



Personal Touches

Get creative, and have a wedding everybody will remember

By Amy Halloran

Every wedding is part of a continuum, an imaginary wedding march, if you will, of couples stretching back through the history of legal mating. Yet each wedding also belongs solely to the particular pair involved. How can you respect traditions and also keep your wedding yours?



Creativity is the key. Sage graduate Karen McMahon and her husband chose the Rosamond Gifford Zoo in Syracuse for their ceremony and reception. The couple wanted an outdoor wedding and liked supporting the zoo. Guests were given eco-chocolate treats as favors, and got to mingle with the animals during cocktail hour.

Aquariums and natural history museums make great locations, too. Couples marry under sea turtles and the yawning maws of dinosaurs. If you choose such a site, however, make sure the terms of use are clear; a wedding at an art museum had an unexpected twist because guests were not allowed access to the galleries, as the couple had assumed would be the case.

People who are in love with the outdoors often find great ways to show their love for each other. Mountaintop weddings with the wedding party and guests in full ski gear are not as rare as you might think. Big snow machines can bring those intimidated by the chairlift to the ceremony. Hikers could draw dedicated pals to a favorite peak; there are plenty of officiants ready to literally go the extra mile. One couple married at a summer camp. Guests stayed in bunks and the wedding weekend was full of activities like waterskiing, softball and tennis.

Boats are a classic place to get married, but how about a boat on the Erie Canal, or a trip on the Battenkill railroad? Beaches are beautiful settings, and at least one adventurous couple got married at 7 AM, and served guests a breakfast buffet.

What if the great indoors appeals to you? Think of what you love to do with your love, and build your wedding around that. A couple crazy for classic films had a graphic designer use their images and names on a reprise of an *It's a Wonderful Life* poster; the design was used for the invitation, where guests were asked to wear black and white.

Ecologically minded foodies might choose a palate of locally grown foods for the first meal they share with family and friends. The truly devoted might ask their favorite farmer to host the ceremony and festivities. Since wedding season conflicts with the harvest, that might be the only way to get your farmer to attend. There are rural wedding sites, however, already manicured and primed to present the spectacle of a wedding.

Weddings are a kind of theater. There is a script of rituals you can incorporate into what you do, or you can write the entire day from scratch and set the stage for your shared life. My husband is involved with dance theater, so he took this thought to heart. We had a small ceremony, and two receptions, a picnic at Grafton State Park for my family and friends, and an audience participation play in our Seattle backyard. A friend ignited effigies of our single selves, and we crowned each other king and queen of our hearts.

However, if you and your mate are interested in a standard celebration, there are lots of little ways to go wild. Put cookie cutters or G.I. Joes on top of your wedding cake. Give your guests bath treats and massage oil for danced-out feet. Give gag toys, as one Albany couple did. Artifacts keep surfacing in my house: a taped together whoopee cushion, popping rubber toys that jumped behind the fridge.

Personalized printed matter, such as a romance novel starring the bride and groom, newspaper templates ready for customization, or wedding programs studded with details about the couple, are just a click away. A couple of

newspaper reporters made a special edition for their wedding, filled with stories penned by writer friends, and the document has been spied years later on friends' bookshelves.

Invitations and centerpieces are other areas where you can easily stray from the norm. How about making wedding tickets for invitations? Fully functioning piñatas decorated tables at a Seattle wedding. Fortune cookies can be filled with individualized messages. Forsake the multi-tiered wedding cake and offer a stack of glass jars full of candy.

The theme common to these variations is personalization. All the elements of a wedding—location, vows, food, favors, outfits—can be specialized to become emblems of the people involved rather than representations of a model. If you can take liberties with the form, do. Your efforts will stand up in people's memories, a document to the commitment you are asking your guests to witness.

My sister speaks fondly of one wedding. People got to know each other while staying at the bed-and-breakfast where the wedding and reception were held. There was no military timing to events. The weekend felt like it was about the people gathered, not just the couple. And that, I think, is a truly creative achievement.