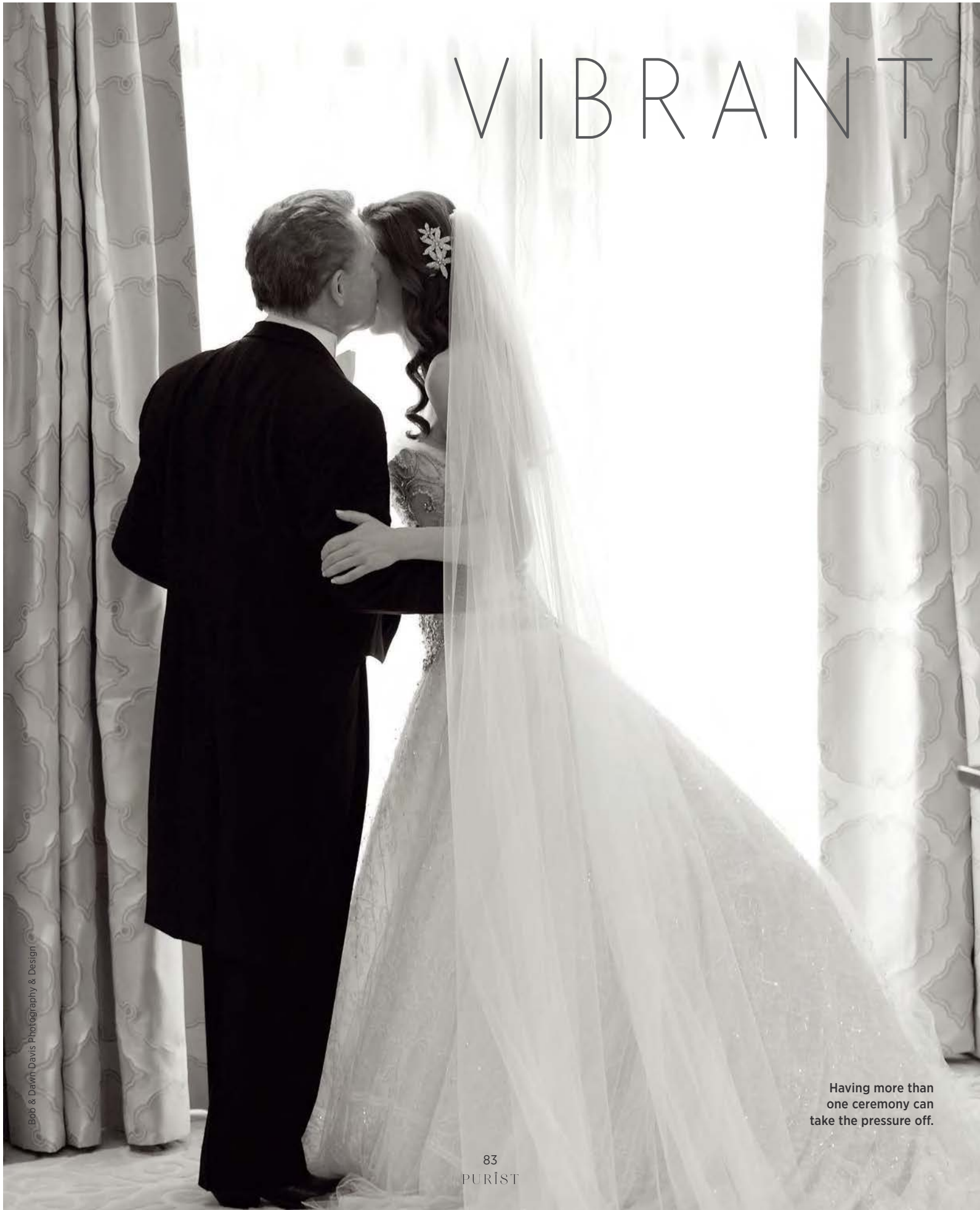


VIBRANT



Bob & Dawn Davis Photography & Design

Having more than
one ceremony can
take the pressure off.

WHY HAVE JUST ONE WEDDING?

Subsequent ceremonies offer couples the thrill and joy of commitment, without the stress of “the big day.” BY DR. STACIE STEPHENSON

My first wedding was spectacular—and a spectacular disaster. Every detail was planned. We had constructed a beautiful venue outside on our horse farm, and a rain venue just in case, but at the last minute, one of the people in charge of the construction said that they hadn't put the tent over the top of the rain venue and that was OK because “the forecast said it wasn't going to rain.”

The day dawned sunny and gorgeous. I was dressed and ready. The guests had arrived. I was all arranged in one of our antique carriages, complete with footmen and nine horses hitched up and ready to make my dramatic entrance. We started down the lane, and just when I was in sight of the guests and my handsome groom, out of nowhere, black clouds rolled in, the sky went dark, and then...the deluge.

It wasn't just a sprinkle. It was a massive pounding rain and whipping wind. The guests fled to an eave over the house. Of course, the rain venue didn't have a cover, so that was out. I began to call out for everyone to go inside. Clearly, we would have to call the whole thing off until the rain stopped. But then my dear husband-to-be, eager to get married then and there, grabbed a headset and commanded all those in charge: “Cue the bride! Cue the bride!”

There was nothing I could do. I was escorted out of the carriage, and down the aisle. I was a drowned rat. My beautiful dream wedding dress was soaked. We got married, the rain cleared up, we had a party, and yes, I know that rain on your wedding day is good luck, but needless to say, this was not my idea of the perfect wedding.

My husband knew this. He promised me a do-over. Two years later, when we were having a fancy summer dinner party, with our friend who is an opera singer entertaining, we decided to make the party an impromptu pop-up wedding, and we got married again, in front of all of our friends. It was a summer soiree with a surprise—a quick and romantic vow renewal with no wedding party and no fuss, beyond what was already planned. My husband felt vindicated, and I was happily swept up in the romance.

But this do-over wedding got me thinking. That evening, I said to him: “That was so lovely today. Why stop there? Why don't we get married every year? Why

don't we get married whenever we travel to countries that mean a lot to us?” I was kind of kidding, but he loved the idea.

It was actually a few more years before we had the next wedding. It was in the Bahamas, on a deserted island that was a nature preserve. I'd always dreamed of a beach wedding, but we knew such a place couldn't accommodate the guest list and many family and social obligations we'd had to fulfill for our first wedding. And it's certainly hard to get good formal pictures at a beach wedding, not to mention dresses always get ruined. But during that trip, I just happened to mention, “Wouldn't it be fun to have a wedding on the beach one day?”

We came back to our room one night and there was an invitation on our pillows, asking us to attend our own wedding the next day. It said, “Be dressed at 4:30.” They had pulled out a little dress from my closet, and clothes for my husband. All we had to do was get dressed and show up. We had a yacht crew as the wedding party. The captain walked me down the aisle, then switched places to stand up as best man to my husband. It was a windswept romance.

The next wedding was in the South Pacific. We got married according to the local custom, and we didn't have the slightest idea what our officiant was saying, but we were decked out in traditional wedding garb. The ceremony and especially the celebration afterward were unforgettable. We then had a wedding in Marrakech, Morocco, also according to the traditional culture. Both of us love to travel, so to experience different cultures and blend those cultures with our romantic ideals was so much fun.

Our most recent wedding was in Paris. I had an idea to charter a vessel on the Seine, but my husband was sure I wouldn't like it. He said it would be windy and cold. He surprised me with a room at the Mandarin Oriental with a big terrace and a spectacular view of the Eiffel Tower in the background. We had an orchestra and an arch, framing the Eiffel Tower twinkling with lights behind us. My husband spent a lot of time with the officiant, prepping him about our history, so he did a beautiful job making the ceremony personal. We weren't able to bring our twin boys with us on that trip, but their nanny sent us pictures of them in little tuxedos to mark the occasion.

Subsequent
weddings can create
space for more
romance and fun.



This wedding was particularly special, not just because it was in my favorite city, but because our babies were born and we were now a family in a way we never had been before. That added a whole new layer to our bond. It was the deepest of our vow renewals—so far!

Why limit yourself to only one wedding? Additional weddings are more economical and attainable because they are made to accommodate only two (or just a few) people. It's really just a romantic celebration, so the pressure is off and the fun is on. The beautiful thing about getting married as many times as you like is that you can truly do what you want, versus having to fulfill all the expectations and obligations of family and society. You could get married in your jeans, or your swimsuit, or whatever you want—even if you weren't quite brave enough to do that at your first wedding. And you can do it whenever—we have always done these weddings on either our anniversary or Valentine's Day, but you could do it any time—a birthday, the anniversary of your first kiss, any holiday, or any day at all. You could do it when you travel or in the privacy of your own home. We've had a real officiant each time, but that's not necessary either because you're already married. There are no rules

other than the ones you make.

Each of our subsequent weddings has been a little more beautiful, a little more meaningful, a little more romantic—another chance for us to hold each other's hands, look each other in the eye, and say, essentially: I choose you again. I keep choosing you. It isn't just a vow renewal. It's a renewal of everything that made us fall in love in the first place.

For those of you wondering how else you might do this in your own life, here are a few more tips. Wherever you feel comfortable is the perfect spot, fancy or not. A friend's beautiful backyard, a local park or nearby beach, the place where you had your first date, your place of worship, or your favorite family travel spot, made new again with your romantic recommitment, are all possibilities. You can be as exotic or as familiar as you like because this ceremony is just for you. It's not about where you are. It's about who you are, together.

Now that we've started this tradition, we love to wonder and dream and discuss: Where will we get married next? The possibility is always out there, so it never feels like the romance is over. It always feels like it's just beginning... again. drstaciestephenson.com 🌸