

A conversation with

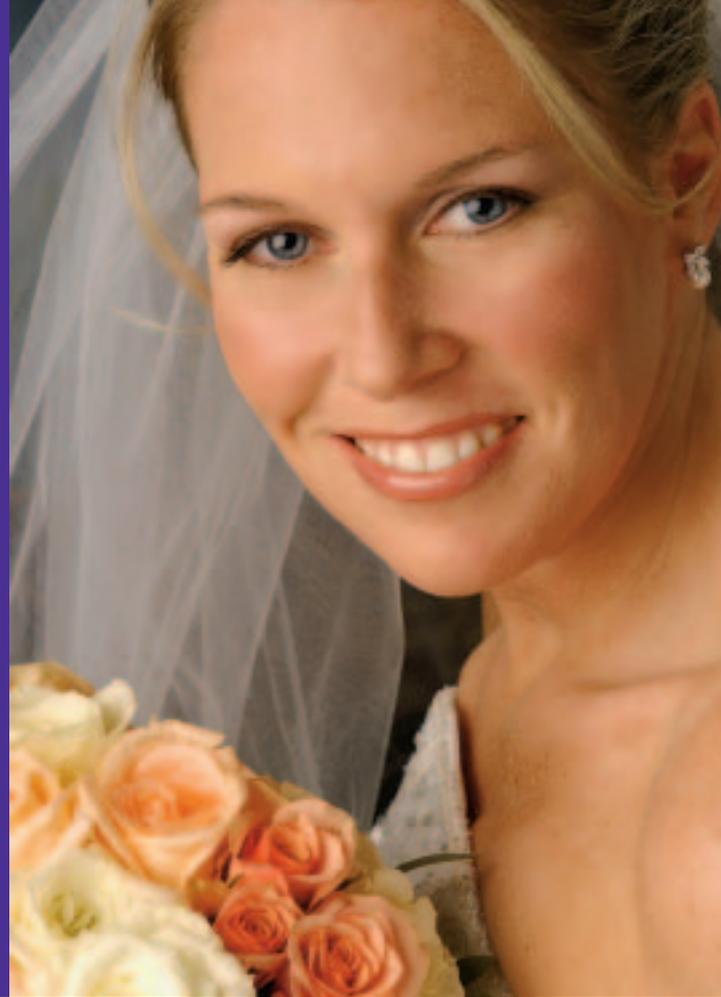
ANDY MARCUS

*The name in New York
wedding photography
tells the story of his success*

By Jeff Kent



How do you turn a small, family-run
photography business into a multimillion-
dollar enterprise serving the elite circles of
the world's most high-profile city?
According to Andy Marcus, you do good
work, treat your clients well,
and the rest will happen in time.





*Every person I photograph
is a new challenge.*

*I try hard every time to
make them look good and
to have a good time.*

*And that's the key to
success in this business.*

Talk a little bit about the legacy of your father and how he created Fred Marcus Photography.

Andy Marcus: My father emigrated from Germany in 1939, and he wound up in Cuba for two years waiting to get into the United States. All he had with him was a Leica M3 camera. One of his hobbies was photography, so to make a living he took photographs of other emigrants' children on the beaches and developed them in his bathtub at night.

After two years in Cuba, he ended up following his clientele to New York. They remembered him and would hire him to photograph bar mitzvahs, weddings and portraits of their children. He eventually came to be known as one of the top two or three wedding photographers in New York.

When did you first get involved in the business?

I started in about 1962 as a lighting assistant. I was 13 years old. I got into the business full time in the early '70s after I graduated college.

How was your working style different then?

We would shoot maybe 100 pictures at a wedding, not 4,000 like a lot of people do now. My father always said it was like going to war; you want to make every shot count.

When I started as a lighting assistant, we were shooting black-and-white Speed Graphic cameras with flash bulbs. I still remember carrying those flash bulbs in my suit pocket. If there was any static

Marcus is the proprietor of Fred Marcus Photography in New York, founded by his father in 1941. Considered one of the city's premier wedding studios, Fred Marcus Photography has a client list that reads like a who's who of the Empire City. Celebs like Howard Stern, Art Garfunkel, Donald Trump, Eddie Murphy and Billy Baldwin have gone through Marcus' books, not to mention countless society and political figures. With 18 full-time employees and another 30 or so part-time and contract workers, the studio Marcus took over from his father in 1975 shoots 400

to 500 weddings a year. There are also oodles of commissions for charity balls, bar mitzvahs, high-society parties and even a healthy dose of family and individual portraits.

But it wasn't always that way. Fred Marcus Photography grew from very humble beginnings on the beaches of Cuba, where Fred Marcus, a German Jew, sought refuge from the Holocaust. Now more than 60 years later, the third generation of the family, Andy's son Brian, is involved in the business. We recently sat down with Andy Marcus to find out more about how it all happened.

electricity from the carpet and you reached into your pocket for a bulb—oh, boy, that pocket would explode!

By the late '60s, electronic flash started coming into the picture. There were dry batteries used in those flashes, about 500 to 600 volts worth. I remember my father winding up on his butt many times from being shocked. We were some of the first people to start using multiple lighting setups at a wedding. But that was no easy task. Some of those battery packs were 20 or 30 pounds. My right shoulder is still a little lower than my left from carrying those around.

How did you and your father grow the business and build up the reputation it enjoys today?

The greatest networking tool is doing great work. You create a good base with good work and you add on to it. It's like a pyramid. The work has to be consistently good, and you have to know what you're doing. There has to be steak behind the sizzle.

What are some of the biggest changes you've noticed in the industry since you took over the studio?

There's more of a focus on equipment today. I feel like the equipment has taken over a lot of photographers and they spend

less time with the people. It's also an expense. You used to buy one camera and replace it every 10 or 15 years. These days, photographers change cameras constantly and spend a fortune on computers and software.

I find it funny. I've used my Hasselblad for years, and I still do. It's an extension of me. I shoot from the hip. I don't look through the camera, but my pictures are always straight and well exposed.

Your studio is known for its high-profile, society wedding work. How did you get into that scene, and how do you maintain that clientele?





My father always said, "You never know who's going to be at a wedding." Even if it's a small wedding of 30 people, or a minor portrait shoot, someone could be there who loves your work and ends up being a huge client. I try to always remember that.

For example, one of my biggest clients started with a small portrait job. The call came in on a very busy day. I didn't want to take time out to go on the shoot, but I went anyway. It took me 10 minutes to take the photograph, but the gentleman and I established a great rapport and had a lot of fun.

Not too long after, he called me up and asked me to shoot his birthday party in Monte Carlo on his 175-foot yacht. There were only 12 people there, but he ordered 27 albums for his friends and family, even the captain of the boat. Every year since then, he has flown me to Europe for his birthday and I do a major album for him. He's also flown me to Florida to photograph his children and grandchildren.

That's how you do it, with great work and customer service. So for me, every party is a new challenge. Every person I photograph is a new challenge. I try hard every time to make them look good and to have a good time. And that's the key to success in this business.

What scale are we talking about with some of these weddings?

My customers are often people who spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on flowers, sometimes a million on the wedding. So for them to spend six figures on photography is not surprising.

I shot a wedding for the daughter of Jeff Loria, owner of the Florida Marlins. It was at the Waldorf-Astoria here in New York, and he had Bon Jovi perform as a surprise for his daughter. At another event, the client spent \$40,000 just on airfare to fly my people to the wedding. Imagine what he spent on the actual photography!

Do you promote yourself in those elite circles to keep up that type of clientele?

Not really. The majority of it is word of mouth. I do minimal advertising. It's mostly doing great work, building a reputation, and people come to you.

Also, I'm very in tune with my clients, their tastes, and what they want. A lot of people stay away from their clientele outside of the business, but I'm very in touch with mine. I walked into an Italian restaurant a couple weeks ago and knew just about everyone in there. They were all my customers. The owner of the restaurant came over and asked who I was. I said, "I'm really nobody." He said, "No, you know more people in my restaurant than I do." So I told him that I'm a photographer and his restaurant was full of my clients. He gave me his card and started to ask about my studio. And that's how it's all done. □