



# The things they do for love

**Katrina Lobley** meets the cupids staffing the front desk.

**M**ark Peyton is hardly the world's greatest romantic. Yet the Sofitel Sydney Wentworth chief concierge is becoming a dab hand at composing love notes for guests who simply can't think what to write to the love of their life.

"People ring me and say, 'G'day mate, I want some flowers put in the room. It's our anniversary next Friday,'" Peyton says. "You'll be, 'What sort of flowers and what would you like to spend on flowers? Now a card – what would you like the card to say?' They say, 'Oh, I don't know – you put something down'.

"I'll say, 'I love you?' or 'Happy anniversary, darling?' and they say, 'Yeah, anything like that'. I think perhaps they're a bit embarrassed saying it to me [but for them] it's this big spend on a night in a five-star hotel in the city, so I'll always stick a few words in there if I don't think it's nice enough. I may flower it – not too lovey-dovey if he's not lovey-dovey, you can't be too obvious. But it's all about reading people and what they want."

Over his 20 years as Wentworth concierge, during which time he has rubbed shoulders with celebrities such as Audrey Hepburn, Sammy Davis Jnr and Rolf Harris, Peyton has applied the perfect finishing touches to many a marriage proposal. He just wishes some nervous boyfriends would give him more notice when they want him to help out. "Some people plan it six months ahead if it's a complex arrangement or something very special but some will ring you on Thursday and say, 'I'm wanting to propose on Friday night – got any ideas?' And you think, 'Blimey'.

"I have to admit I'm not the most romantic person but, being a concierge, you have to think outside the square. There are the obvious chocolate-dipped strawberries, the rose petals in the room, the champagne. Some people go out to dinner but want the room set for when they pop the question.

"They walk through the lobby at the end of the day and raise one eyebrow at you and you raise your eyebrow at them. He's looking for me to be confident and not give him one of those startled looks like, 'Oh, it was tonight!'"

A pre-warned concierge can also organise a great restaurant table for a proposal. "I'll ring the restaurant manager and say, 'Special one – can you look after them for me? It looks like it's going to be a proposal,'" Peyton says. "We've had a ring put in a

bread roll – that was a funny one because it took ages before the girl started to rip it open.

"The guy knew she would because she loves bread rolls but I think it was the whole fancy affair of this particular restaurant."

The Hilton Melbourne South Wharf, on the banks of the Yarra, opened only in April but it's already been the scene of one memorable proposal.

Bob Eagles, the man on the end of the "Magic" button on the hotel's phone system, took the call from the guy with a proposal on his mind.

"The gent had actually stayed with us before," Eagles says. "He stayed in 1702 – one of our relaxation suites – and wanted to get that again. He said, 'I want to organise something for my girlfriend'. He was a bit hesitant and I said, 'If you wish, you can bring in your own things and we can set that up in the room for you'.

**'Some will ring on Thursday and say, I want to propose ... got any ideas?' Mark Peyton**



"He said, 'Can I drop off fresh rose petals and a pair of binoculars?' He asked me to trail the rose petals from the doorway to the bedroom area and to place the binoculars on the TV unit. Then he said, 'The reason is I'm going to propose to my girlfriend. My friends are going to be standing on Spencer Street Bridge and when I give them the word by sending a text message, they'll drop this banner [reading 'Will you marry me?']'.

"I believe how it went down is he asked her to look out the window with the binoculars, his friends dropped the banner and he was actually on bended knee behind her holding the ring.

"I spoke to him later that afternoon and said, 'How did it all go?' He said, 'It went fantastic – she said yes.'"

Red rose petals might help set the scene for romance but Mark Peyton has one thing to say about them on behalf of hotel housekeepers everywhere: please remember, they stain white bedlinen. "You'd like people – before anything happens – to brush them off the bed," he says. "Rose petals cause us a little bit of grief sometimes."

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