

The Life of the Party

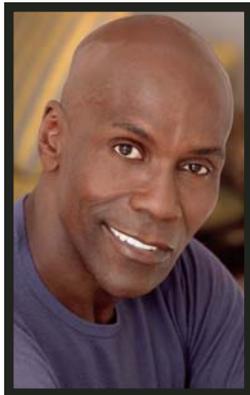
By Lana Bortolot

HIGH SOCIETY,
HOLLYWOOD ELITE
AND GLOBAL VIPs ALIKE
CALL PRESTON BAILEY
TO CREATE THEIR
SWANKY SOIRÉES.

ONE WORD more than any other infuses a conversation with Preston Bailey: love. He loves his job (event planner), he loves his city (New York) and he triple-loves—as in love, love, love—his clients (Joan, Melania, Oprah).

And what goes around in his fabulous world comes around, because Bailey's clients love him back—and invite him back. Known for his extravagant productions that come off as elegant not garish, Bailey is much in demand with A-listers on both coasts. And with his easy charm, movie-star looks and impeccable manners, it's no wonder he's quite literally, the life of the party.

"Working with celebrities is really great, and most of them call me because they want to do something a little different... they want something entertaining and out of the ordinary... something magical," Bailey says.





Donald and Melania Trump's Wedding Reception at Mar-a-Lago



Four Seasons Hotel New York

A Bailey transformation is more than fabrics and flowers: it involves builders, engineers, lighting specialists, designers and a bevy of production people.

High society, Hollywood elite and global VIPs alike call him to create their birthday parties, weddings or—in the case of Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones—refresh their homes with his signature floral arrangements.

Even renowned tough cookies are pleased time and again with Bailey, who has an ability to find the “sweet spot” and work with it—even when it’s the world’s toughest customer, *The Apprentice*’s Donald Trump.

“Donald is great to work for—his lovely and fabulous wife is his secret recipe. Melania is very level-headed and knows what her husband wants,” says Bailey, who planned their 2005 wedding at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach. “She is the one that can work with him and around him to get things done.”

A Bailey transformation is more than fabrics and flowers: it involves builders, engineers, lighting specialists, designers and a bevy of production people. There’s carpets, tents, music, visuals—everything from

tabletop to tent top—conveys Bailey’s aesthetic. A recent private event he executed in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, at 4,500 guests, was his largest project. Bailey flew to the site six weeks in advance with 20 of his key people and with the help of nearly 300 others, pulled off the event without a hitch.

“Dubai was the most exotic place I’ve worked and the resources were extraordinary. The level of entertaining there is very high, but the standards of service are very high, too. You can get anything you want or need there.”

Bailey’s story is well documented. Born in Panama, he arrived in New York City in 1968 at age 19 to work as a fashion model, eventually opening a men’s clothing store. When it closed in 1980, interior designer pal Vincent Wolfe brought Bailey into the Park Avenue homes of his clients as a floral designer.

And the rest, as they say, is history—with one notable intervention in the form of Joan Rivers. Rivers hired him for her daughter Melissa’s wedding in 1998. The well-

publicized extravaganza broke Bailey into the world of celebrity events, and it was hello, Hollywood.

To this day, Bailey credits Rivers’ “very generous back-up” for his success. “She really embraced me and introduced me to a lot of people. She is truly my angel and mentor.”

Since that auspicious beginning, Bailey’s list grew to include clients such as Uma Thurman, Donna Karan (Bailey did her daughter’s wedding in the Turks and Caicos), Liza Minelli, Matt Lauer, Laurence Fishburne and Bill Cosby.

Recently, the master planner has been exploring new cultures via new projects in places such as Gabon in West Central Africa, Colombia and the South of France. The new direction combines his love of travel and the exotic, and also feeds his imagination.

“Traveling is a great way of getting a lot of information—through museums, fashion and local culture,” he says. For him, the trips are fodder for a book he’s working on—his fourth—that he says will be world-centered, showing what design means in different cultures.

Authoring books is just another extension of his stylish empire. The first three books—best-sellers that focused on entertaining, weddings and inspirations—provide the basis for his popular show on the Oh! Oxygen network, *Preston Bailey, Mr. Fabulous*. Not just another reality show, Bailey says it has a very practical platform that people appreciate.

“There’s something about the impermanency of it that makes it very special,” he continues. “There’s a humanness about it—we don’t pretend to be perfect. Sometimes things go wrong and we show that.”

Bailey’s other projects include a partnership

with 1-800-FLOWERS.com, which features Bailey-designed arrangements, and his Signature WeddingMoons at Sandals Resorts, a series of destination wedding packages—again all bearing the Bailey touch—to Sandals’ all-inclusive resorts in the Caribbean.

When he’s not running the show, a typical day in the life of Bailey would certainly include his workout at Chelsea Piers, (three hours of training, alternating with running, swimming, cycling and yoga), taking in a play on Broadway (he attends at least two plays a week and gets some of his inspiration from the theater), and enjoying dinner either out on the town or delivered to his Gramercy Park home.

“I don’t cook, but I love to eat,” he says. Latin food is one of his favorites, and Bailey is known for his laid-back dinner parties where “I just have people over and have too much food, too much dessert.”

Bailey’s generous nature extends to two charities he supports. R Baby Foundation, dedicated to reducing infant mortality in the United States, and The HealthCare Chaplaincy, a Manhattan-based multi-faith organization that provides professional spiritual care to patients, families and staff of all faiths throughout New York City.

“They both focus on the time in a person’s



Private Residence
in Bridgehampton

“Traveling is a great way of getting a lot of information—through museums, fashion and local culture,” Bailey says.

life when they need medical assistance the most. I believe this is a very important cause that is highly ignored.”

So, what’s next for the man who seemingly does everything? Don’t look for a Preston Bailey magazine any time soon (no need:

Bailey sits on the advisory boards of two magazines and is a contributing editor to *ELLE DECOR*). For now, Bailey is content to split his time between his global projects and his adopted city, which he ranks high among his favorite places in the world. SA



Pierre Hotel,
New York City