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Intimate Gatherings Something Old, New, Borrowed and Blue: A Small Wedding May be Right for You!

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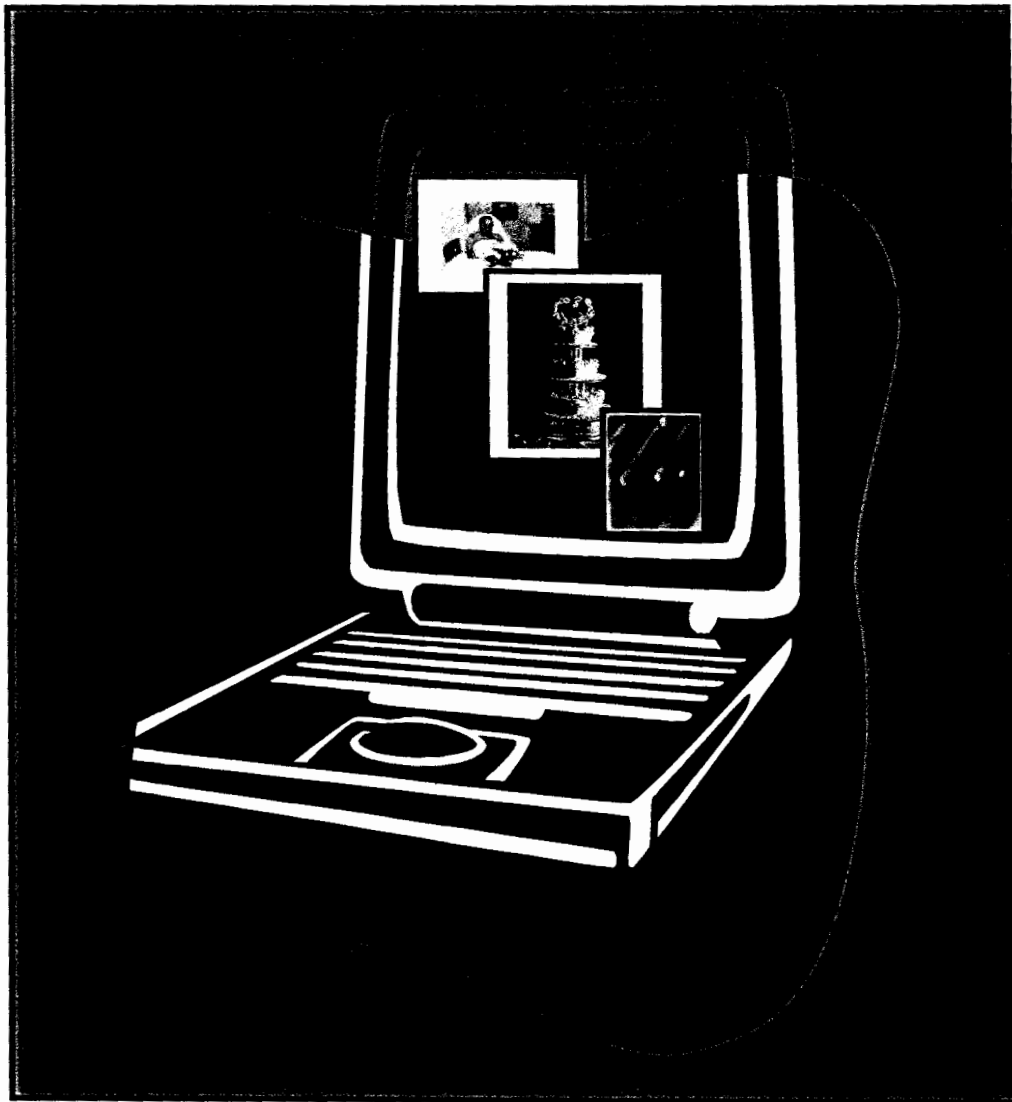
Intimate Gatherings
Something Old, New, Borrowed, and Blue:
A Small Wedding May be Right for You!

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication
Seton Hall University
August 2004

WWW.INTIMATEGATHERINGS.NET
An Online Resource for Coordinating a Small Wedding



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The author would like to extend her highest gratitude to her Heavenly Father for sustaining her health, strength, and sanity during the pursuit of higher education. She realizes through faith and prayer all things are possible.

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This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of the author's parents,

Mr. and Mrs. Charles and Regina Thomas

LOVE

*Love is patient and kind.
It is not jealous or boastful;
It is not arrogant or rude.*

*Love does not insist
On its own way;
It is not irritable or resentful;
It does not rejoice at wrong,
But rejoices in the right.*

*Love bears all things,
Believes all things,
Hopes all things,
Endures all things.*

LOVE NEVER ENDS

I Corinthians 13:4-8

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

PLANNING THE WEDDING INSTEAD OF THE MARRIAGE

The author was watching an episode of the *Oprah* show, and during a segment on event coordination an audience member said, **“People plan their weddings instead of their marriages.”** This statement was very powerful. All the author could think about were the several relatives, friends, and co-workers who went into debt paying for elaborate weddings they really couldn’t afford. For example, the author worked with a gentleman who took out a \$60,000 home equity loan for his only daughter’s wedding; like 50 percent of American couples, she was divorced shortly afterwards. He and his wife are still paying off the loan!

According to a 2002 survey by the Fairchild Bridal Group, the average American couple spends \$22,300 for their wedding. In major cities such as New York and Washington, D.C., the average is about \$50,000. Wedding experts also said many couples are maxing out their credit cards to pay for very elaborate affairs. (Horyn, C. 2004)

The statistics weren’t really surprising after reading a *New York Times* article titled: “Perfect Wedding: \$5,000 Cake, Hold the Simplicity.” Writer Cathy Horyn interviewed Sylvia Weinstock, a Manhattan baker, who often delivers her cakes by Continental Airlines. The elaborate creations can cost \$5,000 plus an additional \$500 and more for shipping if accompanied by a handler. Mrs. Weinstock said, “When you’re spending \$200,000 for a wedding, a cake that costs \$5,000 is not all that expensive.”

The article encouraged the author to think deeper about what’s really important in a marriage. The conclusions: all weddings are special regardless of the size. The couple’s love and the vows they make to each other and to God are most important.

Do Hollywood celebrities realize this? The big news on *Entertainment Tonight* during the summer of 2004 was the marriage of entertainer Jennifer Lopez, 34, to her third husband, singer Mark Anthony. Her engagement to actor Ben Affleck was broken five months prior to her marriage to Anthony. Of course, Anthony had to wait three days until the ink was dry on his divorce papers from his first wife, Dyanara Torres, before promising forever to Ms. Lopez.

Who can forget the recent 55-hour marriage of Britney Spears to her childhood friend, Jason Alexander? The short marriage was annulled, and Spears was soon engaged to her back up dancer, Kevin Federline, after a two-month courtship. When Federline and Spears announced their engagement, his ex-girlfriend, actress Shar Jackson, was eight months pregnant with their second child. With that being said, *Access Hollywood* made sure to let viewers know that the couple was planning an elaborate wedding!

During the tabloid broadcast, all the author could think about were all the fiancés and wives who were without their mates due to the recent War in Iraq. Although it has been over a year, and the war is over, many families have been separated, and many of our troops have died.

The author was very moved by an article written by New York bride Elena Donovan Mauer, detailing her marriage to Tony Mauer, a U.S. Marine Corps reservist, who was called to active duty six months before the couple's wedding day. Although Elena had caught "wedding fever" and planned an elaborate event, the couple eventually exchanged vows at New York City Hall. She realized her marriage wasn't about the disc jockey, flowers, and an expensive dinner – it was about love. (Donovan-Mauer, 2004)

In light of these situations, the author was very happy to find a recent magazine article by writer, Anne M. Raso titled, *A Spiritual Guide for Brides: 10 Must-Ask Questions*. She lists questions that every bride must ask herself to make sure she is getting married for all the right reasons; these questions are good for the groom as well.

1. What are you most excited about when you think of your wedding day?
2. What are you most nervous about when you think of your wedding day?
3. How do you feel about getting married? (Explore positive and negative feelings.)
4. How do you imagine yourself feeling on your wedding day?
5. How can you prepare for the possibility of an experience in which your emotions feel conflicting and paradoxical?
6. Brides sometimes share feelings of regret concerning who they chose to include in their wedding party. One bride included a sister-in-law with whom there was some animosity, because she didn't want to cause a conflict. It is important to think very seriously about the women (and men) surrounding you on the special day. Who helps you to connect to your true nature?
7. How can your loved ones best support you on this day?
8. Brides often share that they had difficulty being present on their wedding day. What are your expectations of how you should feel on your wedding day? What is your plan, if the reality is different?
9. Brides often say they felt too exhausted on their wedding nights to make love. What are your expectations of this night? What are his?
10. Think about rituals that symbolize your transition: What physical act represents the change and new birth that your relationship will undergo? (Raso, 2004)

SCENARIOS: WHY HAVE SMALL WEDDINGS?***Scenario I: Reality Sets in***

Dinner was incredible. You both enjoyed the appetizers, the entrees were cooked perfectly, and the tiramisu was superb. You and your beau kept smiling at each other over dessert, but it wasn't forced, because the relationship just comes natural, kind of like breathing. Then it just happened. Somewhere between cappuccino and the last song being played by the pianist, he took out a small box, got down on bended knee, and asked for your hand in marriage.

In spite of your red, puffy eyes and that atrocity dripping from your nose, you managed to muster up a tearful "yes." The crowd cheered and you were both momentarily in another world as you thought about spending the rest of your lives together as husband and wife. Since you have dreamed of this moment and big day since you were 12, you can't help thinking about the lavish affair and all the guests who will be invited including: family, friends, college roommates, neighbors, co-workers, former kindergarten teacher, and the check-out girl at the supermarket. Heck, you're even willing to extend an invitation to the bag boy if he is willing to come!

A week later, reality sets in. You only have \$158.17 in your checking account, just under \$1,000 in savings, and a \$50 savings bond. In addition, you are responsible for paying your rent, car note, utilities, and student loans. Mom and dad are still paying off those second and third mortgages they took out to send you and your siblings to college and graduate school, so expecting them to pay for the wedding is out of the question. Like many contemporary couples, the event will be your responsibility. The guest list is downsized from 400 to about 100 or less.

Scenario II: Family and Friends

You were nicknamed “the brain” of the family. Of course this was very fitting for a young lady who graduated high school valedictorian at the tender age of 16, earned a bachelor’s degree in just three years, and became a junior partner at a prestigious law firm all by the ripe, old age of 25. While in law school you dreamed of trading in your jeans and sneakers for nicely tailored Ann Taylor suits in navy, black, and beige; with matching Coach bags; and Nine West shoes to complete the polished, corporate look.

Although marriage was always in your future, you never dreamed about the elaborate wedding gown and lavish reception. It’s not that the celebration wasn’t important, it just wasn’t a priority. Sure, with the six-figure income and vast investments, you *could* afford to have a large wedding, but spending this special day with immediate family and close friends is more important.. You have decided to host an elegant, intimate gathering for 50 guests in your beautiful new home.

Scenario III: Second Marriages

Since you both have previously been married, the huge church, cocktail hour, and lavish reception have already been experienced. Now, a beautiful ceremony, reception, and honeymoon for two are your favored nuptial choices. A warm, tropical location is a great place to begin your new lives as a couple.

Of course, after the special getaway to the lovely Island of Jamaica, Hawaii, Florida or Miami, marriage announcements will be mailed to family, friends, and co-workers. In an effort to share the memories of your nuptials with loved ones, many pictures should be taken and placed in a festive photo album or scrapbook to commemorate the event. Invite guests over to watch a home video documenting your celebration for two.

ADVANTAGES

Allison and Kevin had been to dozens of weddings, both together and separately, before they became engaged. When they began to consider their own nuptials, it occurred to them that, in general, they had more fun at second-marriage weddings. “We couldn’t figure it out,” said Allison, who tied the knot last year, “but then we noticed a pattern: these were the weddings with fewer guests.”

Many couples have come to the same conclusions: Fewer people can mean a more personal celebration. There is more time for the bride and groom to spend with each person, the group really gets to know each other, and everyone contributes to the event in his or her own way. Intimate celebrations, it seems have certain advantages, as well as caveats. (Carse, 2003)

Another major advantage of hosting a small wedding is the ability to have a less expensive affair. For example, you might decide that a sit-down dinner for 100 is better than a cocktail reception for 200. In addition, by keeping things small, the ability of the bride and groom to spoil their guests with extra details such as limousine service, gift baskets, elaborate feasts, and beverages becomes more realistic.

Many wedding experts agree that when a couple’s guest list decreases, their location options increase. For example, “there are so many creative options for locations when one is not trying to accommodate hundreds of guests,” said Bonnie Kowar, a wedding consultant who has coordinated over 375 weddings. “There are unique restaurants, rustic ranches, cozy cabins, or fancy gardens,” she added. (Carse, 2003)

RESEARCH QUESTION

You may recognize yourself, a family member, or friend in one of the previously mentioned scenarios. The author wrote each one in an effort to demonstrate reasons why an individual or couple would choose to have a small wedding. The situations represent the choice to host an intimate ceremony and celebration out of necessity or pure desire.

The question for this study is: Something old, new, borrowed, and blue, is a small wedding right for you?

This examination will investigate and present both the pros and cons of having an intimate gathering for one of the most important days in a couple's life.

SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS

In an effort to provide brides, grooms, couples, and entry-level event planners with as many ideas as possible for coordinating an intimate celebration, this study will devote time to answering the following questions specifically for small weddings:

1. How do I deal with the hurt feelings of guests I am unable to invite?
2. Where should I host my affair?
3. What questions do I ask before booking a banquet facility?
4. What type of gown should I choose?
5. What type of veil should I choose?
6. What is the best attire for the groom and the wedding party?
7. When do I mail the invitations or wedding/marriage announcements?
8. How do I announce my elopement?
9. What type of flowers should I have?
10. What are the Four C's of a diamond?

PURPOSE OF STUDY

As a former bridal consultant for David's Bridal, one of the largest off-the-rack bridal businesses in the nation, and a journalist who has written about the wedding industry, the author has witnessed many of the issues that brides-to-be are forced to address when planning their event. The purpose of this study is not to discourage couples from having large, lavish weddings if they choose to do so. However, this is an opportunity to provide a guide for brides, grooms, couples, and entry-level event coordinators with ideas and suggestions for planning an intimate gathering for Christian, non-denominational, or civil wedding celebrations.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

After thorough research, the objectives of the study are to provide a historical overview of popular wedding traditions; suggest ideas for coordinating an intimate gathering; and to offer specific recommendations for wedding attire; ceremony and reception locations; and floral selections. In addition, the author will create a Web site at www.intimategatherings.net which will summarize and feature many of these key elements.

LIMITATIONS

To an extent this study is inhibited due to its exclusive focus on small weddings. There are many options for planning weddings of various sizes. Secondly, most professional planning guides are geared towards larger affairs, so there are limited resources that focus solely on small weddings. Thirdly, planning a wedding is very personal and varies with each couple. Ultimately, no amount of "research" or "survey counting" can influence or change a couple's plans regarding their special day.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

TRADITIONS

Now that the decision has been made to host a small ceremony and celebration for your nuptials, ever wonder where the term “**wedding**” originated? Historically, many brides were kidnapped; however, marriage by purchase was the preferred method of obtaining a wife. The Anglo-Saxon word “wedd” literally means to gamble or wager and the term referred to the “bride price” to be paid by the groom to her father. This exchange could include land, social status, political alliances, or cash. (“Historical Wedding Traditions and Other Trivia: The Origin of the Term Wedding,” 2004)

In the Gospel According to Saint John, (John 2:1-11) we are told of Jesus’ miracle of changing water into “wine” at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. The situation leading to the miracle was that the guests were unhappy, because the wine was running out and Jesus’ mother, The Virgin Mary, was worried the groom would be disgraced. While there is much debate amongst Christians and biblical scholars concerning whether or not the wine was fermented, (alcoholic) we learned from this account that a wedding is a celebration that is extremely important to all involved. The event is an opportunity for the couple to share their happiness with loved ones while enjoying food and beverages. In other words, it is very important to plan adequately.

As a symbol of fertility, **cake** was thrown or broken over the bride’s head as a part of the ceremony. Luckily for today’s brides this tradition has been replaced by the tossing of rice or rose petals after a ceremony. Can you imagine having a concoction of cake and icing dripping down your hair and face while exchanging vows? Yikes! (“Celtic Wedding Traditions: History of Holy Matrimony,” 2004)

And speaking of rose petals or **flowers**, the custom of using floral arrangements to profess love has been popular since biblical times: “My beloved spake, and said unto me, rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over (and) gone; the flowers appear on earth; the time of the singing (of birds) is gone, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.” (Song of Solomon 2:10-12)

Flowers were traditionally chosen for weddings based on their individual meanings. For example, with its ability to simultaneously bear flowers and produce fruit, the orange blossom symbolizes the fusion of beauty, personality, and fertility. A red rose symbolizes love; and with their clean lines and elegance, calla lilies symbolize beauty. Today’s brides should choose wedding flowers that compliment the season, attire, color scheme, personal taste, and budget of their event. (“A History of Bridal Wedding Bouquets,” 2004) (Lluch, 2000)

A **white aisle runner** symbolizes a walk on Holy ground. A marriage covenant is made between the couple, their guests, and God. The white aisle runner symbolizes God’s Holiness. (Powers, 2004)

Of course there can’t be a section on traditions without discussing that popular little wedding rhyme: “**something old, new borrowed and blue.**” Many have heard this matrimonial riddle a million times. What exactly does it mean?

It can be rather amusing to watch a bride and her coordinators run around trying to collect these items without knowing what they symbolize. Traditionally, handkerchiefs, pearls, flowers, and garter belts have been the most popular items. However, contemporary brides can personalize several items to make their wedding day meaningful and fun. Here are the meanings and a few suggestions to complete the day:

- **Something Old** symbolizes continuity. Items to try: great grandparent's wedding portrait on display at the reception; buttons from one of your father's old coats; a piece of lace from grandma's gown sewn into the hem of yours; or consider wearing mom's pearls.
- **Something New** symbolizes optimism for the future. Items to try: a charm for a bracelet; custom fragrance; cocktail created especially to honor the bride and groom; hot new haircut or highlights; or leather guestbook with enough room on each page for guests to write personal notes.
- **Something Borrowed** for the big day denotes the borrowing of happiness from another person. Items to try: flowers from your grandmother's garden; your mother-in-law's earrings; a poem; or a loved one's handkerchief.
- **Something Blue** ensures fidelity, good fortune, and love. Items to try: blueberries (for bouquets and table centerpieces); hair ribbon; baby blue slip or petticoat; bluestone tiara; blue chalk to scrawl couple's initials on the sidewalk; or wedding party attire. ("Big Ideas: Something Old, New, Borrowed, and Blue," 2003)

While these are some of the most favored traditions, for most brides, the event is all about what she will be wearing. To hell with the caterer, limousines, and photographer, it's all about the gown! OK, maybe the bride-to-be isn't that extreme. However, choosing just the right **wedding gown** for the special day is probably one of the most important traditions all women encounter while preparing for their event, regardless of the size of the celebration. According to many of the survey respondents, choosing the perfect gown can sometimes be even more stressful when having a smaller wedding.

Today's popular designs can range from \$100-\$1,000,000 depending on the designer, material, and jewels adorning the gown. Many women spend their entire childhoods dreaming about their wedding day and most importantly, the special dress they will wear. Experts say it is wise to select a gown at least nine months prior to the wedding. However, there are some brides who select their gowns up to two years in advance.

Married in 2001, 30-year-old, Natasha Jaipaul, dreamed of how she would look on her wedding day every since she was a little girl and even had her gown picked out seven months prior to the big day.

"I always wanted to look like Cinderella, like everyone else, as far back as I can remember," Jaipaul said in 2001 as she tried on wedding veils to compliment her gown at David's Bridal in Springfield, New Jersey, a month before her nuptials to Pedro Martinez, Jr. of Passaic. (Thomas, S. 2001)

Wedding gowns have not always been as elaborate as they are today. During the Eighteenth Century, poor brides dressed in simple robes; this symbolized to her future husband that she brought nothing into the marriage, and therefore would not burden him with any debt. It wasn't until the mid Nineteenth Century that all-white wedding dresses became fashionable. Previously, a bride simply wore her best dress, regardless of its color. In 1840, Queen Victoria's pure white gown started the trend that many women follow today. ("History of Wedding Traditions: The Bridal Gown," 2003)

It should also be noted that a white wedding dress does not necessarily indicate the "purity" of the bride-to-be. White is not a symbol of chastity, but of joy.

("Wedding Traditions and Customs History: White Wedding Dress," 2003)

Before 1499 and post-biblical times, blue was the wedding dress color of choice because of the symbolic connection between blue and purity, a virtue most closely associated with the Virgin Mary. (Internet Uncovers Truth behind Wedding Traditions,” 2003)

Through research, the author has developed five major categories of brides based on the type of gown and overall wedding theme. These various “subcultures” will usually dictate the style of gown a woman chooses along with the location of the event.

For example, a **Cinderella Bride (Formal)**, who dreams of looking like a princess for the day, may choose a ball gown to give her that fairy-tale look. This gown features a full skirt that gathers at the waistline, and has to be accompanied by a full, balloon slip to help it lay properly. A gown with an elaborate cathedral train, which extends 102 inches, is another option, and it can be bustled for the reception. Both styles are perfect for a church ceremony followed by a reception at an upscale banquet facility.

Secondly, a **Semi-Formal Bride** may choose an A-line style, which has a fitted bodice and flares from the waist. She could also choose a mermaid style dress which has a straight top and flares below the knee. These styles are nice choices for weddings held on a yacht or at a very nice hotel.

Thirdly, a **Sunday Best Bride (Informal)** holding an event at home or the couple’s favorite restaurant may choose a knee-length dress, a skirt or pant suit, or an elegant sheath-style dress. With its body slimming, sleek, and contemporary design, this “straight” gown usually comes with a detachable train for an easy transition from the ceremony to the celebration. Many believe that this gown style is like getting two for the

price of one; once the train is removed the dress often looks very different and is more functional for dancing and entertaining guests.

The fourth category would be the **Getaway Bride**. Many of today's couples are skipping tradition and formality altogether and are opting for weekend weddings for two, or ones that will be shared with immediate family members and very close friends. The setting for this celebration may take place in Las Vegas, a tropical island, or a cozy bed and breakfast. For these locations a bride may choose a less formal gown. For example, a nice dress with an empire waist; this is a bodice with a high waistline directly below the bust. A silk "slip dress" also works very well for the Getaway Bride; this allows her to look beautiful on her wedding day, without all the hassles of an elaborate gown. When Cyndi Crawford married Randy Gerber on the beach several years ago, her white, knee-length slip dress was all the rage. ("David's Bridal: Our Style Guide," 2004)

Lastly, a **Denim-is-Dandy Bride (Casual)** may choose to have a civil ceremony conducted by a judge or non-denominational minister; this bride loves her Gap jeans and prefers not to get dressed up at all. The "casual" philosophy of this bride is perfect for a wedding barbecue shared with loved ones at a fun picnic facility.

The above categories, styles, and locations are simply suggestions that are very interchangeable. For example, a "Getaway Bride" may choose to wear a ball gown to her Las Vegas wedding, or a "Semi-Formal Bride" may choose to wear a white bridesmaid dress, with an elaborate veil and tiara during her church ceremony; it is a matter of the bride's *personal* choice. Some rules can be broken!

Every bride is special regardless of the size of her wedding or which of the previously mentioned five categories she may fall into.

Keeping this in mind, it is always best to choose the most appropriate style that both highlights and flatters the bride's figure, skin tone, and personal tastes. For example, the ball gown is nice for brides who have an hourglass or full-figure; an A-line or princess cut dress works well for short and curvy brides, because vertical lines will elongate and streamline their figures; a sheath works well for very petite brides who like showing off their curves. (Bonnell, 2004)

Whatever the bride chooses to wear, it is important that her groom and wedding party be properly coordinated. For example, if she chooses a formal gown, her groom should be wearing a traditional tuxedo in black, white, off-white, or grey. Grooms, please steer clear of those 1970's inspired powder blue "with matching bowtie" suits, because your loved ones will laugh. Besides, this look died three decades ago, so please allow it to rest in peace! A tux or a very upscale suit is a great choice for the groom of a Semi-Formal Bride; a nice suit or shirt/tie and slacks are appropriate choices for the groom of a Sunday Best Bride; the groom of a Getaway Bride may opt for a linen suit or kakis and a Hawaiian style shirt for a tropical setting; of course, if "denim is dandy" for the bride, it should also be the desired choice of her groom. It would be quite awkward if the bride were dressed casually, while her groom was wearing a formal suit.

The attire of the wedding party should match the style of the bride and groom. For example, if a bride has chosen a satin gown, then the material of the bridesmaid's dresses should match. However, there are exceptions. The author recently attended a wedding where the bride had chosen a beautiful off-white gown made of satin and lace, and her lavender bridesmaid's dresses were made of chiffon; they were absolutely beautiful!

After a wedding gown has been selected, try it on standing next to the bridesmaids dresses to make sure the different materials compliment each other. Many women often photograph or video tape their shopping sessions to be certain their perspective gowns work well on film. Once the bridesmaid's dresses have been selected, ask for a "swatch" of the gown; this is a small sample of the gown's material. A swatch is good for groomsmen to have when they go shopping for tuxedos or suits, and most shops will be able to match vests or ties to the exact color of the material.

While no one would argue that the dress is *the* most important detail of a bride's attire, it's not *all* about the gown. If just one accessory is missing, a bride's look is incomplete. It is believed by many bridal consultants that the **wedding veil** is the bride's crowning glory. Historically, brightly colored veils were worn in ancient times in many parts of the world and were considered a protection against evil spirits. At one time, Roman brides were completely covered with a red veil for protection.

However, in early European history, they served another purpose. Women were considered the properties of their fathers, and weddings were arranged without their prior consent. The marriage of an unattractive woman was often arranged with a prospective groom from another town without either of them meeting each other. A veil was placed on the bride so that her groom could not see her face until the end of the ceremony, preventing him from leaving an "ugly" bride in tears at the alter causing shame to her father and family; this is why it became "bad luck" for the groom to see the bride before the ceremony. ("Historical Wedding Traditions and Other Trivia: The Origin of the Wedding Veil" 2004)

Though there are many variations on the traditional veil for today's bride, many wedding experts say it is a "must have" to complete the perfect look: "I think the veil is very important. If you are going to go the whole nine yards with the gown, you need to have a veil to match," said Ruthie Sukiennik, a wedding consultant with tytheknot.com, based in Bergen County, New Jersey.

"In the most traditional sense, it adds a touch of mystery as the bride walks down the aisle. Once she's married and the veil is lifted, it's her time to shine," she said. Sukiennik added that a veil should also be a perfect complement to a wedding gown without overpowering it. She suggested that future brides who prefer a plain gown choose a veil that has more detailing, such as rhinestones or pearl accents. However, if one's dress is "busier," a plainer veil may be better suited. "The two should not be competing against each other," Sukiennik said. (Thomas, S. 2001)

Examples include: A Cinderella Bride wearing an elaborate ball gown may choose a simple, shoulder-length veil with a rolled edge, while a Semi-Formal or Sunday Best Bride may choose a cathedral-length veil with a ribbon edge. There also are many selections of tiaras, bunwraps, and headband options. A crown of fresh flowers is a very lovely choice for a Getaway Bride, especially if she is getting married in a tropical setting.

If selecting just the right gown and veil is a time honored tradition for women, then selecting the perfect **engagement and wedding rings** is a rite of passage for men.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24)

In 860 A.D. Pope Nicholas I decreed that an engagement ring become a required statement of nuptial intent. He also insisted that they had to be made of gold to signify the financial sacrifice on the part of the future husband. The diamond engagement ring originated with King Maximilian who presented Mary of Burgundy with a diamond ring in 1477 as a token of his love. Since it is the hardest and most enduring substance in nature, it followed that the engagement and marriage would endure forever. (Historical Wedding Traditions and Other Trivia: The Origin of the Engagement/Diamond Engagement/Wedding Ring,” 2004)

Today’s grooms have the serious task of choosing the right gem for both his bride and wallet. To be certain of the gem’s quality, it is important for the groom to make sure that the ring he has purchased is certified by the Gemological Institute of America.

Established in 1931, the GIA is the world’s largest and most respected nonprofit institute specializing in the research and education of gems. The organization employs about 900 scientists, graders, and educators and sets very high academic standards by offering the prestigious Graduate Gemologist (G.G.) diploma. The G.G. distinction at the end of a jeweler’s name lets consumers know that they are highly skilled.

The GIA also created the famous Four C’s of a diamond. Gems are graded using this system that judges the stone on its **color, clarity, cut, and carat** weight. These are commonly known as the “Four C’s” of diamond education, and they determine the value of the diamond. It is wise to shop around and compare prices to make sure you are getting the best deal. (The Gemological Institute of America: “About GIA,” 2004)

- **Color:** Most diamonds appear colorless but actually have slight tones of yellow or brown. The closer the stone comes to colorless, the more valuable it is. Diamonds are graded on a color scale ranging from D (colorless) to Z (heavily tinted.) Only a highly skilled professional will detect any color in E stones, and the color in diamonds rated up to J will be virtually invisible when set in a ring or other jewelry. Diamonds also come in a wide variety of other colors, including red, blue, green, and canary.
- **Clarity:** It is very common for diamonds to be formed with slight imperfections. These are known as “inclusions” and can come in many forms, including tiny white points, dark dots, or feathery cracks. The fewer inclusions, the more the stone is worth. A diamond’s clarity ranking is determined by the number, size, type, and placement of the inclusions. A stone with only a few hard-to-see pinpricks located near the edge, where they can be covered by the mounting, has better clarity than a stone with a crack located right under the table.
- **Cut:** The cut of a diamond refers to both the shape and quality of the cut. For example, a diamond with uneven or poorly proportioned facets won’t be given the same grade of cut as an ideally proportioned and masterfully cut stone. This information will be found on the certificate of a certified diamond. Popular shapes include round, pear, heart, oval, marquise, emerald, and princess.
- **Carat:** This term is used to describe the weight of any gemstone, including diamonds. Since 1913, the international standard has been 200 milligrams, or 1/5 of a gram. Jewelers often describe carats in 1/4 increments.

(“Diamond Product Knowledge and Education,” 2004)

START FROM THE BEGINNING

Now that you and the love of your life are engaged and the histories of some of the most treasured wedding traditions have been reviewed, where do you begin? That's simple; start from the very beginning!

Nine Months Prior to the Wedding

- **Announce Engagement:** One would think this would be the easiest task of all. Nothing could be more hurtful to a loved one than hearing about your good news from someone else.
- **Select a Date:** If you don't know *exactly* when you're getting married, no one else will. How about the anniversary of your first date? Valentine's Day?
- **Determine Wedding Style:** This includes choosing the location, formality, time of day, and number of guests.
- **Write Guest List:** Start with those who *must* be invited; then those who *should* be invited; followed by those who *would* be nice to invite.
- **Reserve Ceremony Site & Officiant:** This could include your place of worship or a reception site. Your minister or the mayor of your town could officiate.
- **Reserve Reception Site:** This may include a banquet facility, hotel, yacht, or the private home of a friend or relative, etc.
- **Select Wedding Party:** This would include your maid of honor, bridesmaids, best man, groomsmen and ushers (approximately one usher per 50 guests.)
- **Select Bridal Gown & Veil:** Choose something that represents your personal style, taste, and personality. If you choose a simple gown, select a more elaborate veil and vice versa. The two should not compete. (Lluch, 2000)

Six Months Prior to the Wedding

- **Select Flower Girl & Ring Bearer:** These “cute as a button” youngsters will be a great addition to your ceremony. Selecting them earlier in your planning gives their parents the opportunity to prepare for the day and shop for their wedding attire well in advance.
 - **Wedding Party Responsibility Cards:** This lets your wedding party know exactly what is expected of them well in advance. When everyone is on the same page the event flows much more smoothly.
 - **Select & Book Wedding Vendors:** This includes your caterer, musicians and/or disc jockeys, photographer, videographer, limousine service, and florists. Many vendors book up soon during popular wedding months such as June and September.
 - **Schedule Fittings & Delivery Dates:** This includes the final fittings for you, your attendants, and the flower girl and ring bearer. Keep in mind that children grow and adults gain or lose weight, so fittings are continuous.
 - **Select & Order Wedding Invitations:** This also includes other stationery such as thank-you notes, wedding programs, and seating cards.
 - **Make Rehearsal Dinner Arrangements:** This includes selecting a date, time, location, and guest list.
 - **Plan Honeymoon:** Decide where you want to go, set a budget, and plan your itinerary. Make sure that this expense fits into your overall wedding budget. If not, you can always delay the honeymoon until your first wedding anniversary.
- (Lluch, 2000)

Two Months Prior to Wedding

- **Check Blood Test & Marriage License Requirements:** They vary from each state, so make sure you verify the rules applicable to the state where you are getting married.
- **Select Bakery & Order Wedding Cake:** Choose your favorite flavors and coordinate it with your color and overall theme.
- **Order Party Favors:** These are thank you gifts to your guests. They can include photo frames, boxes filled with candy, or candles, etc.
- **Select & Order Decorations:** These can include pew bows, an aisle runner, balloons, and a decorated cardboard mailbox for all of your gift envelopes.
- **Purchase Honeymoon Attire & Luggage:** You want to look great on your honeymoon, because you will want to show off your photos upon your return!
- **Make a Dentist Appointment:** Since you will be taking so many photos, you want your smile to be fabulous. Consider having your teeth cleaned or bleached.
- **Purchase Gifts:** For your significant other and your attendants. Handbags and/or jewelry that your bridesmaid will wear to your wedding are nice selections. Money holders, cigars, and monogrammed mugs are cool groomsmen gifts.
- **The Last Week:** This is an opportunity for you to make sure everything fits, do a final guest count, gather rehearsal dinner items, review your schedule of events and arrangements with vendors, and confirm the honeymoon reservations.
- **The Wedding Day:** Give the groom's ring to the maid of honor and the bride's ring to the best man. Relax and enjoy your detailed schedule of events. Because you have planned so well, you can actually enjoy your special day. (Lluch, 2000)

COORDINATING AN INTIMATE GATHERING

Budget Analysis

Sit down with your partner and determine your wedding budget and most importantly, stick to it! There are certain expenses that all weddings will have regardless of its size. However, with smaller weddings you will be able to save money on certain items. For example, you will spend less on reception flowers, because fewer table centerpieces and ceremony decorations may be needed.

The budget is divided into fifteen categories which are: Ceremony, Wedding Attire, Photography, Videography, Stationery, Reception, Music, Bakery, Flowers, Decorations, Transportation, Rental Items, Gifts, Parties, and Miscellaneous. To determine the total cost of your wedding, estimate the amount of money needed on each category and create “subtotals.” Afterwards, add each category to determine the total budget. If you find that the total amount is more than you planned to spend, decide which items are more important and adjust the expenses accordingly. (Lluch, 2000)

Traditionally, the bride’s family is responsible for most of the expenses of the event. However, most contemporary couples are contributing to the budget or assuming the total cost. When analyzing your budget, take into consideration all of your sources of income without using credit cards or borrowing. Remember, this is a very special day, and you want to be left with great memories – not huge amounts of debt! If you have to take out a bank loan, then you are planning a wedding that you probably can’t afford, consider having a less expensive event. Make sure to include wedding insurance in the overall budget, because this comes in very handy if a guest gets hurt. Keep in mind insurance does not cover a “cancelled wedding.” (Wilson, Wilson-Hickman, 1999)

Creating Your Guest List

Once a budget has been agreed upon, this amount will determine the number of guests invited. It is important to realize that limiting the guest list is the key to saving money. Early in the planning, it is very important to decide whether or not to limit your guests to immediate family and close friends or extended family and acquaintances. Once you make your decision, don't second guess yourself. (Wilson, Wilson-Hickman, 1999)

As previously mentioned, categorize your guest list into those who **must**, **should**, and **would** be nice to invite. This also is the best time to determine whether or not you want to include children (other than the flower girl and ring bearer) on the guest list. (Lluch, 2000)

Location! Location! Location!

The location of the event should represent your personal style and taste. This section will offer advice and highlight several options for the special day. It is wise to make appointments with perspective managers and bring a camera to take photos. It is important to take notes and write down the name of the person you spoke to, making it easier to contact them in the future. Most importantly, safeguard your plans with good questions. It is wise to be a reporter!

In addition to determining the size of your event, your budget will play a huge role in the selection process of the location. Although a church ceremony followed by a reception at a banquet facility is the most popular choice for most couples, many contemporary brides and grooms are becoming more creative and opting to share their nuptials on yachts or in hotels; private homes; tropical locations; museums and art galleries; casual restaurants; or rustic cabins.

A Church & Banquet Facility

Now that the initial steps to planning your event have been reviewed, the specifics of coordinating an intimate gathering should flow easily. For example, if you are a Cinderella Bride planning a church ceremony followed by a reception at a banquet facility for about 100 guests, remember to decorate the church the night before. You are going to be very busy the morning of the wedding without having to add this task. The author once attended a wedding where the coordinator was putting the final touches on the church decorations as the guests were arriving; this was not very good planning.

Flowers and candles are nice alter decorations, and the addition of white or off-white bows on every other pew will make the sanctuary beautiful. Check with your church officials as to whether or not they allow candles. While they are beautiful and smell nice, candles can be a fire hazard. Even if you are allowed to use them, remember not to keep them lit over night, and make sure they are put out immediately following the ceremony. Flowers and white or off-white tulle are nice accessories to the entrance of the church. Place a guest book or signature frame by the door so you have a record of all the guests; this is a great keepsake and will come in handy when thank you notes are written.

In an effort to personalize the event, family and childhood photos of the bride and groom can be placed in the church's foyer. In addition, have someone in charge of the guestbook or signature frame; this person should help coordinate the flow and order of the guests prior to them being seated in the sanctuary by the ushers.

When coordinating a Christian ceremony, remember that the bride's pews are on the left and the groom's are on the right. When you line up at the alter, the officiant, usually a minister or priest, will be in the center while the bride will be on the left with her father

and maid of honor to her left. The flower girl will be directly behind them with the bridesmaids lined side-by-side directly behind the flower girl. The groom will be on the right with his best man to his right. The ring bearer will be directly behind them with the groomsmen lined side-by-side directly behind the ring bearer.

During the procession, or entrance of the wedding party, the clergy, groom and the best man should be the first to enter, followed by the groomsmen, bridesmaids and then the maid of honor. The flower girl and ring bearer will follow and will almost always steal the show! Consider adding a wedding bell ringer; this a boy or girl, usually the same age as the flower girl and ring bearer, who walks down the aisle after the flower girl and says “the bride is coming, the bride is coming,” while ringing a bell. The little bell ringer is another attention grabber. The bride enters last, escorted by her father, step-father, uncle, or even her mother. The bride can share this special moment with whomever she chooses.

During the recession, or departure of the wedding party at the end of the ceremony, the bride and groom should be in the front with the bride to the left of the groom. The flower girl, maid of honor, bridesmaids, and the mothers of the bride and groom should be behind the bride in this order. The groom, ring bearer, best man, groomsmen, and the fathers of the bride and groom, and the officiant should be behind the groom in this order.

Have the person who oversees the guest book or signature frame be responsible for handing out the rose petals, rice, or bubbles to your guests to toss upon your departure from the sanctuary. (Lluch, 2000) While your guests are traveling to the reception site to enjoy the cocktail hour, you, the wedding party, and your parents will be in the park or a nearby garden taking your wedding photos (if you didn't do so prior to the ceremony.)

If your photos were taken prior to the ceremony, enjoy the cocktail hour. Usually, the facility will prepare a separate cocktail room for the bridal party at no additional cost. Be sure to ask what the minimum guest amount is, most places require one for Saturday evenings.

Additional questions to ask the site manager of your prospective banquet facility:

1. **Is the site free?** Fees can range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars.
2. **What types of payment options are available?** Usually, a down payment of 10-20% with the final payment being due a week before the wedding.
3. **What is the length of time of the event?** Normally, four or five hours.
4. **Does the site have liability insurance?** If they don't, purchase your own.
5. **What is the cancellation policy?** Some places will refund most of your deposit if you cancel far enough in advance, others may not.
6. **What are the decoration guidelines?** They may or may not allow you to move things around, so be sure to ask before rearranging the room.
7. **Will there be another party immediately before or after yours?** Make sure your event is not rushed or held up in any way.
8. **Are there sufficient restroom facilities and ample parking spaces?**
9. **Will an employee of the facility supervise your wedding?** If so, this is the person you need to plan your event with. If not, make sure to have your own coordinator.
10. **Remember the person who oversaw the ceremony details?** This may very well be the same person who oversees the details of your reception.

(What to ask Site Managers, 2003)

A Yacht or Hotel

A Semi-Formal Couple may choose a wedding on a yacht for up to 100 guests, and this can be a real treat! Your minister or the ship's captain can officiate the ceremony. Consider exchanging vows outside on the deck. Set up chairs or have your guests surround you and the wedding party in a semi-circle. The head table can be decorated with sea shells and jars of sand; they both retail for under \$20 at The Pottery Barn; these are nice nautical theme decorations.

Make sure to ask whether or not there are separate charter fees for private yachts. These fees can range from \$800-\$5,000 and includes the basic charter fee, captain and crew, and fuel consumption. For a non-private cruise, (meaning there will be other guests on the yacht, but not necessarily on the same deck) the charter fee may be waived and the prices are comparable to a banquet facility.

For the Semi-Formal couple who is not fond of water and is fearful that their guests may experience a bad case of sea-sickness, a hotel can be a very nice alternative; this is also a great option for couples who have many out-of-town guests. Since this is a smaller affair than most hotels accommodate, make sure to ask them for a smaller ballroom, because your guests may feel lost in such a huge space.

Most hotels will offer great discounts if a block of rooms are reserved for the wedding guests. Make sure to ask for special room rates. Another benefit of hosting a wedding at a hotel is the fact that guests don't have to drive home after the event. Hotel rooms come in handy if there was an open bar at your wedding and a guest or two needs to sleep off their "beverages." You don't want anyone leaving the celebration and driving under the influence.

A Private Home

While many couples may prefer the religious tradition of a church ceremony followed by a reception at a banquet facility; the beauty of a nautical experience; or the opulence and convenience of a hotel; a Sunday Best Couple may be content to share their love with 50 family members and close friends in the comfort of a private home. Whether it is the home of a parent, close friend, or the couple's own, the familiarity, personalization, and attention to detail of a home wedding celebration can be very alluring.

Consider having the ceremony in the garden of your backyard followed by a cocktail reception in the living and family rooms. The dining room can be decorated and used to display the wedding cake. Simply place a nice tablecloth on top of the dining table, then adorn with rose petals, add small candles, and bottles of champagne or wine wrapped in matching cloth napkins, then place your wedding cake in the center.

If a sit down dinner is preferred, consider having the ceremony inside the home and renting a tent for the backyard; they can cost from \$500 to about \$5,000 depending on the style and size. Make sure to ask the rental company whether or not the cost of the tent includes tables, chairs, flatware, and centerpieces.

Most importantly, be certain to evaluate your home for a wedding before you start planning. Ask yourself whether or not the home is large enough to accommodate your guests; make sure the kitchen is properly equipped for a catering staff; and be certain there is ample parking. Remember that scene in the *Father of the Bride* when the cops came and demanded *all* the cars be moved to the lawn? While it was funny in the film, it won't be in real life. Obtain a permit from the municipality to host a house party where there will be several cars on the street. (Right at Home, 2004)

If planning a home wedding celebration, you will most likely have to hire a caterer. If food is being prepared by family and friends, allow plenty of time to try out different recipes and determine a budget. Most often, family and friends will offer to make a dish as a wedding gift to the couple; this is a very nice gesture. However, it is important for them to be certain the different dishes compliment each other.

Hiring a professional independent caterer is a good idea; they can range from someone who prepares the food to be picked up, to a full-service caterer who will provide all of the rental items including tables, chairs, glasses, china, etc. To help eliminate costs, hire a caterer from a local culinary school. Students are often great resources for good, reasonably priced food.

Regardless of who is chosen to cater your affair, there are some universal guidelines that should be followed before signing an agreement. Here is a list of questions that potential caterers should be asked prior to them being hired:

1. What menu choices do we have?
2. Will you provide a dish for special diet requirements?
3. Does your meal charge include nonalcoholic beverages? (soda, coffee, tea)
4. Does your meal charge include the cost of catering, serving, and staff?
5. What is the ratio of staff to guests?
6. What tableware is included? (cloths, napkins, dishes, silverware)
7. Will you handle any necessary rentals such as tables and chairs?
8. Will your staff cut and serve the cake? Additional charge?
9. How many hours before the event will you start setting up?
10. When will your staff start cleaning up? (Wilson, Wilson-Hickman, 1999)

A Tropical Island or Bed & Breakfast

With its natural beauty and serenity, a beach wedding may be exactly what a Getaway Couple has in mind for about 25 family members and friends. The most popular destinations include The Islands of Jamaica, Hawaii, and Turks and Caicos, located about 75 minutes from Miami.

In addition to planning travel arrangements several months in advance, you should remember to plan for the weather. You can exchange vows under a large gazebo, or set up a small tent in case of a downpour, and remember to keep several umbrellas on hand. The arch, flowers, and aisle runner should be weighed down. Place hurricane lamps over candles, and keep your hair pinned up or back so it's not "gone with the wind," while you're saying, "I do." It is very important to protect your guests. For example, keep insect repellent and sunscreen available. Ushers or the wait staff of the hotel can offer the guests chilled towels and water. (Beach Ball, 2003)

A guest list of 25 may still be too large, especially if you are dreaming of a ceremony, celebration, and honeymoon for two! A cozy bed and breakfast is a nice choice for an elopement. The Sea Mountain Inn sits on 3.5 acres and is located in the mountains of Malibu, CA. The mansion is in a gated community and is decorated with upscale designer art. The southern charm of Claudia's Manor located in the historic district of Savannah, GA is a great location for an event for two; this Spanish style colonial home is perfect for the couple who wants to slow down and relax while enjoying their honeymoon. (Rooms for Romance, 2003)

Just remember to mail marriage announcements upon your return, and *call* your parents; No E-mails or casual mentions! (Hagen, 2004)

A Museum or Art Gallery

Do you have an appreciation for art? If so, why not incorporate this love for beauty into the wedding day? Consider holding your nuptials and celebration at a museum or art gallery. The author had the pleasure of visiting The Newark Museum one weekend in May 2004 while Carol Blunda, an events manager, was setting up for an evening wedding.

Ms. Blunda said museum nuptials have become so popular, The Newark Museum will be coordinating an exhibit titled: "The Year of the Wedding 2005," which will be displayed from March-September; this should be very interesting! Ms. Blunda said she coordinates several small weddings per year, because contemporary couples are opting for something different and creative. The rental fee for Friday and Sunday is \$4,000; Saturday's fee is \$5,000 and includes tables and chairs, they also offer a list of caterers and tent rental companies for outdoor celebrations.

A wedding celebration surrounded by your favorite art collection at an intimate gallery is another option to showcase your creative side. The South Orange-based Gallery 61 hosts several small weddings per year and is reasonably priced. For example, the rental fee is \$1,000. Catering prices vary. However, a popular choice is \$750 for up to 100 guests. At this site, you have to purchase your own alcohol and a one-day alcohol permit from the Village of South Orange.

The Louisiana-based Venusian Gardens art gallery is a cool and inexpensive location for a unique wedding celebration, and their prices range from \$375-\$750. The packages include a rental and minister's fee along with professional photographs. Elaborate packages include champagne, a wedding cake, flowers, and a carriage ride.

A Civil Ceremony

Flowers sat on the desk alongside white, scented candles while classical music played softly in the background of the judge's chambers.

"We are going to invite God into this place, and we ask that He be in the midst," said The Honorable Sybil Elias, an East Orange Municipal Court Judge. "Are you ready Barbara? Are you going to look into his eyes? There will come a day when you want to remember and remind him of this moment, so make sure you look at him," Elias said to the bride, laughing.

In between her daily municipal cases, Elias also performs several marriage ceremonies once a week like the one above. Barbara and Lascelles Taylor decided a traditional wedding was not for them and allowed the author to witness their beautiful, civil ceremony.

"A church wedding is too much money, and a civil ceremony is next to nothing," Barbara Taylor said, shortly after exchanging vows. "We are going to have dinner in West Orange to celebrate."

Tex Hille, 55, of New York, who was a witness at the wedding, said he really enjoyed the simple ceremony: "I am very happy for them," he said.

Makarios Salkey, 24, of New York, is a close friend of the couple and gave the bride away. He said that after witnessing such a beautiful, intimate ceremony, he was very inspired.

"This is the first time I have been in a wedding, and it really was an eye-opener," Salkey said. "It really made a good impression on me, because when you're seeing it up close and personal, it makes you appreciate marriage more."

A Wedding Barbecue

Are you the outdoor adventurous type? If so, a wedding barbecue may be the perfect setting for your “Denim-is-Dandy” theme. Located in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University has a gorgeous Garden and Log Cabin with an adjoining pavilion. While beautiful, keep in mind that it is very rustic, so if you are not a fan of the outdoors, this is not a good location for your celebration.

Many couples exchange vows in the beautiful garden followed by a reception in the Log Cabin and Alumni Pavilion. Since this is a very casual affair, you can plan a lot of fun activities such as volleyball, musical chairs, or Frisbee. Make sure the food is protected with netting, and don’t forget the ice; warm soda is no fun, especially during the summer!

As with any outdoor event, make sure to keep the insect repellent on hand along with a well stocked first aid kit for any accidents. This facility also has weather awnings for the rain, which are placed along the openings of the pavilion. The cabin has a music policy that must be adhered to. Amplified music requires the hiring of a music monitor at the rate of about \$20 per hour, and it will be monitored with a sound meter in an effort to respect the surrounding residential community.

As with attire, please keep in mind that these location ideas are suggestions that are interchangeable, depending on the couple’s personal tastes, guest list, and budget. For example, a couple who is planning a church wedding may want to have their reception at home instead of a banquet facility or a couple hosting a wedding on an island may invite more than 25 guests.

WEDDING ETIQUETTE: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

The date has been set, details have been properly planned, and the wedding party has been coordinated. Even with all the planning, sometimes you will experience a few ripples in the waves. During the introduction, the author discussed the many benefits of small weddings, but what about some of the disadvantages?

For example, how do you deal with the hurt feelings of uninvited guests? Explain that it was an event for immediately family. Please avoid saying “or just close friends,” because this person may consider themselves a close friend even if you don’t. Hosting a casual party a week or two after the reception would financially allow you to invite more guests; or take the wedding far away. Because of the expense of traveling, many people will be unable to attend and this places the choice on them as to whether or not they want to shoulder the financial responsibility.

Next, how are you are going to get the word out about your wedding or elopement? It is customary to mail wedding announcements the day of or before the wedding to those who were not invited, but with whom you want to share the good news. If you elope, mail a marriage announcement upon your return from the honeymoon.

Another disadvantage of a small wedding is that every detail is noticed. For example, that loose thread on your hem or that pesky hair that won’t stay in place. These are things that might go unnoticed with 200 guests, but with 50, it’s very unlikely.

As mentioned earlier, the biggest disadvantage is the minimum guest requirement that some banquet facilities stipulate. Stick to your number, and try to negotiate with the site manager. If this does not work, find another facility to accommodate your smaller number.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY

The methodology the author utilized was a survey questionnaire that was personally handed out to 50 individuals who were randomly selected without regard to race, age, gender, or any physical characteristics. The questions were measured on the lickert scale, utilizing a scaling system ranging from SA= Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neutral; D=Disagree; and SD= Strongly Disagree.

For the purpose of the study, the author defined a small wedding as one between two to 100 guests. The author's used 10 research questions to look for specific opinions concerning the benefits of small weddings. For example, whether or not respondents felt that small weddings were generally less expensive than larger ones; or if they believed that smaller weddings could be more personal. For example, the addition of family photos, scrapbooks, and/or engraved keepsakes.

The author had a lot of fun collecting the data. Because everything was done in person, the author was able to have great conversations with people concerning their views on hosting intimate weddings. For example, a respondent shared that she told her daughter to make a choice between "a large wedding and an education." The conversation provided a really nice laugh. If the surveys had been mailed or E-mailed, this type of personal interaction would have been lost.

The author spent a couple of Saturdays at David's Bridal Salon in Springfield, NJ in an effort to attract respondents who were engaged. The problem with this was the fact that the brides-to-be were busy trying on gowns and putting the finishing touches on their wedding attire and plans, so the last thing they wanted to do was fill out a survey.

SURVEY STATISTICS

- **GENDER**

Male = 22%

Female = 78%

- **AGE**

18-21 = 38%

22-30 = 22%

31-40 = 20%

40+ = 20%

- **MARITAL STATUS**

Single = 68%

Engaged = 2%

Married = 26%

Divorced = 4%

- **EDUCATION**

High School = 2%

Some College = 36%

Undergraduate Degree = 16%

Some Graduate School = 6%

Graduate Degree = 36%

Other = 4%

QUESTIONNAIRE & RESULTS

Note: For the purposes of this survey, small weddings are defined as two to 100 Guests.

Based on the scale below, please circle the answer that best represents your opinion.

SA Strongly Agree A Agree N Neutral D Disagree SD Strongly Disagree

- 1. Generally, smaller weddings are less expensive.
SA/A = 84% N = 10% D/SD = 6%
- 2. For the most part, smaller weddings are more personal than larger ones.
SA/A = 82% N = 10% D/SD = 8%
- 3. A couple can generally spend more time with their guests at smaller weddings.
SA/A = 92% N = 8% D/SD = 0%
- 4. For the most part, it takes less time to plan smaller weddings.
SA/A = 46% N = 16% D/SD = 38%
- 5. There is generally more location flexibility with smaller weddings.
SA/A = 72% N = 14% D/SD = 14%
- 6. There are generally fewer conflicts to address when planning smaller weddings.
SA/A = 38% N = 20% D/SD = 42%
- 1. There is a greater ability to add more personal details to smaller weddings.
(For example: family photos, scrapbooks, &/or engraved keepsakes)
SA/A = 82% N = 12% D/SD = 6%
- 8. The option to purchase a less expensive gown is greater with smaller weddings.
SA/A = 18% N = 26% D/SD = 56%
- 9. The option of hosting a home reception is greater with smaller weddings.
SA/A = 68% N = 22% D/SD = 10%
- 10. Generally there is less stress associated with planning smaller weddings.
SA/A = 28% N = 16% D/SD = 56%

Please offer any additional comments that you may have regarding small weddings:

CHAPTER IV: WEBSITE

WWW.INTIMATEGATHERINGS.NET

One of the most exciting aspects of this thesis project was the creation of the Web site located at www.intimategatherings.net. The author created the site in an effort to summarize the written project. It is a great opportunity for brides, grooms, and entry level event coordinators to readily access information regarding small weddings. The Web site provides a “snapshot” of the written project.

The costs for creating the site were very reasonable. For example, a 12-month junior hosting plan at www.godaddy.com cost \$47.50; the 12-month domain registration plan cost \$8.95; there was a one-time copyright registration fee of 14.95; and the Website Complete 5.0 design program and license fee cost \$49.95. The grand total was \$121.25.

The Web site pages include the following titles:

- **Home Page:** A very inviting powder blue color scheme with classic wedding photos.
- **My Bio:** Features the author’s personal photo and bio.
- **About This Site:** Contains a detailed description of the site’s purpose and origin.
- **Traditions:** Provides an overview of some of the popular wedding traditions featured in the written portion of the thesis project.
- **Attire:** Summarizes the author’s five bridal categories.
- **Wedding Etiquette:** Provides advice for a few popular wedding dilemmas.
- **Resources:** Features the links for on-line wedding planning sites along with many of the books used for the written project.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY

In conclusion, this project has truly been a labor of love, and the author has enjoyed every moment of the process. Different wedding styles with varied budgets were observed as part of the research process. Every wedding and couple are special, and this project was a wonderful way to assist couples and entry-level event coordinators plan small weddings for up to 100 guests.

Learning about the several traditions surrounding ceremonies and receptions was great! For example, the white aisle runner symbolizes a walk on Holy ground; it's not just a nice decoration piece. The author used to be one of those bridesmaids who ran around frantically collecting something old, new, borrowed, and blue without really knowing what they symbolized – not anymore.

The author had a tremendous time visiting different banquet facilities and sites while they were preparing for intimate wedding ceremonies including: The Newark Museum, The Bethwood, L'affaire Fine Catering, The Richfield Regency, and Nanina's in the Park. The author was especially grateful to attend the civil ceremony of Barbara and Lascelles Taylor at the East Orange Municipal Court. Presided by The Honorable Sybil Elias, this wedding was proof that when love is the main focus, a huge crowd and budget are not necessary.

Intimategatherings.net was a great joy to create. It compliments the written project very well. Great online resources readers will find helpful:

- www.weddingsolutions.com (A National Guide)
- www.theknot.com (A National Guide)
- www.weddingconnections.com (A West Coast Guide)

The idea for this project came about after watching an episode of the *Oprah* show. During a segment on event coordination an audience member said, **“People plan their weddings instead of their marriages.”** All the author could think about were the several relatives, friends, and co-workers who went into debt paying for elaborate weddings they really couldn’t afford. For example, the author worked with a gentleman who took out a \$60,000 home equity loan for his daughter’s wedding; like 50 percent of American couples, she was divorced shortly afterwards. He and his wife are still paying off the loan!

According to a 2002 survey by the Fairchild Bridal Group, the average American couple spends \$22,300 for their wedding. In major cities such as New York and Washington, D.C., the average is about \$50,000. Wedding experts also said many couples are maxing out their credit cards to pay for very elaborate affairs. (Horyn, C. 2004)

In an effort to cut down on debt, couples may opt for smaller weddings. Other advantages of having a smaller event include: Intimacy and personalization; time spent with individual guests; and less planning time. There are some disadvantages to coordinating a small wedding which includes: hurt feelings of uninvited guests. You can explain that it was an event for immediately family only. Please avoid saying “or just close friends,” because this person may consider themselves a close friend of yours even if you don’t.

Hosting a casual party a week or two after your reception would financially allow you to invite more guests. A far away location is another option. Because of the expense of traveling, many people will be unable to attend and this places the choice on them as to whether or not they want to shoulder the financial responsibility.

Next, many brides worry about announcing their wedding or elopement. It is customary to mail wedding announcements the day of or before the wedding to those who were not invited, but with whom you want to share the good news. If you elope, mail a marriage announcement upon your return from the honeymoon.

Another disadvantage of a small wedding is that every detail is noticed. For example, that loose thread on your hem or that pesky hair that won't stay in place. These are things that might go unnoticed with 200 guests, but with 50, it's very unlikely. One of the biggest disadvantages of hosting a small wedding is the minimum guest requirement that some banquet facilities stipulate. Stick to your number, and try to negotiate with the site manager. If this does not work, find another facility to accommodate your smaller guest list.

Most importantly, remember what really matters on your wedding day; it's not the disc jockey, florists, or expensive dinner – it's about love. Elena Donovan Mauer, of New York, wrote an article detailing her marriage to Tony Mauer, a U.S. Marine Corps reservist who was called to active duty just six months before the couple's wedding day. Although Elena had caught "wedding fever" and planned an elaborate event, the couple eventually exchanged vows at their local city hall. Elena realized the marriage was more important than the wedding. (Donovan-Mauer, 2004)

Like Elena, many brides catch "wedding fever" and forget about what is really important when planning their special day. Writer Anne M. Raso suggests 10 questions every bride (and groom) must ask themselves before walking down the aisle.

Are you getting married for all the right reasons?

1. What are you most excited about when you think of your wedding day?
2. What are you most nervous about when you think of your wedding day?
3. How do you feel about getting married? (Explore positive and negative feelings.)
4. How do you imagine yourself feeling on your wedding day?
5. How can you prepare for the possibility of an experience in which your emotions feel conflicting and paradoxical?
6. Brides sometimes share feelings of regret concerning who they chose to include in their wedding party. It is important to think very seriously about the women (and men) surrounding you on the special day. Who helps you to connect to your true nature?
7. How can your loved ones best support you on this day?
8. Brides often share that they had difficulty being present on their wedding day. What are your expectations of how you should feel on your wedding day? What is your plan, if the reality is different?
9. Brides often say they felt exhausted on their wedding nights to make love. What are your expectations of this night? What are his?
10. Think about rituals that symbolize your transition. What physical act represents the change and new birth that your relationship will undergo? (Raso, 2004)

The research question for this project was: *Something old, new, borrowed, and blue, is a small wedding right for you?* If a couple is interested in having a less expensive, personal affair, where they can spend more time with their guests, the questionnaire responses strongly suggests the answer to the research question is, “yes”.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

As a former bridal consultant for David's Bridal, one of the largest off-the-rack bridal businesses in the nation, and a journalist who has written about the wedding industry, the author has witnessed many of the issues that brides-to-be are forced to address when planning their event. The purpose of this study was not to discourage couples from having large, lavish weddings. However, this was an opportunity to provide a guide for brides, grooms, couples, and entry-level event coordinators with ideas and suggestions for planning an intimate gathering for Christian, non-denominational, or civil wedding celebrations.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

After thorough research, the objectives of the study were to provide a historical overview of popular wedding traditions; suggest ideas for coordinating an intimate gathering; and to offer specific recommendations for wedding attire; ceremony and reception locations; and floral selections. In addition, the author created a Web site at www.intimategatherings.net which features and summarizes many of these key elements.

LIMITATIONS

To an extent, this study was inhibited due to its exclusive focus on small weddings. There are many options for planning weddings of various sizes. Secondly, most professional planning guides are geared towards larger affairs, so there were limited resources that focused solely on small weddings. Thirdly, planning a wedding is very personal and varies with each couple. Ultimately, no amount of "research" or "survey counting" can influence or change a couple's plans regarding their special day.

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