

An original take on lighting and posing helped these divas figure out how to make a woman look comfortable, natural and fabulous. Toss out your old notions of boudoir photography, and take a look at the new school of sexy.

PORTRAITS

By Stephanie Boozer

Boudoir divas

A fresh style and approach redefine a once outdated genre

If the idea of boudoir photography conjures up a vision of star filters, overdone makeup and awkward come-hither poses, cruise on over to theboudoirdivas.com for an eyeful of a reborn genre. A tempting combination of retro '80s cool, classic '40s pin-up, and turn-of-the-century ultra-feminine sensibilities, the portfolio of The Boudoir Divas is creating quite a stir among the good women of San

Diego, Calif., and, indeed, across the country.

The Boudoir Divas are Marissa Boucher and Kimberlee West. One look at their take on boudoir photography will chase your tawdry perceptions out the window. "We didn't realize how much demand there was when we started," says Boucher, whose clients range from your average housewife to local celebrities to the preacher's wife. "I told

the guy at the pet store the other day what I did, and he immediately responded, 'I want to get my wife to do that.' I think a lot of women want to do it, and they need to find a place that's respectable and super classy, where they'll feel comfortable."

Boucher and West launched The Boudoir Divas just two years ago, doing sessions in a tiny garage. Before long, the duo moved into the 4,500-square-foot studio they occupy now, and they plan to expand into a second, undisclosed location in the very near future.

The genre of the boudoir portrait once had a less than stellar reputation, thanks in part

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would buy only a few prints,” says Boucher. Yet the Divas report average sales of about \$1,150. “Because our marketing pushes packages and albums, we always sell an album with each package.”

Some clients do purchase large prints to display on the wall in their bathroom or walk-in closet, but the majority go with the glossy 8 x 8, 20-page album, which Boucher lays out in sleek, modern templates with a handful of inscriptions. Surprisingly, the Divas get a fair amount of repeat business, and many of their clients fall into the

to taste-challenged shooters who over-glossed and over-glitzed women into near parodies of themselves. But the look of realism that spread from magazines to wedding photography is also redefining boudoir photography.

“It’s all about making someone look comfortable and natural,” says Boucher, who with West, is coauthor of “The Posebook by The Boudoir Divas.” The two also regularly lead workshops for other photographers interested in revving up the pulse of their studio. Through their blog and website, the Divas offer a variety of material on getting started, from marketing packets to Adobe Photoshop actions to album layouts.

“Photographers always want to know about posing, lighting, and how to get clients comfortable,” says Boucher. “That’s why we created the posing guide for the trickiest part of boudoir.” Tricky, because all bodies are unique and all women want to look fabulous. Through trial and error, Boucher and West found 28 top poses that work on every body type, and they’ve detailed them in the book and the accompanying video.

The other common concern they find among photographers is what to sell and how to sell it. “Photographers feel like they can’t justify doing boudoir, thinking clients



PORTRAITS



studio's VIP category. They also host boudoir parties for groups of 10, who each get a mini-shoot.

Through partnerships with lingerie stores and salons, the Divas network in the area, and get tons of referrals. They have a presence at local bridal fairs (many brides like to give a little peek-a-boo book to their grooms on the wedding day), do radio commercials and print ads, and often have booths at charity events. But hands-down, their best marketing comes from the buzz created by their own clients.

"We're always trying to make sure that San Diego sees us all over the place," says Boucher, who admits they probably over-advertise. "But women chat and talk, and

this is a real conversation topic. So many of our clients tell their friends."

And their popularity isn't just in San Diego. Thanks to Google, they've been getting bookings from women nationwide, who fly in for the day just for the session. "We get about two or three clients a month who do that," says Boucher.

The Divas have begun scheduling Boudoir Marathons to coincide with their speaking engagements and workshops. Adding a day or two onto their workshop schedule, they book an extra hotel room, and run a series of back-to-back photo sessions. One of their most recent was, fittingly, in Paris.

"That's the whole association I have when I think of boudoir," says Boucher. "Very French,



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PORTRAITS

old-school, vintage '20s, Parisian style," a style she's noticed popping up in magazines and lingerie catalogs—classic, tasteful, elegant. "It's almost like the catalogs are no longer about the clothes, but about the shot," she says.

If the catalogs are onto it, you can bet that the client base is, too, part of which explains why The Boudoir Divas have become so popular so fast.

"People don't see how big the market is," says Boucher. "But when you look at something like Victoria's Secret, the women who spend money on lingerie from there are the same women who come to us. It just shows that our clientele is abundant." ■

See what the Divas have been up to lately, visit their blog at www.thedivasblog.com.

