



Las Vegas-based Cactus Collective Weddings provides multiple settings for couples to choose from when planning their micro wedding or elopement.

PHOTOGRAPHERS ENCAPSULATE TREND OF **MICRO-WEDDINGS** **AND ELOPEMENTS**

By Jacy Lewis

Micro-weddings and elopements have become a trend this year because of cancellations of large group gatherings but some photographers see it as a trend and have started to cater their business around it. Desert micro-weddings and elopements are providing couples with minimalist backgrounds for their nuptial setting.

Marfa-based wedding photographer Jona Christina Davis moved to Marfa two years ago from Austin. She said in an email interview that she has been photographing weddings for 15 years, and it's her one true passion. The wedding industry has definitely changed, and smaller gatherings have become the trend over larger weddings.

"That's in part to state mandates, but I also

think that the current climate has put things into perspective for my clients," she said. "When it comes down to it, weddings are truly about two people in love, deciding to spend the rest of their lives together. A global pandemic can make you question a lot and put priorities into perspective."

She has had to adapt her business strategy to offer packaging for intimate weddings and elopements. She isn't booking large-scale weddings outside of the West Texas area and is avoiding weddings that are indoors where it's a challenge to socially distance.

"I've really focused on offering what keeps my clients and the health and welfare of their loved ones, and myself, in mind," she said.

She said people who have booked with her have made an array of decisions to postpone a year, elope or simply cancel for the time being. Before the coronavirus hit, she had started brainstorming with Cara Crossley

from Open Roads Floral, also located in Marfa, about all-inclusive elopements.

"Marfa truly is a magical place to have a wedding, and although there were large-scale weddings offered here, we felt there was a market for more intimate events," she said. "Open Road Florals and I started talking with Jaqueline from Corte Del Norte, who owns La Tierra, a gorgeous property on the outskirts of town. Jaqueline mentioned a beautiful hilltop spot overlooking one of the most beautiful landscapes. Cara and I went to check it out and instantly fell in love."

They decided to offer an all-in-one package to couples, which makes it easier for them, especially now when they are going through a lot of change. The elopement packages are geared toward about 10 people. The packages include ceremony location (La Tierra), photography (by Jona Christina), florals (by Open Roads Florals), the officiant and food

and drink (by Para Llevar). The vendors are Marfa-based, so clients get an authentic taste of West Texas for their event, she said.

Davis said she and the other vendors are protecting their community while operating their businesses, which is why they are limiting elopements to small numbers.

“The most important thing for us to let people know, is that Marfa is still at its heart a small community,” she said. “We are working hard to be as mindful as possible during this time, which is why we are limiting elopements to small numbers. We love our town and want to continue to keep it a safe place for everyone to enjoy.”

McKenzi Taylor, founder and CEO of Las Vegas-based Cactus Collective Weddings, operates on a larger scale.

She photographed her first wedding in South Dakota when she was 16 and started doing wedding photography full time beginning about 11 years ago. She created Cactus Collective Weddings, a micro-wedding and elopement business, in 2017. She specializes in elopements around Las Vegas.

“As a photographer, I was working with ministers regularly and we were doing these weddings anyway. Then the photography aspect, it seems like photographers end up handling a lot of these other little add-ons couples want,” she said in a phone interview. “I actually eloped in Red Rock Canyon and I knew that there’s got to be people like me who wanted a pretty destination, great

Marfa photographer Jona Christina Davis has an elopement and micro-wedding business in collaboration with other local vendors.



Want to elope to Marfa?

photography and a meaningful ceremony.”

She said the transition to the elopement business started with her elopement. A lot of people have started looking into eloping during the pandemic because large gatherings have been prohibited or deemed less safe. Taylor said people want to be married and don't want to wait until the pandemic ends, but they are delaying their big party dates to be able to celebrate with others.

Location curation has been something Taylor has done over time with specific permitting and working with landowners for use of private land, for which they are paid. Couples can choose from a variety of packages with different location options including Valley of Fire, Red Rock Resort and Casino, Palms Apex, Cactus Joe's, Red Rock Canyon, Eldorado Canyon, Dry Lake Bed and Floyd Lamb Park.

“I would call these more of an intimate wedding or a micro-wedding because people think elopement as running away,” she said. “Most of these locations we can have about 50 guests – some locations more – but 50 guests and under is definitely our sweet spot. People



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are definitely planning these a year or so in advance, but we can definitely accommodate a two-week window.”

She started as a photography-based company, while other companies might focus more on planning the wedding. She schedules ceremonies to capture the best lighting for images. Packages also include ministers, location, bouquet and boutonniere. Cactus Collective Weddings offers preferred vendors for transportation, hair and makeup service, and if couples need help planning a reception, she can suggest vendors.

“We can essentially help them with as little or as much as they really need,” said Taylor, who also said that many of the couples

booking her service are from Texas.

Cactus Collective Weddings has partnered with Leave No Trace because she thinks the event industry has a waste problem.

“The events industry has a long way to go when it comes to protecting the environment and promoting sustainable events,” she said. “A lot of things get thrown away at the end of a wedding. I'm really passionate about providing intimate weddings where they use the natural backdrop as the decor and our flowers have some sustainable components. We try to include a succulent or two in them so they can be replanted for couples later. There is a low-carbon footprint for the vendors we have on site.” **m**

MFB PUTS SAFETY FIRST IN RETURN TO STUDIO, STAGE

The Midland Festival Ballet has been taking a different approach to the studio and the stage this year. The company has implemented safety measures to keep dancers, faculty and staff safe from COVID-19 as the dancers return to rehearsing in person. This year's performances also will have a different look than the company's traditional performances at the Wagner Noel Performing Arts Center. MFB's annual "The Nutcracker" stage production has been canceled. In its place, the company will create and produce a film about the story of Clara and the Nutcracker, according to a press release. The company is planning Vision 2020: virtual as well as live performances for the rest of the 2020 season. The company offered virtual classes through MFB At Home in April and May, and a limited number of advanced students and company dancers returned to the studio on June 1; all classes were kept to 10 or fewer students, said executive director Rachel Ritter.

"They have been incredibly dedicated and are ready to adhere to the safety protocols if it means they can be in the studio dancing," she said. "Our company, especially, is used to dancing between 20 to 30 hours each week together and working in small groups with masks is a big change. I have been very impressed with the dancers' ability to adapt and take on this year's challenges with positive attitudes and a great deal of flexibility."

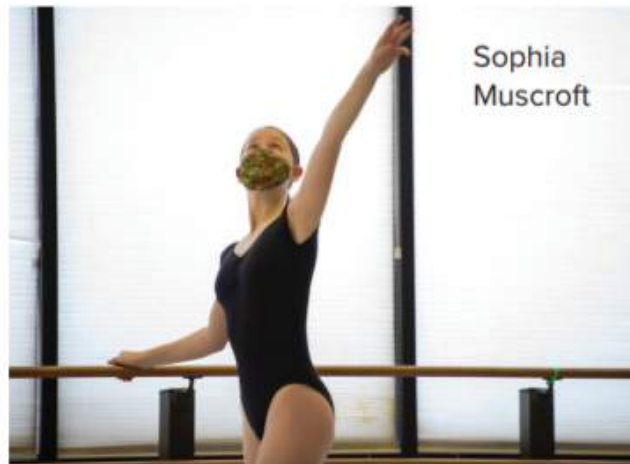
TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JACY LEWIS



Dancers practice July 21 at the Midland Festival Ballet studio on North Midkiff Road.



Mia Pressler



Sophia Muscroft



Addison Garcia



Bella Jones