Isaac Manevitz for Ben-Amun. Bracelet, Siman Tu. Necklace and top ring, R.J. Graziano. Bottom ring, Kenneth Jay Lane. Turn to Shopping Guide.

THIS PAGE Under a heavily beaded cape, a satin gown from Elizabeth Fillmore is embroidered with cording and a shell motif; full lantern sleeves and a pleated train add to the opulence. Cape, Joanna Mastroianni. Top ring, Isaac Manevitz for Ben-Amun. Bottom ring, Kenneth Jay Lane. His tunic and trousers, Duckie Brown. Hat, the Village Hat Shop. Chain necklace, Chrome Hearts.

OPPOSITE Like the pastel brocades worn by wealthy Florentine women, this blue silk-taffeta ball gown would punch up any piazza. The structured torso of the single-sleeved dress is embellished with lace and jeweled bands; volume is provided by a silver lace under-skirt; Platinum for Priscilla of Boston. Rings, R.J. Graziano. Turn to Shopping Guide. Hair, Livio Angileri for Phyto at artmix.com. Makeup, Viktorija Bowers for Benefit @ Kate Ryan Inc. Menswear stylist, Robert Bryan. Prop stylist, Michael Hermiston.

A **MEDICI MOMENT**
Maestros of manipulation shape bead-encrusted fabrics and lengths of satin into wearable works of art

