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Dream On

The diamonds, cakes, receptions, bouquets, honeymoons--and more--that will make your every wedding wish come true

By Katie Vaughn



Getting married is rarely as simple as saying "I do!" Not to worry. You've found the perfect partner, right? You'll also discover rings, cakes and flowers to make your heart flutter. Then you can get on with the big day ... and that whole happily-ever-after part.

Ringleaders

Romance and courtship aside, what really gets the wedding gears turning is the proposal and the engagement ring.

The most timeless look for brides is a Tiffany solitaire with a matching channel-set diamond band, says John Hayes, owner of Goodman's Jewelers. But don't overlook the three-stone ring representing a couple's past, present and future, says Randy Hellenbrand, owner of Romance Jewelers. It's a popular choice

these days.

A classic men's ring is a simply designed six-millimeter comfort-fit band. Consider materials like lightweight titanium and durable tungsten steel, says Hellenbrand. They're more subdued than gold or platinum.

Price: \$3,000--\$10,000 for a one-carat diamond; wedding bands run \$200 --\$4,000

A welcome announcement

This is likely the biggest party you've ever hosted. Get your guests as excited as you are with the right invitation.

Simplicity and elegance are at the top of most couples' lists, says Marjie Gibson, owner of Personally For You Invitations & Accessories. Her clients like white and ivory cardstock with crisp lines and softly designed borders.

But bolder colors are big, too, and couples can add splashes of teal or cocoa in borders, ribbons and envelopes, according to Jenny Wedberg, owner of Fiddleheads Studio.

Price: Between \$1 and \$5 per invitation



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Scene stealers

Nothing makes things simpler than holding your nuptials and reception at the same site, says **Angela Dupont, professional bridal consultant and owner of Top Shelf Weddings & Events**. Monona Terrace, Overture Center and Masonic Center are all popular choices for ceremony and celebration. Or try the Madison Museum of Contemporary Arts' rooftop sculpture garden for a more modern fete.

Marisa Menzel, owner of Marry Me Marisa Wedding Consulting, suggests seeking out an architecturally interesting site. The detail can add atmosphere to photography and cut down on the need for decorations. The Orpheum Theatre, Bellini's Restaurant and the Madison Club fit the bill nicely, she adds.

For outdoor weddings, Olbrich Botanical Gardens and Allen Centennial Gardens are tops. But don't overlook the Lussier Family Heritage Center, which is nestled in a prairie, says Bill Reed, owner of The Wedding Guy wedding consulting business.

Churches and chapels will never go out of style, and receptions at the Concourse and Edgewater hotels or Nakoma and Blackhawk country clubs are always chic choices. The added bonus of going with an old standby? They've done this a million times and they will pull off your big day without a hitch.

Price: ceremony \$200--\$700 ; reception \$500--\$1,500 (food & drinks not included)

Cake walk

Have your cake anyway you like it--chocolate banana cake, cheesecake, even crème brûlée. Or jazz up the old buttercream with purple polka dots or orange stripes. In fact, cakes are showing up in every hue and in unusual shapes like square stackers, says Nerissa Metcalf, a pastry chef at La Brioche Bakery. But smooth white buttercream tiers garnished with fresh flowers are still a sweet, familiar sight, says Carl J. Loeffel of Carl's Cakes. Some brides skip the layered look and choose a stack of colorful cupcakes or even doughnuts. Or add variety (and ride a hot trend) with a different cake at each table.

Price: \$350/single hundred-serving cake; twenty table cakes run about \$550

Say cheese!

Candid photojournalism style is "in," but it takes a skilled pro to catch people in the moment before they stiffen or ham up for the camera. And don't forgo a few traditional poses altogether: Portraits are always in demand, says Barry Lewis, owner of Lewis Photography.

Some of the best pictures come when a wedding party ducks out to a special location, and especially when they let loose, says Robin Kempfer, owner of Northern Light Portrait Studios. "Just because you're in a dress doesn't mean you can't take your shoes off." Price: \$2,000--\$6,000.

Blossoming love

The freshest look in wedding flowers is single arrangements, says Andrea Berto, a co-owner and wedding coordinator at Fleurishes. Irises, Gerbera daisies, orchids, whatever--they all look great used exclusively. But a bride can't go wrong with roses or calla lilies. "I wouldn't say those are trends--they are staples," says Tricia Adler, designer and wedding specialist at Buffo Floral. Roses now come in more colors than ever, including current shades of hot pink, mango and chocolate, she adds. Enviro-minded brides should inquire about locally grown or organic blooms that will be in season come wedding day.

Price: Most Madison couples spend \$800--\$1,500 for the entire wedding, with \$250--\$350 of that devoted to the bride's bouquet.

Soundtracks

Whether you're into Irish jigs, Rat Pack standards or smooth jazz, there's probably a band in Madison you can book for your wedding. DJs are still tops for pleasing a diverse crowd. But if you don't need an emcee to navigate you through the first dance and bouquet toss, take a do-it-yourself approach: Put your favorite tunes on a disc or customize a playlist on your iPod. If your guests aren't into dancing, consider hiring dueling pianists Piano Fondue to perform, Dupont says. Or if you're a tad irreverent, you can always rent a karaoke machine or have the Gomers (see "So You Wanna Be a Rock Star?" on page 20) stop by.

Price: \$2,000--\$5,000 for a night of live music; \$800--\$2,000 for a DJ

Steal away

The wedding is over; now the real fun begins. Want sea, sun and complete relaxation? All-inclusive resorts--particularly the couples-only variety--in the Caribbean and Mexico are the way to go, says Peggy Abel, a senior travel consultant at Gulliver's Travels.

For a more exotic beach getaway, set your sights on Brazil, Thailand or French Polynesia. Or take a cruise through the Greek isles.

Foodies and oenophiles: get yourselves to France, Italy or California's wine country. City slickers will be happy in London, Prague or good ol' NYC. And adventure-seeking couples should consider a Rocky Mountain white-water rafting trip or a bike tour. Environmentally minded newlyweds may enjoy an eco resort in the Galapagos Islands, New Zealand or the Bahamas, says Jill Frederick, a destination wedding and honeymoon specialist at Burkhalter Travel. Costa Rica and Belize are good spots too.

Price: Caribbean all-inclusive resorts run \$1,500--\$2,200/person per week, food & drinks included.



I do--somewhere else

If the thought of tending to all the details makes your head spin, consider taking your wedding show on the road. Frederick says Sedona, Las Vegas and California's wine regions are top destination-wedding locales. Travel agents can also help book ceremonies on yachts, at the rim of the Grand Canyon or in castles, she adds.

Getting hitched overseas, however, can be tricky. Requirements vary, so be sure to find out what's required where. But tying the knot in Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands is hardly more difficult than saying "I do" stateside.

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