

Forget what you've heard about boudoir photography. The modern approach captures the substance behind the sex appeal. Chelsea LaVere uses the whole experience to make every woman feel beautiful.

BOUDOIR

By Stephanie Boozer

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Behind the bedroom eyes and come-hither looks, Chelsea LaVere's boudoir images are more than intimate photos. They are unabashed portraits of real women who want to look and feel beautiful. We've arrived at a new age in boudoir photography, and it's about time. Shrugging off the clichéd and vacuous posing that can make boudoir a little silly, LaVere's genuine take is still sexy, but also natural.

"My style is classic and timeless," she says. "I want the woman to feel she's in a place where time doesn't exist."

Based in Hampton Roads, Va., LaVere is the creative eye behind Bit of Ivory Photography, her portrait and wedding business, as well as the niche-market Persuasion Boudoir. Both were named in homage to Jane Austen. LaVere is, in fact, a bit of an Austenophile, who proclaims she was born about 200 years too late. An English major with a focus on 18th and 19th century British literature, LaVere has made her literary passion a running theme on her website and blog. She also has a deep-rooted love of photography, which was fostered by her mother, who happened to be a photographer.

"I'm a huge Ansel Adams fan," says LaVere. "I've always believed what he said about the most important component of a camera being the 12 inches behind it."

LaVere cites Adams and John Singer Sargent as artistic influences, as well as the less well-known Julia Margaret Cameron of the Victorian era, who took up photography at

Feminine persuasion

Bringing whimsy and creativity to boudoir photography

the age of 47 and became a driving force behind the recognition of photography as an art form.

“My clients aren’t Victoria’s Secret models, so I don’t go there for inspiration,” says LaVere. “Much of my inspiration comes from my own background in fine art and drawing. I know what’s flattering for different bodies. You have to know about angles, and your own body, too.”

LaVere’s foray into the bedroom setting wasn’t immediate; she launched Persuasion Boudoir just a year ago. She wasn’t 100 percent comfortable with the idea at first, which began with a request from a client and friend. For her husband’s wedding gift a few months prior, LaVere had had a boudoir photography experience, so she knew what it entailed and how she wanted to portray the classic side of women, but ultimately, she wanted to make sure she would make a difference.



“I had self-confidence issues, and I wasn’t sure if this was the way I could make a difference,” she says. “Then *shazzam!* It was like God’s confirmation that I needed to do this, to help women see themselves as the crowning

jewels of creation. It ended up being the best experience for me, because the photographer did not make me feel at ease, so I learned that I need to talk to my clients and give them positive affirmation.”



“Not everyone wants to wear a silk chemise.”

After being on the other side of the camera, LaVere was motivated to make her boudoir sessions be about the entire experience.

“I never want to seem like I’m putting people in boxes,” says LaVere. “But I just don’t do this to make women feel like sexual objects, which is the social stigma boudoir has acquired. I want women to feel beautiful and know their worth.”

LaVere shoots boudoir sessions in luxury hotels, preferably those with fabulous windows and bountiful natural light. For her marathon sessions, which she undertakes several times a year, LaVere brings in a hostess to keep the clients comfortable, as well as hair and makeup artists.

“I love it,” says LaVere. It’s cost-effective for me, and it’s fun for the clients. They can bring in a group of friends, kind of a girl bonding thing.”

In her next session, she’ll venture to a new location, a beautifully decadent private location that makes LaVere feel like she’s taken a step back in time. The second day of the marathon will be done outdoors, definitely with an earthier feel, and definitely for women wanting something a bit more bold. Regardless of the setting, LaVere’s goal is consistent, to create beautiful portraits of beautiful women of all shapes and sizes.

“I *do* look at the human form through rose-colored glasses,” she says. “It’s hard for me not to see the beauty in anyone.” ■

See more of LaVere’s boudoir portraits at persuasion-boudoir.com and check out her wedding and portrait work at bitofivoryphotography.com.

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