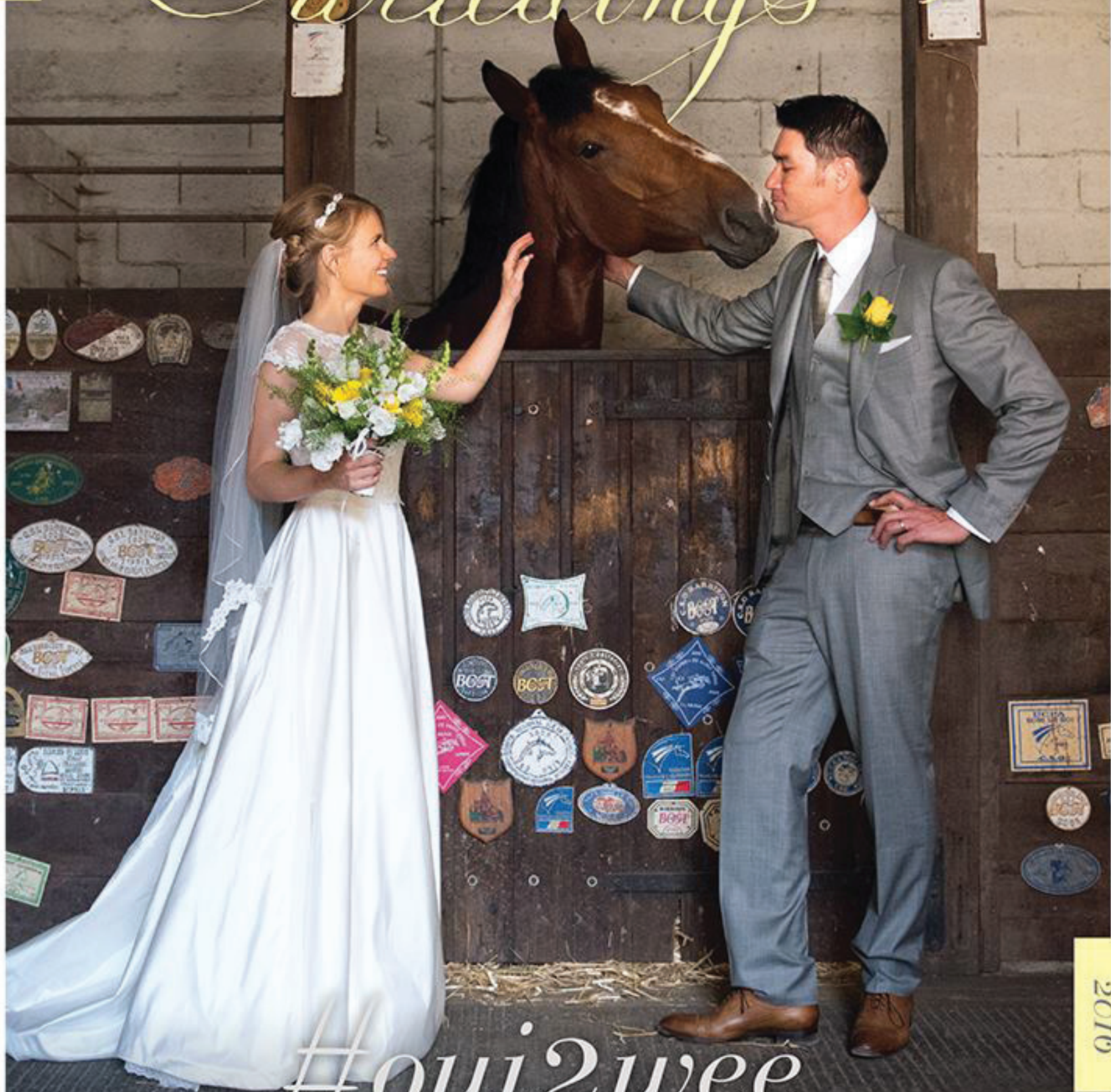


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Volume 1



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2016

Beautiful Balance

BLENDING TWO LIFE PASSIONS

Michelle Durpetti comes from a long, proud line of entrepreneurs. As a third generation member of a hardworking Italian American family, Michelle draws much of her inspiration from her grandfather, Gene Michelotti, who founded the renowned Chicago steakhouse Gene & Georgetti in 1941, owned and operated by her family for 75 years. In 2015, the Durpetti family expanded the business, opening a second restaurant in neighboring Rosemont, IL, and affording Michelle the opportunity to join the family business as managing partner of brand development; adding another dimension to the young professional's busy schedule. She also owns and runs Michelle Durpetti Events (MDE), a sought-after wedding and event-planning firm. Despite a demanding career, Michelle finds time to fulfill her passion for horses, riding and competing with Chicago-based trainers Greg Franklin and Caitlyn Shiels at Canterbury Farm.



Photo © Frank Ishman



Left: Michelle and her horse Kenya, photo © Wendy Aull; Right (top to bottom): Michelle and her horse Serafina competing, photo © Alison Hartwell Photography; Michelle worked with Carasco Photography to organize and style a wedding-themed photoshoot at Canterbury Farm in Hampshire, IL

Michelle's family instilled in her a 'good, old-fashioned work ethic' and a commitment to excellence – a phrase coined by her father, Tony Durpetti, who is both her advisor and confidante in all things business and horses – which has extended itself to other areas of Michelle's life as well. The 37-year-old returned to a lifelong passion for riding seven years ago after facing a health issue that reminded her of the importance of having balance in life, and what a blessing it is to be active and able to enjoy all that life has to offer.

Michelle wears many hats professionally and is also active with several charities that are special to her. Her zeal for her career and an enviable talent for multi-tasking allow her to excel in many aspects of a remarkably busy life, for which she is very grateful.

"My grandfather always said, 'The harder I work, the luckier I get,' and I find his words to be so true," Michelle stated. "I see that same work ethic continue with my parents, and my cousin Rich (Michelle's co-managing partner in the Rosemont expansion)."

Michelle's love for horses began at an early age, as she took her first riding lesson when she was nine years old and was immediately enamored

with the sport and with the 15-hand Appaloosa "Keebler," a leased horse on which she won her first championship.

"It was the best experience; I was in love!" Michelle said. "Grooming the horse, bathing him, learning to care for him, and spending my summer days at the barn with friends was perfect. I learned the value of hard work and the importance of practice. I have such wonderful memories from those days."

One year after she began riding, Michelle moved to a more competitive program, training through her junior years with Katie Kappler, then moving to trainer Lynn Jayne as she became an amateur.

"Through riding with Katie and her brother Chris, I learned foundational elements and horsemanship that have stayed with me my entire life," Michelle detailed. "And, after a wonderful junior experience with them, it was with Lynn that I learned the true meaning of discipline and the value of flatwork. I am very grateful to have been able to learn from some of the best and most talented in the business, and I am blessed to have both of these women as mentors to this day."

After high school, Michelle majored in communications and Italian at Dominican

University in River Forest, IL, and then took a hiatus from riding as she moved to attend university in Florence, Italy. After working at major firms Jasculca Terman & Associates, and Edelman, in public relations and event planning, Michelle was grateful for the experience both jobs gave her – but realized by the age of 26 that the corporate life was not for her.

She began freelancing as an events specialist, producing various private events including birthdays, weddings, and the 60th and 65th anniversary celebrations of Gene & Georgetti. She had found her professional niche, and in 2008, Michelle Durpetti Events was officially formed. Since its inception, Michelle has planned and produced over 350 weddings and events, including some of Chicago's most notable, celebrity-studded occasions.

For her, the foundation of the business has never changed; the business is based on the principle that event planners must be good sources of creative ideas combined with practical experience, flexibility, and know-how to manage an event from beginning to end. "In a nutshell, this knowledge is why a client should choose to invest in a planner," Michelle said. "Our attention to detail, and the fact that we speak the language of event and wedding planning daily, is what



A second gorgeous photo from the creative wedding-themed photoshoot at Canterbury Farm in Hampshire, IL, photo © Carasco Photography

makes us a resource and tool for each and every one of our clients."

Two years after starting MDE, at the age of 30, Michelle decided it was time to get back to riding after almost eight years out of the saddle. With a recommendation from an old friend, she scheduled her first lesson with trainer Greg Franklin at Canterbury Farm.

Based in Hampshire, IL, Canterbury Farm is a full-service hunter/jumper training and show facility situated on 40 beautiful acres, owned and operated by the Franklin family. The professional atmosphere, combined with a close-knit family feel, made Michelle feel right at home. While still busy with business, she began to make more time to ride and soon found her way back to the show ring.

Michelle now drives 52 miles from the city to the farm three to four times per week to train with her five horses – Serafina, Kenya, Frisco, Moody Blues, and Lucca. In addition to her friendship with Greg, Michelle has formed a great relationship with co-trainer Caitlyn Shiels, who is also the professional rider at Canterbury Farm. "Greg was, and is, very patient and really helped me find my way back to riding. Within six months, I was back to showing," Michelle

detailed. "The love I have for the horses goes down deep into my very soul, so I was thrilled to have the privilege again."

Michelle credits Greg and Caitlyn with keeping her horses happy, fit, and healthy, even when she has to step away for weeks at a time due to her business. When showing in Ocala this winter, Michelle said she was able to take flat lessons and then go straight into the show ring and be competitive in the adult hunters and jumpers.

"Greg and Caitlyn know how to play to my strengths while focusing on the areas I can improve upon; and they do the same with my horses, all of whom have huge personalities and different needs. I never have to worry about their care," she explained. "They love my horses as if they were their own, plain and simple, and they are really compassionate with me – a quintessential amateur who deals with some anxiety when those jumps start to get big," Michelle joked.

While continuing to balance riding and work, Michelle has also found fun ways to combine her two passions creatively and philanthropically. She has worked with many talented vendors in Chicago, and once had the opportunity to collaborate with the skilled team from Carasco Photography for a stunning wedding-inspired

creative shoot at Canterbury Farm. "We used local gown designer Alice Padrul's gowns, and had some incredible expertise involved. It was a magical day to combine my love of all things equestrian and bridal," Michelle recalled.

She has also produced the annual "Derby Day" luncheon at Showplace Production's Spring Spectacular Horse Show, held annually at Lamplight Equestrian Center in Wayne, IL. The Estate catered and Michelle designed the event for all of the exhibitors and guests. Michelle said, "To produce a major event at a horse show where I have grown up competing is such fun! Pat Boyle and the Showplace Team are great to work with, and Caitlyn won the national hunter derby last year, which was a delightful bonus!"

Michelle served three years on the committee of Chicago Equestrians for a Cause, a non-profit that showcases high-level equestrian events with the purpose of raising funds for charitable institutions in the Chicago area. The Chicago Hunter Derby is the organization's highlight event each fall. MDE provided event production and design consulting for all three years, and Michelle served as marketing and PR chair as well.

"It was such a joy to see the event grow from a one-day event to a three-day long weekend



One of the breathtaking, glamorous events organized by Michelle Durpetti Events, photo © Carasco Photography

in the country' that received local and national press, and featured some of the country's top horse and rider teams," Michelle explained. "Bringing that gorgeous 400-plus person tent to life was a challenge logistically and creatively, and I relished it. The opportunity to give back to the community and pay forward my many blessings through that event was truly a gift, and being that close to some of the country's top horse and rider teams was such a treat!"

With her horses healthy and happy under the expert care of Greg Franklin and Caitlyn Shiels, and her personal and family businesses continuing to thrive and grow, Michelle looks forward to the future while balancing riding and work. She has recently committed some of her time and expertise to the Chicago chapter of Wish Upon a Wedding, a national non-profit organization dedicated to granting wedding "wishes" to couples facing life altering circumstances. Michelle was a founding member of the Chicago board several years ago, serving as event chair, and was honored to take on the role of president of this extraordinary organization.

"Riding teaches me every day to be present in the moment and to focus on the task at hand," she stated. "The horses need my full attention, just as I expect them to give me theirs, and this is a fantastic

exercise for someone like me who is always moving in multiple directions at any moment."

"This summer, and moving forward, I hope to continue to produce weddings for my clients that make them feel happy and surrounded by love and family, and not overshadowed by details (because they know I'm handling them)," Michelle said of her goals. "I love each and every one of my clients, and anytime I have the opportunity to work with couples to plan their weddings, it really is a privilege for me. I genuinely delight in event production and could not imagine myself doing anything else."

Although everyone occasionally has "those days," doing a job that she loves so much never feels like work for Michelle, and the lessons she learns from her riding continue to help her professionally. "What I love about riding competitively is that one day you are a blue ribbon winner and the next, you could literally fall on your behind. It is never about how many times you fall, but how many times you get up – there is no better metaphor for life," Michelle stated.

"This job can be stressful – it's a big responsibility to produce a wedding or non-profit event – it takes patience, attention to detail, and the ability to find a solution within

any challenge that presents itself, while not losing your cool, which is not entirely dissimilar to riding," she pointed out. "Learning to communicate with my horses, without words and without anger, carries over when working with clients and people in general. Learning the value of patience, procedure, and practice with the horses applies to my everyday life. What they bring to my life is invaluable."

She continued, "In my work, communication is essential – with my team, with my clients, and with each and every talented vendor and creative partner we work alongside. Weddings are a symphony of details and collaboration, and when everyone can play their role to the best of their ability, that day becomes a most gorgeous work of art. My main hope in all areas of my life is to have happy, healthy horses with a quality of life that they deserve; to have my family healthy; and to be able to do the work that I love. My father always says that 'you are only as good as the team around you,' and I am so fortunate to have the best teams at MDE, and my family's business, and at Canterbury. These are people who support me through frustrations, help me grow, and together we celebrate many good things. That is really what it is all about for me. The accolades and horse shows are all really sweet icing on a pretty fantastic cake!" **HS**