



## Alice Eaton meets professional magician Andrew Murray to find out what tricks he has up his sleeve for wedding day entertainment

IT used to be that tying the knot would involve a simple church ceremony followed by a meal.

But as the barriers continue to be pushed on where and how you can get married, with some brides and grooms choosing to exchange nuptials in a capsule on the Millennium Eye or while plummeting at 120 mph from an aeroplane, couples are constantly on the look-out for ways to ensure their wedding stands out from the rest of the matrimonial crowd.

An increasingly popular choice among newly-weds is to hire a magician to entertain their guests during the reception.

I met up with a rising star in the world of magic, Andrew Murray, a full-time professional magician who is in constant demand for weddings, private parties, corporate events and trade shows.

Andrew is hot stuff in the world of magic. He recently scooped The Magic Circle's much-coveted Close-Up Magician of the Year Award the magician's equivalent of the Oscars and will be the reigning champion when the Circle celebrates its centenary celebrations in July.

*"It is becoming very popular to have a magician at your wedding,"* says Andrew who is 31 and lives in Southgate with his wife and six-month-old son.

"I am often hired to entertain guests during the reception when the bride and groom are off having their photograph taken. A lot of the time, the wedding group don't know each other, so drawing them into a magic act helps to thaw out the atmosphere.

*"What I usually do is approach a group and ask if I can show them an effect (trick). Soon, others have gathered around and, by the time I finish, it has given them all a common focus to talk about. Usually when I leave, there is a real hustle and bustle in the room."*

Andrew got the magic bug at the age of 11 when he saw a friend performing magic tricks at a summer camp. By the time he was 13, he was reading every magic book going and had begun taking lessons from a professional magician.

*"While other kids went off to their piano lessons, I was hurrying to my lessons with a bag full of magic tricks."*

Although he is reticent to admit it, Andrew spent hours of his teenage years standing in front of a mirror, practising and perfecting the moves to ensure his effects looked as natural as possible.

*"As a magician, you have to critically analyse your performance the way you hold your hands, breathe and talk. If it doesn't look natural, it immediately telegraphs to the audience that something dodgy is going on. The skill is to engage people so that they are distracted away from what is happening in my hand."*

There are different types of magic that magicians specialise in: mind-reading, illusion (David Copperfield), escapology (made famous by Houdini) and close-up magic involving such props as cards, coins and bottles. As well as his close-up work, Andrew also performs a cabaret show where he uses psychological techniques to read what members of the audience are thinking. To keep his act fresh, Andrew is constantly working on new and original effects but only shares his thoughts with a close-knit group of people.

*"My long suffering family have sat through hundreds of effects," says Andrew. "I also have a close group of magician friends who I share my ideas with but they can only use them with my permission. This is an unspoken etiquette among magicians but one that unfortunately not everyone follows. People have been known to rip off other magicians' effects and sell them, so I only have a trusted group I share ideas with."*

I ask Andrew to show me the kind of magic he has got up his sleeve. The first effect he shows me involves a pack of cards, where I pick a card and write my name on it in permanent black marker. After some deft shuffling and before I know it, Andrew has somehow retrieved the card from the pack and presented it to me tightly clamped between his teeth a trick that leaves me giggling with disbelief and demanding to know how he did it. As with all magicians, Andrew will never reveal the secrets behind his act.

*"The rule in The Magic Circle is never to explain the secrets of magic in the public domain otherwise the art of magic dies. Magicians have been kicked out of the Circle for doing that," Andrew warns.*

To follow, he demonstrates one of his mind-reading effects. Handing me a book, he asks me to select a page at random and memorise the word in the top left-hand page (checking at all times that he is unable to see it). He then proceeds to read my mind and tell me not only how many letters are in the word and what letter I chose to pick at random from the word when asked, but he even goes on to write the word itself, correctly, on a pad of paper.

It is an effect that leaves me bewildered, breathless and determined to hire him like a shot when I decide to take the plunge into wedded bliss!