Big Island, Intimate Nuptials

A floral designer conjures her ceremony to include two families' deep ties to Hawai'i.

By **Debra Prinzing**
Photography by **Sarah Anderson** and **Anna Pacheco**

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"Haina Kai" is the family estate of architect **Nick Civitano**, and when he and his fiancée, **Alison Grace Higgins**, owner of **Grace Flowers Hawaii**, began to plan their wedding, the beautiful Big Island property and its sweeping ocean views was their first choice for a ceremony location.

The residential scale and tricky access to the secluded bluff where the groom's parents established a family compound in early 2000s dictated that the couple's vows and a celebratory dinner to follow would be both intimate and set outdoors. And since the bride is one of the busiest wedding and event designers on the Big Island, she wanted to create all the florals herself, with a smallish wedding that seemed doable.

"While the venue is just 15 minutes from my shop in Honokaa, it's in a very remote part of the Hamakua Coast," Higgins said, adding, "So we only had our immediate family for the wedding ceremony."

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The date: Aug. 2, 2018.

The palette: The bride's love of purple combined with the groom's love of yellow. She added orange hues and orchid-pink to the scheme and used ombré styling to blend a warm-to-cool gradient.

The vibe: "Old Hawaii," recalling a time when couples exchanged leis with one another and with family members.

"My family members each gave me a strand to wear, and Nick's family members each gave him leis to wear, and then we also gave all of them leis to wear," Higgins explains. Knowing she would be adorned with an abundance of fresh flowers inspired her to select a simple dress that wouldn't compete with the tropical and temperate-growing blooms – sourced primarily from Hawaii flower farms and nurseries – that she wore in her hair, carried in her hands and draped around her neck.

Higgins designed the entire event herself, as both a personal expression and because the rest of her Grace Flowers Hawaii team members were deployed elsewhere, producing island weddings for paying clients. "Plus, when my brides find out that their florist just got married, they have an expectation – and I didn't want to disappoint there," she confides.

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The designer was drawn to the idea of dangling strands of flowers – larger versions of bloom-strung leis – as a way to showcase the myriad botanical options available from local growers.

She hung a curtain of strands made of white lilies, purple and white crown flowers *(Calotropis gigantea)* and rosebuds from a 7-foot-diameter circle arch – designed and built by Civitano – and suspended shorter chains of flowers from a copper-hued table arbor that stretched along the length of the reception's farm tables.

The bride and groom also adopted a new tradition, one that Higgins and Grace Flowers Hawaii's manager **Nicole Cordier** call a "union boa." The idea of a 10-foot-long floral garland that can be draped over the shoulders of the couple and closed with ribbon originally came from an oversized strand they created for a photoshoot.

"Nicole arrived at the location, and there was no tree on which to hang the garland, so she draped it over the bride and groom and sent me pictures with the hashtag: #unionboa. We offer it to our clients now, in addition to bride and groom leis," explained Higgins.

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The bride's hand-tied bouquet incorporated her husband's favorite callas in a terra-cotta-orange hue combined with a luxurious collection of tropical foliages and local orchids. "We hardly ever get *Cattleyas*, but one of my growers happened to have them available, so I had to say yes. The bouquet had four types of *Cattleyas*, some *Phalaenopsis* and three varieties of *Cymbidiums*. I also added gorgeous local *Dahlias*," the bride detailed.

Higgins and Civitano said their vows with siblings and parents as witnesses before officiant (and friend) **Kahu Tom**. Their "altar" was a lavish circular arch that framed the ocean beyond and paid homage to local flowers, fruits, palms and coconuts.

The wedding meal, alfresco style, of course, offered Higgins another blank canvas to embellish. She commissioned her father and brother (who also served as musician for the ceremony) to build trestle-style farm tables and construct the copper-hued table arbor. She hand-dyed textiles with turmeric to make the golden table runner. Civitano's sister baked the wedding cake and decorated it with fruits and flowers. Local glass blowers created a custom set of dinner plates and bowls for the occasion, incorporating splashes of orchid purple and vivid yellow across the surface.

"The look I was going for was to create a wow factor with flowers," Higgins says. "Our wedding was intimate and private, and it ended up being just gorgeous." ■

DETAILS

Grace Flowers Hawaii, *graceflowershawaii.com*, @graceflowershawaii

VENDORS

Hair/Makeup: Hearts & Stars Salon and Day Spa
Music: Ryan "Higgs" Higgins and Cameron Hart
Minister: Kahu Tom Fernandez
Rentals: Big Island Tents
Cake: The Happy Crumb by Dominique Civitano
Food: Color Catering
Dress: BHLDN
Plates and oil lamps: Big Island Glass Gallery
Flower Sources: ESP Nursery, Hawaiian Isle Flowers, J&D Farm, Mayesh Wholesale Florist (Los Angeles), Pacific Floral Exchange, Poppas Orchids, Shogun Hawaii, Orchidpeople of Hawaii and Virgin Farms.

1) A perfect setting at the groom's family estate created the highly personal venue for the Big Island ceremony of floral designer Alison Grace Higgins and architect Nick Civitano.

2) Joined together by the polychromatic union boa, the couple exchanged rings and floral leis.

3) Higgins and Civitano pose for wedding photography, set in a tropical forest at the edge of Haina Kai.

4) The couple and their immediate family dined alfresco style at a fruit-and-floral-laden table just steps from the property's bluff. Higgins commissioned her father and brother to construct the tables and arbor for the wedding supper.

5) A detail of the table arbor shows how it is strung with a plethora of blooms and hanging globes for lighting.

6 & 9) Locally grown orchids and *Dahlias* are a highlight of the lavish bridal bouquet, designed by Higgins.

7) Higgins holds the union boa in front of the circle arch, giving a sense of scale of the lush property and the dramatic contrast between tropical blooms and green vegetation.

8) The bridal hairpiece features pale yellow *Cymbidium* orchids and threaded botanical strands that echo flowers in leis around her neck.

10) Like everything else chosen for their ceremony, the couple celebrated the island's character in the tablescape, including hand-blown glass plates gifted to them by Hugh Jenkins and Stephanie Ross of Big Island Glass.

11) Wrapped in the flora of their Hawaiian home, Alison Grace Higgins and Nick Civitano symbolize and commemorate their love with local flowers.