



In conversation with CLAIRE HANSON

Samantha Stonehouse

“Do you want a makeup artist, or someone that does your makeup?”

There are so many added benefits to having a professional makeup artist arrive on your wedding day to do your makeup and hair. Let's not forget they can also do all your bridal party including the mothers. That sense of calm they bring, the techniques and vast array of products they have that will make you look effortlessly fresh, beautiful and radiant is all worth its weight in gold if you ask us.

Many of us have never had the privilege of booking one before, or know little about what to look for other than a good portfolio of past work. Hiring the right makeup artist will take a huge weight off your shoulders, trust us on this. There are makeup artists and there are people that do makeup.



Claire Hanson is the Creative Director of MACH, (which stands for Makeup Artist Claire Hanson) we catch up with Claire at her studio in the Cotswolds to find out what's involved with being a makeup artist other than having a wonderful selection of products, kit and a portfolio as there is so, so much more to it.

When you meet Claire you feel the passion and love she has for the industry within seconds – she lives and breathes it. It's hard to believe that Claire originally wanted to be a nanny, a real-life Mary Poppins spending her days with children. Training as a nursery nurse when she was 16, the reality of that chosen career soon hit her and she moved over into the world of makeup, getting her first job on the Shu Uemura counter in Harvey Nichols.

Claire has been a celebrity makeup and hair artist for over twenty years and began her career in London aged 19. In her early twenties, Claire worked on many prestigious events including London Fashion Week and in no time at all became a makeup designer on some of the UK's leading fashion brands. Her first big break into the music industry was in the late-90s for pop band S Club 7 which then opened more doors into the music industry. Claire started to tour the world with some major international artists such as Jon Bon Jovi and has worked her magic artist wand on talent such as Kylie, Kristan Scott Thomas, Sienna Miller and Donatella Versace, but it was her close working relationship with Mr Lionel Richie which began as his groomer in 2006 and now takes her worldwide as his personal assistant, which she still does to this day.

Sarah Haywood, luxury wedding planner and author of two critically acclaimed and top-selling books – *Wedding Bible* and *Wedding Bible Planner* – instructed Claire as her go-to expert for hair and makeup. This gained her an ever greater profile in the private sector, launching her appearance into the wedding industry as well as private individuals and leading hotels in the

world that all now use Claire's services for their events, parties and celebrations.

Fast forward ten years, Claire saw a huge gap in the market to create an agency to help bring professionally trained makeup artists into the workplace following endless requests for guidance, mentoring and the need for artists' business knowledge to grow. Successfully raising and maintaining standards in the industry, Claire and her management team, which includes her long standing partner Dominique Ventura and office manager Holly Kennedy, have helped launch the careers of artists, trained where needed, listened with open arms and guided people on their own pathway to success.

Since we launched OX Weddings in 2016, we have worked with Claire and her team of makeup artists on different locations at several of our fashion shoots and felt it was long overdue to share Claire's inspiring career with our readers – Claire is one admirable and modest woman!

"We launched MACH in 2007," she begins, "and in 12 years, we have met and interviewed more than 5,000 girls. Being a makeup artist isn't just about the skill, it's the kit you have, your own personal presentation and demeanour." The phone rings and Holly picks up the call, it is a bride making a wedding enquiry. The bride-to-be is asked where she is getting married, how many are in the party, what kind of makeup was she looking to have, approximate timings – the list of questions goes on.

"There is never that problem of availability as we have over 1,000 individually assessed, trained and qualified artists, beauty and holistic therapists who work for us. For every wedding we have booked, we will always have a backup artist, just in case there was ever an emergency. All our MACH girls are hair and makeup trained and we work hard to pair our brides up with the right makeup artist. For example we have artists from Italy, France and Asia, so if we have brides that are getting married abroad we may pair up an Italian artist that could be going out to Italy. Once a bride is happy to book with us, it starts with a makeup trial. They can come here to our studio in Lechlade or we can visit their home. We then contact their wedding suppliers – the photographer, venue and florist – to introduce ourselves.

"Detail is so important; these pre-introductions iron out any potential issues and we can get a real feel for the day. On the actual wedding day we work on the basis of 1½ to 1¾ hours for brides. We always start by blow-drying the bride's hair – we would prep hair and then do makeup – and the bride is always the last person that we would work on. If we were booked to do several girls, then there would be more than one artist; the key artist would do the brides and the mothers of the bride and groom, and then the second artist would do the bridesmaids and a further three or four people. We always stay on after the ceremony for little checks and touch-ups, we like to reset the veil if they have one and make sure that their mascara hasn't smudged or if they need some more lip gloss applying."

At this point in our conversation I was keen to backtrack and talk more about Lionel Ritchie and how she got the position of his PA. "I worked for a hair and makeup agency in London who represented me," she says. "We did a lot of commercial and music work. That was when I was working with the likes of S Club and Blue. It was back to back for five years and I was



exhausted. I dropped everything and went to live in France for a year in Provence where we have a house. I regathered myself and moved back to Oxford. I got back in touch with various music companies and then I was introduced to Lionel on a shoot. Even though it was a man, there was still prep to do – from cleansing to mattifying. Before I met him, I did my research and found out where he was from so if he spoke to me, I had some connection with him. When the shoot started, I stood close by and was there if he needed me, tweaking his cuff, making sure that he looked immaculate – he's all about detail too. Following on from the shoot they employed me as his PA, ten years later we still work together, and I go out to the States every two or three months."

It's very easy to see that Claire is all about detail – her home is immaculate. Nothing, not a single thing, is out of place and this transpires into Claire's work. "When we started the business, we advertised nationally for hair and makeup artists; we received 2,000 CVs which we filtered down to 200. Then out of 200 we took 10 girls on. We continue to expand as we work with more wedding planners, and venues. We receive CVs every day and see 12 girls each week, which includes beauticians and holistic therapists. Every two years we reassess every artist and therapist that works under us, we check their kit and make sure they are still operating at an exceptionally high standard that we passed them on – touch wood we've never had to let anyone go."

I ask Claire what advice she can share to brides who are looking for a wedding makeup artist. "My advice would always be to meet before you book anyone. Pick up the phone and have an initial conversation, have a chat on the phone and ask to see some photos of past work. We will always send a profile of the artist to the bride with around 12 photos of their work. Your wedding day is hugely personal; it shouldn't be about the price point, as you'll always find someone cheaper. I will leave you with a lasting question – do you want a makeup artist or someone that does your makeup? There is a big difference."

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