

A black and white photograph of a man in profile, facing right. He has dark, wavy hair and is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored collared shirt. The background is a soft-focus landscape, possibly a field or a beach, under a bright sky. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

*when
the moon
follows
your lead*

Pia Bayot's wedding in Montenegro shows
that with imagination, determination,
and friends and family across the globe
willing to help, no wedding dreams
are impossible. *By Sunshine Lichauco de Leon*



Photographs by *Nolte Lourens*

WHEN I WENT TO MONTENEGRO TO ATTEND MY COUSIN Pia Bayot's wedding, I thought that the magic of the event would be in the three-day celebration with the couple's two hundred closest friends and family who had traveled there from twenty-one countries. I soon realized that the true love story was what went into making the wedding the unforgettable experience that it turned out to be. Some brides hire an event planner, others embrace a "DIY -- do it yourself" attitude. For Pia's wedding to Oliver Corlette, it was the affection of those closest to her and their "everybody pitch in and do it yourself" spirit that helped the bride's every fantasy become a reality.

Planning a wedding in a foreign country where both the language and the culture are unfamiliar *and without* a wedding planner might seem like a nightmare, but Pia took it as an opportunity to demonstrate her project-manager leadership skills and push the boundaries farther. This was a lady who had a romantic notion to realize and, with both wide-eyed optimism and tenacious determination, believed that the impossible could be done with perfection.

Any successful event starts with a good plan and a clear goal, and eighteen months of engagement provided this bride the time to consult every wedding magazine, Web site, book and friend to define what her style was and what kind of ambiance she wanted to create.

Montenegro, a newly formed country in the former Yugoslavia, was chosen for its stunning landscapes but also because it would be the couple's home for the foreseeable future. They wanted to share a place that was full of natural beauty and meant a lot to both of them. Getting married outside their native countries – the Philippines and Australia – also allowed them to keep the event youthful and to limit the guest list to their closest family members and friends. Pia wanted an intimate and personal wedding in an environment of understated charm, where every guest would feel looked-after and special.

The typical wedding in Montenegro is a twenty-people affair over dinner at a restaurant. When Pia came to town and explained her plan – a welcome dinner on a terrace surrounded by rising mountains in the medieval Venetian walled city of Kotor, a wedding ceremony on a sacred islet accessible only by boat, a forty-five-minute drive up the coast for a cocktail reception, a marquis dinner and dancing at Aman Villa Milocer, and an "Aussie-style Barbie" on Aman's Queen's beach—"The Montenegrins thought I was out of my mind!"

London-based Pia's initial "wedding planning team" consisted of her mother Lisa Bayot, Irene Araneta and Bernice Ocampo, who were in the Philippines; Ollie's parents and sister in Australia; a technical director in Montenegro (for lighting, sound, etc.), the GM and staff of Aman Villa Milocer and a local travel agency (for all logistics). It seemed like the bride was conducting an or-

chestra whose different instruments were being played from several countries!

Keeping everything well coordinated and "in tune" was therefore essential. Whether scouring the neighboring countries for furniture and equipment or researching the best material to use for a tent in case of rain, Pia studied the matter as if it were the most important thing in the world at that moment. Lisa recalls, "I would wake up every day and receive at least five emails from my daughter with exact instructions on what needed to be done."

Huge folders with print-outs and cuttings of things Pia liked, and constantly evolving mood boards were essential tools to making sure everyone understood her vision. She explains, "When you don't speak the language and when they haven't done it before, a picture speaks a thousand words."

When she learned that personal relationships were important to the local people, she quickly adjusted. "You can't do things over the phone. You have to physically drive hours to see these people and show that they matter to you. Once you're on the same page, the long negotiations start."

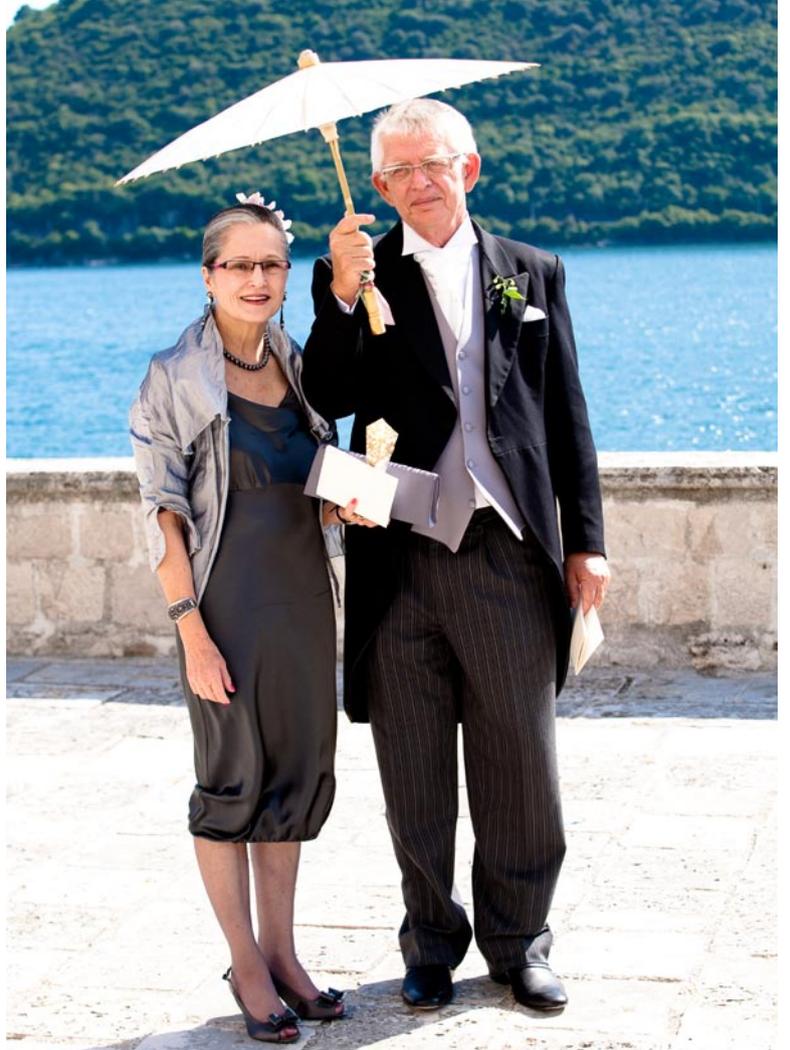
The carefully studied plans were carried out with the same meticulously thoughtful precision. Regular meetings were held during which color-coded production schedules, down to the exact minute, were handed out. Aside from including instructions such as how much space to place between items on the table settings and when each candle or light should be illuminated, there was an entire alternative backup plan in case of rain on the wedding day. When it rained buckets a few days before the wedding, pilot weather charts were used to reach the final logistical decision.

Given that very few supplies and services were available in Montenegro itself, absolutely nothing was left to chance. Pia's "Philippine team" had once reassured her about the availability of flowers: "If we get there and there is nothing, we will walk the woods and pick up flowers, don't worry." When this team received the schedule, it said: "10AM Friday, Cut branches for wild flowers..."

Pia emphasizes that her mother was a tremendous help in sourcing, producing and shipping the many items coming from the Philippines.

Behind everything used at the wedding were a story of how it was made and an adventure of how it got to where it needed to be. The printed material is just one example of how many items called for a multilayered, multinational coordinating effort. The invitations were printed in the Philippines on paper from Italy, the map insert and wedding crest were designed by Pia's parents-in-law's design company in Australia (a P inside an O with the Venetian lion, the symbol of Kotor, above it), the tissue from London, and it was all assembled with vintage ribbon from New York. The task of transporting everything from the Philippines, Europe or America called for another group of helpers to emerge—family, friends and











“abusable nonfriends” that agreed to carry an extra bag!

An important lesson Pia had to learn was how to strike a balance between delegating tasks and doing them herself. Whether it was choosing the performers who would welcome us with a colorful cultural show of traditional song and dance, finding the gypsy band to play at the reception, or driving around the woods to look for moss for table cards, there was nothing this bride would not do to make sure she would get the level of quality she sought.

A few days before the wedding, however, she learned to let go. Irene says, “Her plan worked but at the same time everyone was given a little rope to make judgment calls. Everyone understood what needed to happen, but we had our own instinct which we used to decipher what needed to be done in order to make it happen.”

Preparations may have been elaborate but there were personal touches everywhere. Guests received a welcome packet containing a “Schedule of Events” that included a list of the couple’s favorite restaurants and places to explore and a “Visitors Guide” written by the bride, which had vintage photos of Kotor Bay that she had been collecting for years. At the wedding reception, her Filipino heritage was evident in the *capiz* shell candelabras, table rings, votive lamps and chandeliers.

Loyal family friend Irene played another invaluable role—as the person Pia could rely on to pull everything together and “crisis-manage” in the days leading up to the event. Pia says, “Arriving the week before, she brought it all together, She single-handedly kept her cool while I was panicking. For her, nothing was a problem.”

The event would not have been executed so flawlessly without the countless people who were willing to do whatever it took whenever needed. As Lisa says, “We were there to help but didn’t know the extent of what we would do. We arrived with free hands.” Irene recalls how two friends in particular, Bonnet Ugarte and Sandra Medel, thought they were coming as guests. But when they saw how stressed the mother of the bride was, they volunteered to assist. Irene says, “Just before the ceremony, I ended up carrying benches to place in front of the church and Bonnet washed them!

Although that the Filipinas were just there “fluffing and prepping,” Irene says, those activities and their “soft touch” skills often came in handy in a culture that does not believe in doing things that have never been done before. She says, in the sweet voice and gestures she used to convince them, “It was our job to say, but we can try now? You will do it for me... yes?”

If you’re not sure you can rely on your florist, it’s also vital to have someone overseeing the flowers, a friend whose commitment is so solid she would even miss the wedding ceremony just to ensure the reception will be perfect. Bernice says, “When I saw everyone walk into the marquis and noticed how every detail seemed to fall into place effortlessly, there was no question—it was worth it.”

The bridesmaids were given a list of tasks to do, including putting place cards inside the envelopes the morning of the wedding and handing out hats, boas and masks to the dancing guests after dinner to “give a little extra energy to the party and allow everyone to act silly.” There was a certain energy in the air, perhaps because people had taken the time to travel to this faraway place.

The groomsmen were asked to be chivalrous. Dressed in elegant morning suits, they worked hard during the ceremony held outside Gospa od Skrpjela, a baroque church built on a man-made islet deep in the crystal-clear bay of Kotor. Aside from escorting guests off the Parisian Bateaux Mouche boat which ferried people from Kotor, the groomsmen handed them white paper parasols and fans to protect them from the hot sun. After the ceremony, when Irene saw them dutifully gathering the water bottles and missalettes left behind in the church, she observed, “Never be afraid to ask anybody for help. Contrary to what many believe, the guests do actually enjoy themselves when they are part of the organization.”

There is attention to detail and then there is “attention to detail according to Pia.” To say that this lady took care of every need her guests might have, thought of having or wished to have, is like calling a typhoon a “bit of rain.” In her mind, “Never wanting guests to be uncomfortable” meant things like providing scented cool towels, water and snacks on the bus to cool us off after the boat ride, arranging for all the women to have a pre-wedding appointment at the local hair salon, or my personal favorite—having slippers available and organized into baskets according to size, at the exact moment my feet started to hurt from dancing in heels!

Irene admits that she thought some of Pia’s concerns were “over the top” at first, but recalls the moment when she realized where Pia was coming from. “The sun had just set and I remember hearing the *capiz* chimes, meaning the wind was up. Just as the girl next to me said ‘Oooh’ accompanied by a shiver, she was greeted with a basket of white ‘pashminas’. When the girl said ‘Oh my god, what didn’t she think about?’ I understood that, from the sixty-eight shawls, the Laduree macaroons on the dessert table to the monogrammed cigar box from Pia’s brother Paco, this was a crowd that actually noticed and appreciated every detail.”

As the last songs were played and the last of us dancing guests started to fade away, I looked up and noticed that not only was the sun rising, but the full moon was just about to set into the sea in front of us. Pia’s foresight and planning had created the perfect stage for friendship, love and adventure to unfold in an effortless rhythm. As I stood there, frozen in time for a moment, the serenity I felt suddenly made the weekend seem more mystical than real. It was clear that, although it was their special day, Pia and Ollie had given us an extraordinary gift—and perhaps the moon was gifting them with something in return.

