

# LEIGH RIVERA MAKES WEDDING DREAMS A REALITY

BY Davandra Babb    Photography by Christoff Griffith

Leigh Rivera has always loved to create. In fact, for as long as she could remember, she was passionate about ‘fancy things’ and all things wedding related.

So it’s no surprise that the 29-year-old has now turned her passion into profit.

Originally from Trinidad and Tobago, Leigh is the proud owner of the business Whirlwind Events, a local wedding planning organisation.

“I always wanted to be a wedding designer. I have been doing it since I was 19 and throughout the entire time, I knew that it was a passion of mine, but I never really thought I would have been able to make it into my living. So that’s something I’m very happy about right now that I decided to turn it into a business,” she said.

She began her business in 2016 after initially starting in 2009 while living in Trinidad.

Two years into her business here in Barbados, Leigh told EASY magazine things were going great and especially liked the fact that she gets to work with a lot of international clients.

“It has been going really well. I would say

I was really well received by the Barbados events community. But most of my clients are international; I don’t work a lot with local couples.

“Planning for people that are not in Barbados is a lot easier. I don’t run the risk of being micro-managed. They are forced to trust you because they aren’t here in person,” she said.

Taking a break from a wedding set up she was doing on Fitts Village Beach in St James for the interview on Tuesday, Leigh said she believed what set her apart from other planners was the fact that she was willing to get down and dirty in order to get the job done.

“I like working hard. I’m very hands-on. I would think that’s different from other planners. I try to interact with my couples as much as possible and I try to interact with my vendors on a personal level,” she said while making sure the drapes on her arch were perfect.

And as much as it is financially rewarding to Leigh, she said she also gets genuine happiness out of her job and her ability to make couples dreams

come true on a daily basis.

“I really love being such a big part of people’s special day. It’s like I’m always reliving the most beautiful day of someone’s life. That’s very rewarding in and of itself. As a creative person, I like seeing my designs come to life, that’s very rewarding as well. To have the opportunity to create the things in my imagination and to be paid to do it,” she said with a laugh.

But as with all jobs, it doesn’t come without its fair share of challenges.

“The most challenging thing is that it’s seasonal. Barbados as a whole is an expensive destination. We aren’t just competing with other Caribbean islands for clients but international destinations as well. You have to try very hard to capture the clientele. Once you’ve passed the hurdle of them choosing Barbados, you have to make sure they pick you,” she added.

Those challenges though, have helped the bubbly down-to-earth lass to mature both personally and professionally.



Leigh Rivera acting as witness for her international clients Patrick and Jessica Adams who were married last Tuesday by Revd Elvis Goodman.



“Professionally I have grown in terms of the type of weddings and quality that I offer. I have a better standard of clients now. I have a lot more flexibility. Personally I have grown a lot in terms of accepting the fact that I don’t know everything. Everyday is a learning process – that was a very big and valuable lesson for me. Not to mention my increase in patience,” she added.

And never one to settle, Leigh said she is always thinking of ways to continue to grow her business to become the best she can be.

“My immediate goal is to grow my business. To have a more diverse set of clients and to take on bigger challenges and do things that weren’t previously done here in Barbados before like different designs and traditions. I would love to do international weddings as well,” she said.

And having benefitted from much advice, including much from her protégé and mentor renowned event designer Preston Bailey, Leigh offered her own bit of advice to young up and coming planners.

“The first bit of advice is to get some form of formal training and don’t just call yourself a planner. Do not compare yourself to someone who was doing it for a long while, because you don’t know how they struggled to start in the beginning. It’s very easy to get discouraged when you look at someone who has been doing it for ten years. But in that ten years, they would have faced similar challenges to you so you have to be aware of that as well,” she added.

#### DO RESEARCH

a wedding can be very expensive- probably the most expensive event you will ever plan. Aside from the major costs like catering and photography, other small items add up, so what sounds like a large sum of \$30 000 can be spent quickly!

#### STICK TO BUDGET

Unfortunately, what’s usually left off of the stunning Pinterest images are the price tags. In planning your wedding, think about what you care most about, and prioritise those areas. Having the best and most expensive service or package in each category would definitely throw your budget out the window.

#### BE WILLING TO COMPROMISE

think of the wedding details as a crash course in a series of compromising- an important skill in your upcoming marriage. You might have your heart set on a “toes in the sand” wedding ceremony, but it would be inaccessible to his dear Aunt Esther, so you may have to settle for a beach front location.

#### TRUST THE WEDDING PLANNER

Leave the work to them and you enjoy your wedding! Basically this is the entire point of hiring a wedding professional- you don’t need to call the vendors or worry about setting up place cards. During the planning process, try keeping up with decisions and payments in a timely fashion, and spend your day preparing for your walk down the aisle!