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## The £100k firework displays seeing the super rich into the New Year

Ahead of bonfire night, meet the big-league firework expert that masterminds ten-minute displays for £100,000

By Marieta Rojas Agüero

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Dazzling displays of fireworks in the private gardens of mansions and palaces across the world are tales of one-upmanship. From the pyro-chrysanthemums and cracklers whistling and tumbling above Frogmore House at Harry and Meghan’s 2018 wedding reception to the interminable displays of New Year’s Eve, nothing says celebration like a night sky bursting with fireworks.

And in 2020, pyrotechnics have never been more relevant, owing to the fact that they thrive in the wide open spaces that are left for us to congregate in amidst renewed restrictions. At least these grandiose displays will be a surefire highlight of the festive season, while nearly everything else risks cancellation.

There are numerous things one can do with pyrotechnics, as Serena Foyle, owner of pyromusical production company Foyle Fireworks can attest. Her clients, ranging from wealthy Londoners to pop stars and foreign billionaires, have requested everything from three-minute shows, to longer 20-minute extravaganzas for public competitions and events.

In many cases, the private shows will be just as opulent, if not more so, than public ones, with clients easily spending more than £100,000 on a ten-minute show. “The more the budget we have to play with the bigger we can go,” says Foyle, who's firework displays begin at £10,000.



Foyle uses combinations of comets and shells in The Grange, Hampshire | CREDIT: Pyro Productions

This can mean rows and rows of comets, the smaller fireworks that look like shooting stars, in criss-crossing patterns, and shells, the larger explosions that resemble flowers, lighting up the sky in myriad hues. Foyle also uses less traditional and more bespoke effects, such as messages written in light and armies of floating lanterns.

“They’re nothing like what you buy as a member of the public,” Foyle says of the custom fireworks her designers create. “They’re much more exciting; rather than a firework just being pink, they’ll do fuschia pink, or salmon pink, or baby pink.”



A firework display designed by Foyle for a wedding in Scotland | CREDIT: Kate Hopewell-Smith

Foyle keeps an arsenal of bespoke fireworks at hand, as her clients often require last minute arrangements. In one case, a client called with five-days notice to commission a show laden with heart-shaped effects for his girlfriend's birthday.

“We had so much in stock, but not enough for what we needed because he wanted a crazy quantity,” says Foyle. Nevertheless, she managed to secure the arsenal in time for her client to helicopter them over to the private estate he'd booked for the ten-minute event.



Red shells at one of Foyle's shows with Jubilee Fireworks in the Philippines in 2013

In many cases, Foyle's clients own the estates over which her work unfolds. While ample room is needed to ensure the safety of the viewers, the beauty of such bountiful land helps amplify the show. One of Foyle's preferred locations has a balcony which is elevated out over the lake, so that guests can see the fireworks reflected on the water. In another location, the valley surrounding the estate makes it seem as though the show is framed like a painting.

Foyle is no stranger to using her surroundings to her advantage. Last summer, she co opted the entire sound system of the city of Monaco to play the music for the Art en Ciels competition, the Oscars of the firework industry, which she won with Sirotechnics, a fireworks company.



Fireworks explode over a marquee at a show Foyle designed for a wedding | CREDIT: Sam Churchill

While professional shows such as this can run for 20 minutes, private clients will not usually want more than 15 minutes. Foyle has designed firework displays that last a mere three to four minutes. This may not seem like much to ask, but these requests can cost between £40,000 to £50,000. In one case, Foyle designed a show that enveloped a transparent wedding marquee, but the eyes of the guests were on the dancing couple within. In many instances, her clients view her displays “like background music,” Foyle says.

In others, however, patrons assign considerable weight to the power of Foyle’s displays. “We were contacted by someone to create a show for him to win back his estranged wife,” she says. Foyle’s client requested the soundtrack be based on their honeymoon in Italy, and left Foyle to do the rest.



Foyle's display with Sirotechnics at the Art en Ciels competition in Monaco | CREDIT: Judi Cheeseman

“He was doing this all from afar,” she says, “he didn’t even fly in to be there.” A car was arranged to pick the client’s wife up, and to bring her back from the rented estate once the fireworks had worked their magic. “I felt like a marriage counsellor, I felt responsible to win her back!”

Not all events are that momentous, however. Foyle has catered to too many parties to count, with themes ranging from the roaring twenties to the 80s, with music to suit them all. Accompanying music is a priority for Foyle, who explains that due to the size of her displays, it can easily be drowned out. “It’s nearly always at the point where the music is getting bigger and bigger, it’s becoming sort of a climactic point, and then the fireworks are also getting bigger and bigger,” she says.



The Art en Ciels display in Monaco

To combat this situation, Foyle budgets for the sound systems separately, and will usually rent music-festival-quality equipment for the entire night for ten-minute’s use. When not owned by the person requesting the display, estates too, are rented for the entire night, although her clients zoom off in their helicopters and sports cars as soon as the show is over.

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