

america's bride

the exclusive wedding
of
MISS AMERICA
2005
Deidre Downs

by Tracy Przybysz
photography by Frank Carnaggio

Unlike many pageant winners, Deidre Downs, 27, did not dream of being Miss America when she was a little girl. This Birmingham native instead preferred to be on the pitcher's mound during Little League baseball and playing sports, which eventually earned her a full volleyball scholarship to the University of Virginia. When Deidre's desire to focus on academics required her to relinquish her scholarship, she followed her mother's suggestion to enter a Miss Alabama pageant in hopes of winning scholarship money. After competing for five years, Deidre secured the title of Miss Alabama in 2004. The following fall, she was crowned Miss America 2005—the third Miss Alabama contestant to win the title in the pageant's 75 year history. When all was said and done, Deidre won a total of \$100,000 in scholarships—money Deidre used to fund both college and medical school costs. Deidre also won the Quality of Life Award from the Miss America Organization for her community service work with pediatric cancer. Today, Deidre is finishing her final two years of medical school at the University of Alabama and aspires to be a pediatrician.

On March 15, 2008, Deidre Downs exchanged her former titles of Miss Alabama 2004 and Miss America 2005 for a new and much-anticipated title—that of Mrs. Andrew Gunn. Alabama Weddings Magazine is pleased to present an exclusive interview and coverage of Deidre's wedding celebration!



SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Deidre Michelle Downs and
Andrew Clifton Gunn

March 15, 2008

one-to-one with
Deidre Downs

AW: Deidre, tell us how you met your spouse. What is he like?

DD: Andrew and I actually met in a history class at Samford University. We started dating the summer I won Miss Alabama and then broke up the following October. We didn't date again until after my reign as Miss America had ended and I moved back to Birmingham and started medical school. He asked me out again, and halfway through dinner, I knew I would marry him one day.

[Andrew is] very laid back--very funny--but in a quiet kind of way. When you meet him, you can instantly tell that he's a nice person. He's got such a huge heart and we have so much in common. We both like sports, history, politics, and traveling. We don't really disagree on much, and we rarely fight.

AW: How did he propose?

DD: I was shopping with my mom when Andrew called and asked her to bring me to his house after we finished. (The custom-made engagement ring he ordered had come in that day.) Mom was in on the surprise and after dropping me off, she and my best friends waited at Michael's Restaurant. After he proposed (and I, of course, accepted), we joined our friends and family for a celebratory dinner.

AW: When asked about your main challenges in planning the wedding, you mentioned the guest list and the bridesmaid dresses. Explain why.

DD: The biggest challenge we faced was narrowing the guest list. I had always wanted to have a sit down dinner, so I knew we couldn't have 500 or 600 guests unless we went with more a buffet style dinner. But I knew from the beginning that I wanted the sit down dinner--that was my dream, so we knew 300 to 400 guests would probably work instead. But we really wanted to include everybody.

The bridesmaid dresses were a difficult decision for me because I typically don't care for bridesmaid dresses. Sometimes the colors or styles aren't great, and it's difficult to pick out something that will work for girls with different tastes and different needs when it comes to finding flattering styles. I went with long black dresses with spaghetti straps. We had an after-six wedding, and long and black was in keeping with a later, formal wedding.

AW: How did you go about selecting your gown?



DD: We tried on dresses and more dresses, and at the last shop we visited, Bella Couture, we found the perfect gown! I really liked the bottom of the dress, how it flowed, its little pickups, the subtle pearl beading on the bodice. Its details weren't something that jumped out from far away, but close up the gown was intricate. As soon as I tried it on, I knew it was the dress I wanted. I could just picture myself walking down the aisle in that dress.

DD: There was a kitchen-themed luncheon, at the home of Carol Hill, a couples' party with a stock-the-bar theme, and a bridal tea, hosted by Nan Teninbaum, executive director of the Miss Alabama pageant. On Thursday before the wedding, my matron of honor and I spent the day at the spa, and that night we attended a wine and cheese get-together. The bridal luncheon was held at The Veranda, and that night the rehearsal dinner was held at Park Lane. Both were perfect venues. Kathy G catering did an outstanding job with the rehearsal dinner. The room was gorgeous and the food was incredible!

AW: What kind of bridal showers or bachelorette parties did you attend?



bridal parties

photography by Jim Grillo

photographs by Don Breland



after rehearsal dinner

The rehearsal dinner was held at Park Lane, with its overall design concept developed and executed by Kathy G Designs, the in-house design division for Kathy G & Co. The goal was to achieve a contemporary, yet elegant look through the use of a monochromatic orange palette and crisp white accent. We Rent Atlanta supplied square tables and coordinating gold chivari chairs with orange chair pads, all cleverly arranged into a checkerboard pattern throughout the room. Each table showcased a centerpiece of square wax luminaries surrounded by tulips, pincushion proteas, and rose petals. A. G. Lighting supplied the ambient and specialty lighting.

For the menu, Kathy G. coordinated the colors of each course to complement with the overall design scheme.

THE MENU

HORS D'OEUVRES

Stuffed Mushrooms with Sausage and Pecans
Cheese Display with Crackers

SALAD

Hearts of Romaine with Olives, Roasted Peppers, French Feta and Vinaigrette

DINNER

Steak and Cake-Grilled Molasses Glazed Beef Tenderloin and Lump Crab Cake over Buttermilk Mashed Potatoes, Asparagus and Lemon Buerre Blanc

DESSERT

Chocolate Lava Cake with Crème Anglaise and Berries



the wedding day

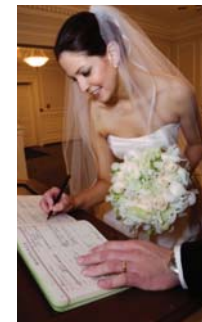
AW: Where was your wedding and reception held? Why did you select these places?

DD: Our wedding was at Canterbury Methodist Church and the reception was held at Vestavia Country Club. We visited lots of churches and kept coming back to Canterbury. It looks like it was made for weddings. Vestavia Country Club went out of its way to make us feel special.



AW: What other special touches did you include in your ceremony?

DD: For music, we had a string quartet playing during the prelude, and an organ and trumpet during the ceremony. We left the church [for the reception] in a vintage Rolls Royce named "Claude."



Deidre extends a special "thank you" to everyone who made her wedding day perfect.

Frank Carnaggio – photography

Bella Couture in Mt. Laurel – wedding dress

Kathy G & Company – rehearsal dinner at Park Lane

Main Street Productions – videography

Coats Classic Cars – limousine

Barb's Cakes – cakes

Chef David – ice sculpture

Village Press – wedding stationery
 Carol Sullivan – florist
 Christophe Jackson – pianist
 John McElroy – trumpeter
 Leigh Sherer Seirafi and David Higginbotham – vocalists
 Vestavia Country Club – reception venue
 American Flyers – band
 Misty Smith – hair & makeup
 Blue Room Salon and Spa in Mt. Laurel



the reception

AW: Tell us about the highlights of your reception.

DD: We weren't sure about the design of the cake until a few weeks before the wedding. We found a picture we liked in a bridal magazine and it turned out to be a picture of one of Barb's Cakes designs! We had lots of music: a pianist during the reception and dinner and a band for dancing afterwards.

Choosing our band, The American Flyers, was one of the best decisions we made – the music was great and they had everybody dancing!

AW: What advice would you offer other brides as they prepare for their wedding day?

DD: My advice would be to invite everyone you can. We thoroughly enjoyed visiting with our friends and family at the reception. •

