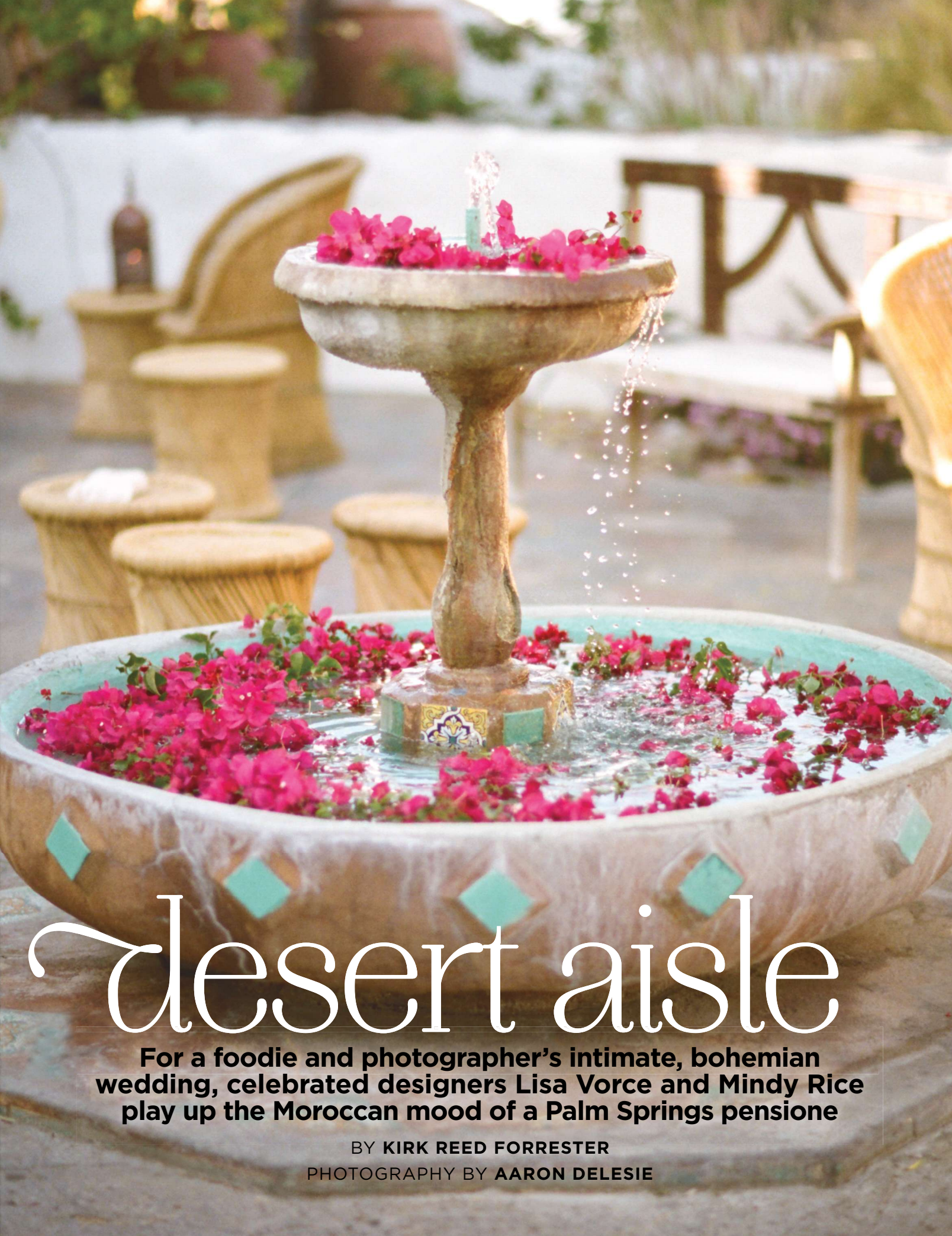




The newlyweds are sprinkled with petals after the ceremony. OPPOSITE: Guests threw lucky pennies—which the bride later retrieved and kept—into the bougainvillea-laced courtyard fountain, a focal point at the ceremony.



desert aisle

For a foodie and photographer's intimate, bohemian wedding, celebrated designers Lisa Vorce and Mindy Rice play up the Moroccan mood of a Palm Springs pensione

BY KIRK REED FORRESTER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON DELESIE





INITIALLY, Marisa Holmes and Ron Troyano wanted to elope. Despite the fact—or maybe because of the fact—that the San Diego–based couple is steeped in the world of weddings and hospitality (she is a wedding photographer; he is a restaurateur), it was the idea of escaping the big, fussy, traditional wedding for something intimate, beautiful, and exotic that appealed to them.

“It’s kind of ironic; I shoot weddings for a living but never grew up dreaming about a wedding,” says Holmes. “I loved the idea of getting married in a little courtyard somewhere and going back to a villa with my family, but I recently did a bunch of destination weddings and realized how complicated they can be. I wanted to find the same feel [of a destination wedding] locally but didn’t know what we were going to do.”

Then one day, while online, she stumbled upon a link to Korakia Pensione, a historic Mediterranean-style bed and breakfast in Palm Springs. “It was exactly what we were looking for,” says Holmes. “It feels like a hideaway. There’s no TV, no phones.” It even had a little courtyard. After a quick scouting visit, Holmes and Troyano set a wedding date for March 7, 2012, (exactly four years after their first date) and reserved half of the hotel for their 25 wedding guests.

“We really wanted our families to get to know each other during the wedding,” says Holmes of her family from Orange County and the groom’s family from Northern California. “Maybe everyone wouldn’t arrive as family, but we wanted them to leave as family. It wasn’t just about Ron and me.”

Holmes tapped her longtime friend and former boss, Aaron Delesie, to do the honors behind the camera. Delesie suggested that she reach out to wedding industry titans with whom he often collaborates, event designer Lisa Vorce and floral designer Mindy Rice, to pull the event together.

Famous for planning innovative weddings all over the world, Vorce and Rice have an unusually symbiotic relationship. “Mindy and I have worked together for years, and at this point we can practically finish each other’s sentences,” says Vorce. “Mindy has an amazing grasp of the ‘big picture’ and I help bring the ideas to fruition.”

The designers were immediately inspired by Korakia’s Moroccan influence and wanted to use it as a springboard for the wedding’s design. “I like to incorporate local elements like plants, flowers, wood, or fabrics that anchor guests to the area and display an obvious feeling of location,” says Rice, who opted for desert floral tones of red, orange, fuchsia, and gold. Delicate flowers like poppies and ranunculus were mixed with stronger, more graphic ones such as leucadendron and date palm for contrast and texture.

When guests entered the hotel’s courtyard for the afternoon ceremony, they found peacock straw chairs arranged in what Vorce calls “residential style,” grouped in casual vignettes rather than formal rows. Holmes, in a flowing empire strapless gown and ornate white headpiece walked a meandering path up to the altar, which was framed by two enormous antique doors and flanked by fizzy red bougainvillea. At the end of the ceremony, the wedding party and guests threw lucky pennies, which the bride later retrieved and kept, into the courtyard fountain. (Who wouldn’t want to hold onto so many good wishes?)

The seated reception at Korakia Pensione was the ultimate dinner party—a five-course meal in a private courtyard surrounded by majestic mountains and towering palms.





5



6



8



7

1. Marisa Holmes, the bride, carried a breathtaking bouquet of begonia foliage, pastel ranunculus, poppies, *Pieris japonica*, wheat accents, and fritillaria. **2.** Lisa Vorce and Mindy Rice created a stunning wedding invitation with a white embossed pattern and jeweled-pendant tie. **3.** Desserts including raspberry French macarons and lemon-cream mini cupcakes were served with coffee under an awning of bougainvillea. **4.** A kiss during a quiet moment away from the party. **5.** An antique bench with pillows echoing the floral arrangements. **6.** After dinner, the couple takes a spin on the dance floor. **7.** The groom's lapel boasted a dash of *Pieris japonica*, wheat, ranunculus, and fritillaria, all wrapped with a piece of Moroccan eyelet. **8.** Overflowing arrangements looked lush and bohemian amid antique wood, glazed glass, and woven place mats.

“I like to incorporate local elements like plants, flowers, wood, or fabrics that anchor guests to the area and display an obvious feeling of location.”

—FLORAL DESIGNER MINDY RICE, WHO OPTED FOR DESERT FLORAL TONES OF RED, ORANGE, FUCHSIA, AND GOLD



During cocktail hour, guests sipped drinks conceived by the groom and were introduced to one of the evening’s happiest surprises—a handsome, young donkey named Wyatt, who served as a photo prop. Gleeful guests posed with Wyatt, who looked festive in his crocheted saddle and flowers, while Delesie snapped oversized Polaroids for wedding keepsakes.

Next, everyone moved on to the heart of the celebration—a lavish, five-course dinner served alfresco. “Because we only had 25 guests,” says Holmes, “we wanted very much for the wedding to have the feel of an intimate dinner party rather than a wedding.”

Holmes had chosen two long wooden tables, which were covered in loose, gauzy linen trimmed with knotted fringe. Strands of lights hung above, while flames winked from antique, green-glazed candlesticks. Rice found spectacular, wooden door corbels that looked dramatic next to the colorful, feminine floral arrangements. Natural, woven place mats alongside ornate silver and glassware completed the feast of textures on the table. Bowls of Spanish olives along with Manchego cheese and cured Serrano ham were served family style as guests found their seats.

The dinner was a labor of love. Each chef at Troyano’s San Diego restaurant, Alchemy, had devised his own course and had flown up to Palm Springs to cook it. Guests dined on grilled artichokes, diver scallops, porchetta, oysters with caviar, and beef carpaccio—each paired with a wine selected by the groom.

Once dinner was finished, guests danced and tried their hand at breaking the piñata, a Troyano family tradition. As for the wedding photographer-turned-bride, she didn’t pick up a camera all day. “I was ready to give the job to someone else,” says Holmes, reflecting on the wedding. “I totally trust Aaron and love what he does. I spend so much time behind the camera, I wanted to enjoy the day not as a photographer but as the bride.” ❧

LEFT TO RIGHT: Guests were surprised during cocktail hour to meet Wyatt, a donkey decked in his wedding finery who served as a photo prop. • A bridesmaid’s vibrant bouquet of sweet peas, baby green wheat, and leucadendron • An elegant white fondant façade with Moroccan trim and a flourish of poppies hides the decadent chocolate and peanut butter cake inside. OPPOSITE: Orange, red, and yellow tones in the arrangements reflected the desert landscape.