

the whole
paper ...
without
the paper



now online

<http://melbourneweekly.newspaperdirect.com/>

INTERVIEW

The wedding planner

A near-disaster during her own wedding convinced Natalie Doherty to help others with their big days



JOANNE SIM

joanne.sim@fairfax.com.au

When it came to organising her nuptials six years ago, Natalie Doherty was adamant she didn't want a "normal chicken and beef wedding". Doherty and her partner, Grant, had been living in London for five years, but most of their friends and family lived in Melbourne, so the couple chose Koh Samui, Thailand as an affordable yet exotic halfway point. It was four months out from the big day and 60 guests had booked their flights when Doherty discovered the resort had lost all the paperwork.

At the time Doherty was working in a temp job in Melbourne, which she promptly quit to fly over to Thailand with bridesmaid Anna Robinson to organise the wedding again, from scratch.

"They had only done one wedding at the resort before because destination weddings weren't that big back then," Doherty says. "Some of the resorts we spoke to thought we were mad because it was really an unknown concept. This is also why it was really difficult to organise."

Despite such stressful beginnings, the wedding was a huge success. So much so that Doherty and Robinson found themselves in demand to help friends, acquaintances and friends of friends with their own destination weddings. They were so busy that Grant suggested they start up a business, and Take Us To Thailand was born. Despite present civil unrest, Thailand is becoming an increasingly popular wedding destination.

Language barriers aside, Doherty says one of the biggest hurdles for the duo has been to overcome Thai resort owners' expectations of what a wedding should look like.

"Some would show us photos of their set-ups, and they were just horrible with gold frilly tablecloths and red silk. They were just tacky," she laughs from her Prahran home. "Some people think this is the best thing ever, but not us. That's not what we do."

For their wedding clients, Doherty and Robinson organise everything from the celebrant, flowers, menu and entertainment to styling, wedding cake and drinks. Their logistical expertise comes in handy when it comes to arranging accommodation for the couple and their guests, who often choose to stay extra nights in Thailand.

"It's not like a school camp with everyone staying at the same place," Doherty says. "Some friends can't afford to stay in three- or four-star



resorts, so they might want to stay at a place for \$30 [a night] down the road, and that's fine."

After working in sales and marketing, Doherty loves having her own business, especially one that involves frequent trips to Thailand for six to eight weeks at a time.

Growing up in Apollo Bay and later Wagga Wagga and East Melbourne, Doherty's family has owned boutique hotels since she was three years old. Waiting on tables, cleaning rooms and doing laundry every day after school

livingred

**chinese & tibetan antique furniture
contemporary furniture
decor, gifts & statuary**

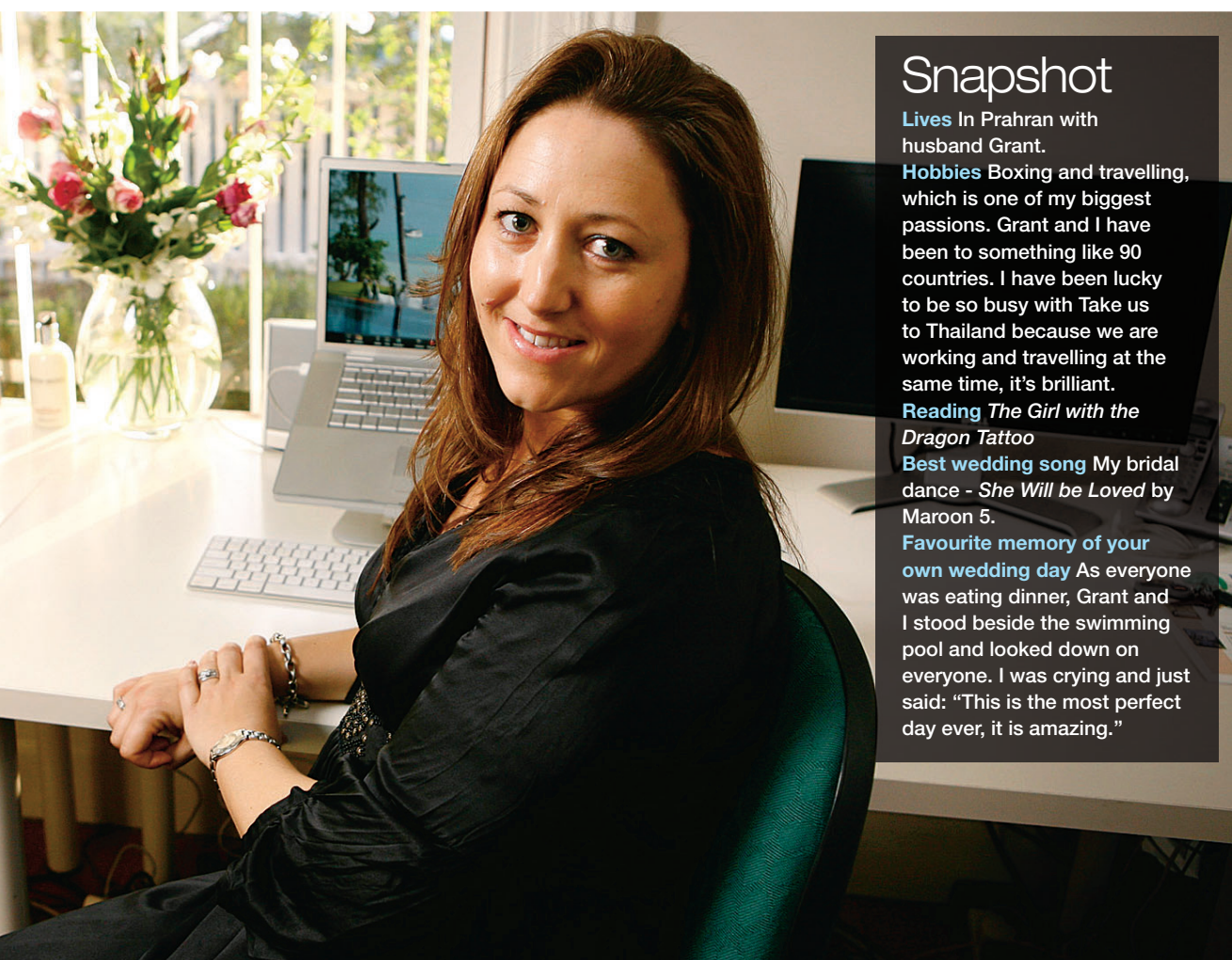
**BIRTHDAY SALE
20 - 50% OFF**

240 Hoddle Street, Abbotsford

Phone 9417 0466 www.livingred.com.au



EX6072860-v2Jun



Snapshot

Lives In Prahran with husband Grant.

Hobbies Boxing and travelling, which is one of my biggest passions. Grant and I have been to something like 90 countries. I have been lucky to be so busy with Take us to Thailand because we are working and travelling at the same time, it's brilliant.

Reading *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*

Best wedding song My bridal dance - *She Will be Loved* by Maroon 5.

Favourite memory of your own wedding day As everyone was eating dinner, Grant and I stood beside the swimming pool and looked down on everyone. I was crying and just said: "This is the most perfect day ever, it is amazing."

STEVE LIGHTFOOT

was enough to make Doherty never want to own a hotel. But it did give her a fussy appreciation of great service.

"My whole life has been about checking out hotel rooms and making sure the standards and the food is great," she says. "One time Anna and I stayed in 49 resorts in 60 days, which nearly killed us ... but we are very critical and just stick with the ones that we know we can rely on and that are beautiful."

Take Us To Thailand aims to make the wedding planning process as stress-

free for couples as possible, but the same isn't always true for Doherty and Robinson. Last July they had their first disaster when the German-born chef of the resort quit and fled to Singapore on the day of the wedding he was supposed to cater. Desperate to save face, the resort staff didn't tell Doherty and Robinson until hours before the main event.

"This was a massive problem, but luckily we are friends with one of the chefs at another resort so we went up there and he offered to help; he saved

us big time," Doherty says. "That could have been a big stuff-up, because it was a Western menu and a Thai chef wouldn't have been able to do it."

Another major challenge for the duo has been the high rotation of staff, who are often poached by new resorts offering just a few dollars extra pay per month. "With us, though, our clients have continuity," Doherty says. "They never have to worry that their paperwork will get lost, like mine." ■

For more information, visit takeustothailand.com

on budget... on time...
YOUR SATISFACTION IS OUR REWARD!



At Sherbrooke Design and Construction your satisfaction is our reward! Sherbrooke Design and Construction is pleased to introduce our end to end new home design, construction and renovation service. Our point of difference is that we can work with your time lines and budgets to offer a Guaranteed Fixed Pricing & Completion Date Contract.

To find out how Sherbrooke can Design your living solution & Build your Vision simply log on to:
www.sherbrookeconstructions.com

Ph: 9572 4139
215 Waverley Rd, East Malvern. Vic. 3145

EX6017063-v10Feb©FCNVIC

**You Can't Bore
People Into
Buying Your
Products!**

**Thursday 17 June,
6pm for 6.30-8.30pm**

Your business should stand for something in the minds of your customers and potential customers. This is your niche.

This seminar will look at cost-effective marketing that you can do tomorrow and not go broke!

Debra Templar will provide a fast-paced and stimulating evening with practical, jargon-free, cost-effective marketing ideas that work.



Where: Banquet Room
Stonnington City Centre
cnr High St and Glenferrie Road
Malvern

Tickets: \$25 (plus transaction fee)
Light refreshments provided.

Bookings: 8290 7000 or
www.chapeloffchapel.com.au

You cannot afford to miss this seminar.

Book now!



City of
STONNINGTON