

# Astra

## Featured Bride



Bride: **Kate Monahan**  
Groom: **Grant Riddell**  
Date of Wedding: **April 9, 2010**



**Background to the wedding:** Our wedding was all about gathering our family and friends for a "destination" wedding at the beachside town of Whitianga in the Coromandel Peninsula. We wanted our wedding to reflect our mutual love of the outdoors and celebrate beautiful New Zealand scenery, food and wine.

The ceremony was on Front Beach, a pretty, secluded white sandy beach looking out onto Maramarotara Bay and Shakespeare Cliff. It's also just a few minutes ferry ride from Whitianga.

As part of the experience our wedding guests (and bridal party) travelled to the beach via the iconic Whitianga Ferry, which was established in 1895.

As part of the Coromandel theme guests drank local Mercury Bay Estate wines (from Cooks Beach) and tables at the reception were named after local sights such as Cathedral Cove and Shakespeare Cliff. We included New Zealand music by Holly Smith and Gin Wigmore during our ceremony, and Tiki Taane for our first dance song.

**How long had you been together?** Five years. It was a case of opposites attract; I was the "city girl", and had just moved back home to Hamilton after eight years of living overseas in New York and Japan. Grant was the quintessential country boy, grew up on a Waikato farm and was working as an agricultural contractor when we met. It was a blind date set up by my old high school friend Cathy, who was married to Grant's younger brother Stuart. Despite being chalk and cheese, we became good friends, went on about 10 "dates" before we realised we had fallen for each other, and the rest was history.

We share a love of travelling and the outdoors, and each year we go on road trips, staying at beachside camps, hiking and kayaking and swimming.





**Tell us about the proposal:** Grant took me out to dinner at a great restaurant. I had no idea he was about to propose. We ordered drinks and dinner, then he pulled out a beautiful box from his jacket pocket and handed it to me asking me to marry him. Of course I said yes. My parents live just around the block so after dinner we raced over to tell them, and followed up with lots of phone calls to family around New Zealand and my siblings in London.

**Why was your groom “the one”?** From when we first met we clicked. He just gets me and we can talk about anything. We are ying and yang to each other; even though we have different interests we have the same core values and together we enhance each other. Grant is a great listener, very patient and kind, wise and funny. He makes me laugh. He is attentive and thoughtful in many practical ways (whether it's checking the oil in my car or folding up washing). We are best friends and enjoy spending time together. He's a great uncle to his nieces and nephews, and now we have a baby, is proving to be a wonderful dad.

What was the feeling you wanted for your wedding day: Relaxed, like a beach holiday for our guests, and a day of celebrating in the sun beside the beautiful ocean. Casual elegance was key – we had beautiful food and wine, a great band, and wanted our friends and family to have a great day and a great weekend.

**On the day:**

What was your most memorable moment: Standing on the beach with Grant as we said our vows with all of our friends and family looking on. It was a beautiful, sunny blue-sky April day; absolutely perfect in every way. Many of our friends and family had pitched in to decorate the beach with shells and a drift wood arch that we said our vows under, and it was so special to have our nearest and dearest there.

We passed around our rings in a paua shell and everyone blessed them or made a wish for our future, and we were announced husband and wife to the ukulele version of Somewhere Over the Rainbow by Hawaiian singer Israel Kamakawiwo'ole.

Our first dance was also a highlight. We'd taken dance lessons, and our dance routine (to Tiki Taane's Always On My Mind) finished with a dip. We were nervous, but it went perfectly on the night and Grant didn't drop me!

Listening to Grant's speech was also memorable and touching and unexpected. I knew he was struggling to put his thoughts on paper, and what he said blew me away.





**What would you change if you did it again?**

Nothing, it was a perfect day.

**What would you give as advice or recommend to other brides?**

Pick and choose what you spend money on. Pick several things that are important to you and invest in those, such as the perfect dress, food and special wine, or a kick-ass band.

Accept help from creative family and friends offering to make the cake (my aunt made the wedding cake using

a special family recipe), with accessories (my mother made a wrist bag for me to carry on the day) or with invites or stationery (my friend, a graphic designer, hand drew flax motifs on table signs).

Just relax, don't sweat the small stuff and go with the flow on the day. Try to enjoy and appreciate all the special moments in the ceremony and reception, because the whole day flies. Take time to look around at family and friends, and soak up all those great moments and memories.

Have a theme and try to carry it through, whether it's a colour or mood or motif. We set the theme with our invitations (from Tauranga company Design Juice) featuring a flax design, which let our guests know there would be a beach/New Zealand theme.

Start brain storming ideas and planning early on. Compile pictures from wedding or fashion magazines, and download and save any photos you like from wedding websites.

**Were there any disasters you want to share?**

After arriving in Whitianga we found that the Hamilton registry office had given us the wrong marriage license, for another couple. Luckily our lovely wedding celebrant Denise Irvine saved the day, rushing in to the Hamilton office to get a new copy the day before the wedding. Crisis averted (for us); I don't know what happened for the other couple who presumably got our marriage license.





The dramas didn't end there however. We managed to cause a fire service call out on the day of the wedding. As the bridesmaids and I were getting ready at our apartment in Whitianga, the fire alarms went off, with a loud wail that could be heard across the township calling all the volunteer fire fighters. One of our guests in an adjacent apartment had burnt toast, and with all the apartment doors open on our floor (people were milling in and out as we got ready), the smoke triggered a hallway fire alarm, which was a priority call out for the fire service. The Whitianga volunteer firemen arrived on their truck, rushed up and tried to evacuate us. It was only about 90 minutes before the wedding and the makeup artist hadn't started my makeup yet so I really didn't want to leave and had a bridezilla moment. Luckily they gave the building the all clear within 10 minutes and we were allowed back in. That all sorted, we got ready and got to the ceremony (almost on time)!

#### **The gown:**

When did you try on the gown: I'd scoured wedding stores in Hamilton, Auckland and Tauranga, as well as online, looking for the perfect dress. After trying on lots of different styles I knew what suited my figure and colouring; an A-line, strapless dress with ruching across the waist/hips, in winter white. The Christina Rossi dress was one of the last gowns I tried on after searching for a couple of months and it was perfect.

**Who chose it for you?** I chose it with help from my mum, my aunt and a few friends.

What made it special for you: I loved the simplicity and elegance of the dress. The A-line shape and strapless sweetheart neckline flattered my figure, and white suited my skin tone (I'd initially wanted an ivory or cream but those tones were too yellow for my complexion – blue-based shades like winter white looked much better I found, after trying on lots of dresses). It had a beautiful lace-up back to nip in the waist, so was very flattering. The taffeta fabric was perfect for the beach as it didn't stain or damage easily, unlike lace or silk. It also had beautiful crystal beading under the bustline and scattered on the skirt train, which to me looked like drops of water – perfect for the beach setting. The cathedral length veil was dramatic and simple, and great for photos as there was a slight breeze on the beach.

**What are you going to do with it now?** It's being kept at my mum's house in storage. I haven't decided if I will sell it or keep it long term. I don't quite have the heart to part with it yet.

#### **Providers:**

**Gown:** Christina Rossi (914 gown in white) from Astra Bridal (Hamilton) with a cathedral length (66 inch) piped edge single tier veil (Astra Bridal).

**Flower girl Dresses:** All white dresses with tulle underskirt and white satin sash from Astra Bridal (B03 dress) in Hamilton. These looked really cute on Grant's nieces Tamsin and Hannah. Their mums got them little white cardigans to wear over the top to keep them warm on the ferry ride over to the ceremony.

**Mens' Suits:** Dorset Suit Hire, Hamilton.

**Hair:** Evolve Hair & Day Spa, Whitianga.

**Makeup:** Hannah Carter, Kitzo Hair and Spa in Hamilton. After having a disastrous hair and makeup trial with another makeup artist two weeks before the wedding, I had to find someone else quickly. Hannah kindly stepped in, travelling from Hamilton to help on the day. She is one of the Waikato's top young stylists and did an amazing job of the bridal party's makeup.

**Flowers:** Divine Flowers (formerly of Whitianga, now based in nearby Tairua). I wanted full blown roses and hydrangeas in my bouquet and I saw an idea in a flower bouquet book for setting small shells and starfish into bouquets. She also put together white Singapore orchids to insert for my hair. We used dark purple and lilac lisianthus for the tables. The flower girls scattered hydrangea petals on the beach.

**Location:** Front Beach, Whitianga (ceremony) and reception at Salt Restaurant, Whitianga

**Catering:** Salt Restaurant, Whitianga Hotel. The food and service at Salt was amazing. Donna from Salt went above and beyond to organise everything; her team decorated the venue with dozens of white, lilac and purple paper lanterns I sourced from Hong Kong, and set up vases and candles.

**Entertainment:** Sharmin (an amazing rock band from Tauranga)

**Stationery:** Wedding invitations by Design Juice (from Tauranga)

**Photography:** Shane Morton (from Hamilton)

**Transport:** Whitianga Ferry

**Celebrant:** Denise Irvine

