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ALL YOUR QUESTIONS

By Kate E. Stephenson



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Easy
EVENT-PLANNING:



Event coordination, especially wedding planning, can be stressful. There are so many factors to consider, choices to make, and people to please. It's difficult to know exactly where to start. But with an abundance of restaurants, caterers, banquet halls, specialty venues, and vendors in the Hudson Valley, there is an answer for every need. We invited the professionals to answer your most frequently asked questions. Here's everything you need to know for your next big bash.

WHERE TO START

Do you recommend hiring a wedding or party planner or can I easily plan my wedding without one?

Melinda Gillespie, Hilton Garden Inn (25 Westage Dr., Fishkill; 845-896-7100; www.hiltongardeninn3.hilton.com):

Unless you are planning something like a destination wedding, we suggest you plan your special day yourself. Remember that you have many resources like *TheKnot.com* to review venues and services. Don't forget you have your bridal party to help you plan your special day. Half the fun is going through it.

How do I calculate my budget for my wedding/event?

Charles Fells, Artist's Palate (307 Main St., Poughkeepsie; 845-482-8074; www.theartistspalate.biz):

Most people consider venue, transportation, and other details first. But guests remember and judge an event by the food, so start there. Meet with your caterer to discuss your options and the associated fees. Per plate rates often only refer to food with charges for staff and clean up tacked on at the end. This can turn your \$60 plate into

\$185 plate easily. Ask for an all-inclusive price to accurately gauge the cost of your dinner service. Then, match venue and other expenditures to that standard.

What are the most important things to keep in mind when choosing a wedding/event venue?

Margaret Brower, The Grandview (176 Rinaldi Blvd., Poughkeepsie; 845-486-4700; www.grandviewevents.com):

As a couple, think of the number of guests you are inviting. Most venues have minimum guarantees. Be comfortable with your minimum. Don't book a venue feeling pressured about the number of guests you need to have. Ask about different options. If your guests exceed the limit of your perfect venue, remember that 15 to 20 percent of guests reply regrets. Although that might seem high, it is usually right on the money.

What is a reasonable distance to ask people to drive? How far away is too far away?

James Chapman, The Rhinecliff Hotel (4 Grinnell St., Rhinecliff; 845-876-0590; www.therhinecliff.com):

Two hours is about the limit that's polite. Three hours is becoming something of an overland expedition which is a bit much to expect of your guests.

How do I decide the kind of space I need for my ceremony, cocktail hour and reception?

That's a very personal choice, it depends on the feel you are looking for. Do you want to be outside for some part of the celebration, do you want water, or mountains nearby? Do you want a classic banquet room feel, or do you prefer some-

thing different, perhaps more rustic? It's best to tour a bunch of different venues to help you discover for yourself what's important to you.

When should I start searching for a wedding dress or get a tuxedo fitted?

Sarah Sahawneh, Villa Borghese (70 Widmer Rd., Wappingers Falls; 845-297-8207; www.thevillaborghese.com):

Keep in mind wedding dresses can take up to nine months to ship. Allow yourself ample time to choose, order, receive, and alter your gown (or change your mind). If possible, purchase your gown at least 12 months in advance. Tuxedos can be fitted more quickly, but tailors still need time to ensure the proper fit. There is a bridal vendor for every budget and personality — take the time to find the right professionals to work with you.

MAKING IT MEMORABLE

What is the most important factor to consider to make my event fabulous?

Charles Fells, Artist's Palate:

Understand your group! Creativity is wonderful but if your guests don't appreciate it, the event won't have that fabulous feel. Understand the expectations of your party. That isn't to say you have to please everyone — impossible. Instead please yourself, and make some allowances for your most important guests. The newest catering trend incorporates ethnic flavors and traditions. A professional event team can find ways to seamlessly integrate cultural notes into your event to make the event uniquely you.

What makes a wedding or event extraordinary?

Margaret Brower, The Grandview:

The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little "extra." Weddings are memorable when a couple's love inspires their guests. Your food and drink selections can be personal choices that reflect you as a couple. If you met at an Italian restaurant and drank wine all night, maybe that's a station theme you can incorporate into your cocktail hour. Every couple has a story. Tell your planner your story, so you can share that magic with your guests.

What's the best way to ensure my guests have a wonderful time at my reception?

Jeanette Davis, Emmett's Castle At Blue Hill (285 Blue Hill Rd., Pearl River; 845-735-3504; www.emmettscastle.com):

A buffet encourages guests to move around the room. Exploring the hot and cold assortments, guests naturally start conversations about the food and wedding. Instant friendships can start



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at the prime rib carving station. Also, guests in motion tend to stay in motion, heading to the dance floor as they decide on dessert. As a recent bride, I chose a buffet-style reception at Emmett's Castle because I wanted my guests to enjoy themselves.

I have a limited budget. Is an elegant, sophisticated wedding out of my reach? Or can I afford the wedding of my dreams?

Theresa Browne, Crowne Plaza Hotel-Suffern (3 Executive Blvd., Suffern; 845-357-4800; www.crowneplaza.com):

Yes, you can certainly have an elegant, sophisticated wedding on a limited budget. Focus on the food, drinks, and entertainment. Spending a little extra on these three key ingredients will make for a memorable experience. Create a delicious signature drink or signature appetizer. Incorporate simple centerpieces with candles to create an intimate cozy atmosphere. No matter the budget, if the bride and groom are having a good time all of their guest will too.

How do I create a sophisticated, elegant wedding party while also keeping the affair lively, festive and fun?

The best way to create a sophisticated reception is to keep it simple. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is to upgrade your table linens. Instead of trying to bring the room together with just your centerpieces, coordinate linens to match your flower arrangements — just don't get carried away with too many colors. Add character to your affair by reflecting the couple's distinctive personality. Use photos as table numbers and give favors meaningful to you as a couple.

Is it possible to give my small wedding reception elegance and sophistication?

Joseph Wilson, Joseph's Steakhouse (728 Violet Ave., Hyde Park; 845-473-2333; www.josephs-steakhouse.com):

With a smaller guest list everything is possible. First, calculate your budget. Then create your guest list — and cut it by 20 percent. (We always invite more than we need and pay for it.) Most importantly, focus on the details:

- Tablescapes: Tables are seen first. Your linens, silverware, place settings, centerpieces, etc. make a difference.
- Cake: Designing the cake to match your theme creates a focal point.
- Food and Music: If these are great, the event is a success.

What kinds of activities should I consider to keep my wedding interesting and fun?

Sarah Sahawneh, Villa Borghese:

There are so many ways to increase the fun factor of your wedding with fun extras. The most popular right now are photo booths—they are an interactive activity that allows your guests to create a keepsake for you (or themselves). But, the possibilities are only limited by your imagination. The Villa Borghese offers professional event planners who can coordinate customized and personalized activities to help you celebrate in unique style.

How can I make my rehearsal dinner a special event for both families?

Jeanette Davis, Emmett's Castle At Blue Hill:

The most important factor is to encourage family members to get to know one another. With a sit-down dinner, your guests don't have the

opportunity to walk around and mingle. Consider a festive but informal buffet or outside barbeque overlooking the golf greens. Emmet's Castle offers a variety of settings that allow you to enjoy great food, successfully accomplish the goal of rehearsing but also encourage your family to talk and interact.

THE VENUE

How important is the venue to a wedding? Should I take into consideration the surrounding area?

Tracy McNally, Historic Huguenot Street (88 Huguenot St., New Paltz; 845-255-1660; www.huguenotstreet.org):

Couples want their nuptials to be unique and memorable, but the truth is in five years most weddings are forgotten — unless there is something truly extraordinary about the event. An unusual venue can be the key to creating that spectacular moment that guests will remember for a lifetime. Historic Huguenot Street, recognized as one of the oldest authentic streets in the United States, offers a stunning backdrop and the chance to introduce your guests to a piece of American history.

When planning an outside wedding, what are the most important factors to consider?

The vista. There is little more important than ensuring the 360 degree view is stunningly beautiful. The power of place should not be underplayed. Not only will a picturesque panorama impress your guests but it can save you money. With seven historic structures built in the early 18th Century, every angle of an outdoor Huguenot Street wedding is filled with history, architecture and landscaped grounds. With these surroundings there's no need to invest in expensive flower arrangements or ornamentation. The place speaks for itself.

I'm not exactly sure how many guests I'm having. How can I find the perfect location?

Melinda Gillespie, Hilton Garden Inn:

Remember that on average, brides will see about 10 percent of their invite list not be able to attend. Keep that in mind when picking a venue. When possible, look for a room that has flexibility in the layout. This gives you some breathing room in changing up your floor plan, if needed.

Should I have a backup plan for my outdoor event?

Liz Morris, Bear Mountain Inn (55 Hessian Dr., Bear Mountain; 845-786-2731; www.visitbearmountain.com):



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Rain plans are an absolute must for any outdoor event—even if your plans include “waiting it out.” But beware; waiting is an inconvenience to your guests, may not be an available option for your venue, and also challenges vendors — particularly caterers, who sometimes cannot hold food (like that scrumptious filet mignon you’ve ordered) for long periods of time. Even if your venue includes a surcharge for this, it’s most certainly worth the peace of mind.

What are the steps I should take to accommodate friends and family who have traveled far distances to attend my wedding?

Emily Glass, Diamond Mills Hotel (25 S. Partition St., Saugerties; 845-247-0700; www.diamondmillshotel.com):

Offering your guests overnight accommodations is essential, as many people use weddings as an opportunity for a weekend getaway. Once you confirm your event date, coordinate a room block with a hotel immediately. Not only does a preferred hotel with a room block save your guests the hassle of making travel plans, but it shows them you appreciate their effort to attend. Our suggestion: Choose a reception venue like Diamond Mills that has a hotel onsite.

I would like to plan a destination wedding. How do I determine if that's the right option? Is it appropriate to ask family to travel?

Roy Benich, Le Chambord (2737 Rte. 52, Hopewell Junction; 845-221-1941; www.lechambord.com):

The average travel time to a wedding is one hour. A special destination can often be found within that timeframe. First, decide what kind of setting you want — that will eliminate 90 percent of the unwanted options. Research and make an appointment to tour locations that fit your criteria. Then consider the features. For instance, Le Chambord caters to one wedding per date. There is no other bride on the premises; we are dedicated solely to your event.

THE MENU

The cocktail hour at events always seem to be the best. How can the dinner be made as exciting and delicious as the cocktail hour?

Mary Millian, Puccini Ristorante (22 Garden St., Rhinebeck; 845-876-3055; www.puccini-rhinebeck.com):

The cocktail hour usually steals the show because of the variety and length. When the cocktail hour has a dozen options and lasts an hour, your guests feast with their eyes and stom-

achs. Before dinner, they're full. Try shortening cocktail hour and serving four to six small hors d'oeuvres. Then offer your guests more options for dinner, four instead of two. And of course, ensure the presentation is as tasteful as the food is delicious.

Chicken and steak are the usual choices. Are there any other easy options to make my affair different?

Seafood, fish, and pasta are versatile choices to consider. Instead of steak, you might also consider lamb or veal; and pork is a delicious substitute for chicken. However, you can certainly opt for the traditional chicken and beef — just do them differently. Chicken can be prepared so many ways besides baking, and beef is more than just steak. Explore the full range of your options. Your menu is only limited by your imagination.

Should I provide an open bar for my guests?

Joseph Wilson, Joseph's Steakhouse:

Open bar can be expensive. Trying to reduce cost by limiting the time or the offerings may create some savings, but vendors are savvy. The first hour is the busiest and priced accordingly; and increased interest in wines means likewise prices. The best way to accommodate an open bar is to cut your guest list. This is your special occasion, spend it with only your special people.

I want to have a fun and unique event.

How can I have fun with food to make it reflect my personality?

Shannon Mckinney, Mckinney And Doyle (10 Charles Colman Blvd., Pawling; 845-855-3875; www.mckinneyanddoyle.com):

Good quality food can always be made fun and interesting. Your caterer should be willing to suggest ideas that keep up with current trends or research your family background to come up with some exciting cultural dishes. Stay away from menus that simply offer package A, B, or C.

My guests like their cold food cold and hot food hot. Is there a way to ensure that all of my dishes remain at the optimal temperature?

That should be expected of any professional caterer or restaurant. Plates for hot food should be warmed before plating food, as plates for salads and such should be refrigerated. There may be some issues with a buffet service. For example, guests may not be comfortable carrying hot plates. Discuss your concerns with the caterer, they should be happy to oblige.



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Are there ways to accommodate guests with dietary needs but keep my menu delicious and interesting?

Liz Morris, Bear Mountain Inn:

The key to accommodating any and all dietary needs lies in communication — communication with your wedding coordinator or venue, and communication with your guests. With the predominance of phenomenal local, sustainable and organic meats, cheeses and produce, sometimes the best dishes find root in an attempt to accommodate a special request. That being said, sometimes specialty items take time to purvey and plan for — communication with your venue is critical to making this happen.

DESIGN DETAILS

What are the latest trends in tablescapes?

Carlo Citera, Cosimos Pizza (various locations; 845-485-7172; www.cosimosbrickoven.com):

We do textures and colors for our more non-traditional tablescapes. We are seeing requests for more DIY country chic style settings. Things like mason jars with seashells, earthy floral arrangements that incorporate unusual items — such as artichokes surrounded by flowers — add simple elegance.

What are some great alternatives to the traditional sit down wedding dinner?

A trend that we have been seeing is a cocktail party style wedding event on which the focus is unique themed culinary stations, creatively displayed passed hors d'oeuvre, and desserts. The focus becomes less formal with added attention to themes and entertainment for the event. It becomes a hip and memorable way to celebrate a wedding.

Weddings all seem to be formatted the same way: dance floor in the front middle with tables around in a U-shape. Is there a way to improve the flow and function of the floor design to give my wedding a unique feel?

Emily Glass, Diamond Mills Hotel:

Get creative with your table arrangements, but remember that a good layout encourages conversation and inter-mingling amongst guests. Use estate tables or long rectangular tables to create a family-style feel throughout dinner, or mix it up with large round tables and lengthier rectangular tables for a less uniform and more customized look. With over 7,000 square feet in ballroom space, Diamond Mills lends itself to countless unique room formations.

Is there a trick to seating arrangements

that will help my guests feel comfortable?

Roy Benich, Le Chambord:

Seating charts simplify the process. On the day of the event, make sure your venue will have place cards available an hour in advance for guests to retrieve before entering the ballroom. This allows guests to go directly to their tables without delay or confusion. At Le Chambord we provide our clients with custom charts that display table numbers and configuration, detailing exactly how the tables will be situated in relation to each other and other features in the space.

PERFECT PICTURES

Is there a real difference between having my photos developed professionally and doing them myself?

Elizabeth Unterman, Elizabeth Unterman Photography (1858 Glasco Tpk., Woodstock; 845-489-0975; www.elizabethunterman.com):

Producing a quality print that looks like the image on the computer screen is a skill. DIY photo products available in retail stores are not archival and will fade within five to 10 years. A professional knows how to navigate papers, printers, colors, and products to produce the perfect image that will last a lifetime. As a photography educator, one of the most time consuming and challenging parts of my classes is the section on printing!

What are some tips for looking picture perfect on the wedding day?

The most important thing I suggest as a photographer (and a recent bride) is that you want to recognize yourself when you look back at your wedding pictures—you want to look like you! Take a “test-run” picture of yourself in your planned make-up and hair before the wedding day. Make sure the picture makes you smile. But no matter what, the camera is going to love you on your wedding day. You will be glowing like never before.

What are some new trends for documenting special occasions and weddings?

Eli Sloves, Eli Sloves Photographers Inc. (6 Drum Ct., Poughkeepsie; 845-227-2266; www.elislovesphoto.com):

Modern brides are super savvy. Current trends entertain guests and commemorate the special day. The confident bride wants to strike a pose worthy of a Vanity cover. With fashion-style photography we create that chic moment in the spotlight. Custom print-on-location capabilities

allow guests their own photo shoot with a professional-quality photo keepsake. Photo booths equipped with props and accessories create a fun activity and personal souvenir for guests.

I find traditional wedding poses stuffy. How do I spice up my wedding photos?

Traditional poses are en vogue — it's stuffiness that's passé. While candid shots capture the spirit of the event, they simply aren't the kind of picture you want hanging above your mantel for the next 25 years. For the place of honor, you'll want pictures that capture the occasion in timeless taste. A photographer who can reflect your attitude as a couple in a relaxed, natural way is the key to making traditional pictures feel fresh.



Should I whiten my teeth for my wedding? What's the best timeframe?

Dr. Steven P. Stern, Windsor Dental (375 Windsor Hwy., New Windsor; 845-565-6677; www.windsordentalpc.com):

Absolutely, if you're a candidate — only your dentist can determine if the procedure is right for you. Tooth whitening is a safe and effective way to lighten the color of your teeth, giving them a healthy white appearance. There are a number of options to discuss with your dentist: zoom, laser, and at-home whitening. These offer different levels of whitening and vary in timeframe from one hour to several weeks before results are seen.

I want my pictures to look amazing. What are some other dental tips besides tooth whitening to ensure a perfect smile?

Invisalign realigns your front teeth through minor rotations, correcting your natural smile over a course of a few weeks. Porcelain Veneers are wafer thin custom shells permanently bonded to the front surface of teeth, improving the color, size and appearance of your smile. Routine cleaning is the most important to a healthy mouth and perfect smile. Schedule a cleaning two months before your wedding; at that time all of your options can be discussed. •



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