



COLLECTIONS

Field Notes: Navigating the World of Weddings



FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES ARCHIVES

FIELD NOTES: NAVIGATING THE WORLD OF WEDDINGS

TBook Collections

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A Meeting That Couples Often Find Daunting

By **LINDA MARX**

February 9, 2014

With Valentine's Day just ahead, now may be a good time to consider some of the more difficult things we do for love. Meeting the future in-laws is among the most daunting of those tasks, and since many of these meetings occur in the winter months, often a chilly one, too.

One of the reasons the meetings can be cold-weather propositions is easy to understand. Most couples want to get meet-the-family weekends out of the way before the marriage proposal is made. And while Christmas is often cited as the most popular time to propose, the latest American Express Spending and Saving Tracker indicates that about 1 in 10 unmarried people anticipate asking or answering a marriage proposal on Valentine's Day this year. And one in five expect a proposal by year's end.

(With such a hopeful sample to question, maybe in early March, results would show St. Patrick's Day as the most likely day to get engaged, and on Halloween in October, but we digress.)

Cheryl Clisby, a wedding planner in Boca Raton, Fla., said: "I have girls come to me before the winter holidays in hopes they will get engaged by spring. If it didn't happen by Christmas or New Year's, they are pretty sure it will be on Valentine's Day."

Ms. Clisby cautioned that a Feb. 14 proposal could feel a bit overwhelming and seem a little like a cliché. "Restaurants are overcrowded, the day can feel rushed due to the commercialization of the holiday, and a proposal anniversary is not a stand-alone date," she said. "But cliché can turn out well if the groom plays it smart, and the bride is actually surprised."

But first, before that all-important question is posed, comes the meeting with the future in-laws.

The pressure to please and to make a good first impression at these encounters can create more anxiety than those jittery hours leading up to the first date. And things don't always go as planned. Months or maybe years later, however, some of the excruciating moments become laugh-out-loud funny and could make good scenes in a Ben Stiller

romantic comedy. Here are a few examples of nerve-racking introductions we have come across:

Anna Whitlow,

Jose Posas

On Nov. 26, 2008, the first Thanksgiving that Anna Whitlow spent with Jose Posas' family in rural Georgia, the couple arrived late at night, let themselves into the house and placed their crated dog in the garage. Since Mr. Posas' father and stepmother, whom Ms. Whitlow had never met, were already asleep, she retired to the guest room by herself while Mr. Posas, who is now 33 and a sports neurologist, went to another room. "This was a very traditional family, and I was supposed to be properly introduced the following morning," said Ms. Whitlow, now 30 and an account supervisor with Murphy O'Brien, a public relations firm in Los Angeles.

But in the wee hours, the dog started barking in the crate, so Ms. Whitlow hopped out of bed and entered the garage, closing the door to the house behind her. She let the dog go into the backyard, then turned to re-enter the house, but discovered that the door had locked behind her. In a panic, Ms. Whitlow, pajama-clad with uncombed hair and no makeup, crawled under the slightly opened garage door and tried to find another entrance to the house. She found a door on the side, but it was also locked.

"I didn't want to meet his family in such a disheveled state, so I frantically looked for another door, an open window, anything to get me back inside," she said. "Since it was dark when we arrived, and I had never been to their house, I didn't know the layout."

She finally made her way around the yard and found the front door was unlocked. As she was ready to sneak back in, a tiny dog appeared outside out of nowhere. She had no idea whose it was or where it belonged. "With the door cracked open, I tried to shoo away the dog and get inside," she said. "Then I heard a female voice say: 'Oh! You must be Anna.' "

So Ms. Whitlow met her husband's stepmother while breaking into her house wearing pajamas. "We still laugh about it today," Ms. Whitlow said." The couple married three years ago in Key West, Fla.

Meaghan Feodoroff,

Tim Curcio

Meaghan Feodoroff and Tim Curcio met at a kickball game in Prospect Park in Brooklyn in 2006. A few months later, Ms. Feodoroff arranged for Mr. Curcio, an actor and writer, to meet her parents at the Italian restaurant Sant Ambroeus on West Fourth Street in Manhattan. "Since my mom had an entire dinner to learn about the man who I knew was the one for me, she was very inquisitive," said Ms. Feodoroff, now 33 and the

public relations director for Beauty Court in Santa Monica, Calif. “This resulted in a disaster.”

As dinner progressed, her mother fired questions at Mr. Curcio, now 34: “How do you think you are good enough for my daughter?” “Tell me now what you like about my daughter?” “How can my daughter socialize with your actor friends if she is not an actor?” Mr. Curcio answered each question patiently.

Later, Ms. Feodoroff also entertained some embarrassing questions from her mother as Mr. Curcio listened: “There have been so many, Meaghan: Sean and Chris and Dave, and I just can’t keep up! Why is this one so special? Please tell me.”

After dinner, the couple went to a bar, ordered vodka on the rocks and didn’t talk until they had finished their cocktails. Finally, Ms. Feodoroff found the nerve to speak. “I told Tim I would understand if he wanted to leave the relationship now and never see me again,” she said, but added, “My mom is a woman who says what she thinks.”

Mr. Curcio was a bit shellshocked and afraid that the interrogation would continue throughout their lives, but he gambled on it being a one-time ordeal. He was right. “I quickly learned that her mom was great, and the initial meeting was just her fear of the new,” Mr. Curcio said. “We all laugh about it now, but it was not fun then.” Eighteen months later, he proposed, and they were married in Nantucket, Mass., on Sept. 20, 2008.

Caroline Fare,

Eric Villency

Eric Villency had a bad case of the prenuptial jitters when he boarded a plane for Europe to meet his fiancée, Caroline Fare, and, for the first time, her parents during Swedish Midsummer festivities in June 2011. Mr. Villency, the chief executive of the Villency Design Group in New York, landed at 10:30 a.m. totally jet-lagged. “I wanted to make a good impression, but I was nervous and completely out of it,” said Mr. Villency, now 38. “I was wearing a rumpled T-shirt while Caroline’s family was celebrating a Swedish holiday that is like Christmas, Thanksgiving and July 4 all in one.”

When Mr. Villency arrived at her family’s home in Mellbystrand, Sweden, 90 minutes from the airport, he wanted to spruce up and at least put on a jacket over the T-shirt. But that was not to be. “The whole family was ready to jump naked into the sauna as I arrived,” he said. “I was promptly invited to strip down and join her father, whom I had never met, and the other male relatives as they enjoyed their holiday tradition.”

Inside, with steam rising, Mr. Villency nodded to her father and tried to enunciate a “Nice to meet you, sir,” but sitting naked in the sauna with a group of strangers made him feel painfully awkward. The Swedes, who were having a great time, did all they could to make their American guest feel at home. “Eric was so nice and eager to meet the family,

yet he was modest about our sauna tradition,” said Peter Fare, Caroline’s father. “We tried to make him feel more comfortable, and he seemed to relax after a while. We were so happy to have him join us for the holiday.”

The rest of the day, Mr. Villency, fully clothed and joyfully refreshed, joined Ms. Fare, now 28 and a model and jewelry designer, and her family in running egg-sack and potato-sack races, drinking rounds of schnapps, singing traditional Swedish songs and dining on meatballs and Norwegian lutefisk soaked in lye, which “traumatized” him, he said, but he “manned up and sucked it down.” They were married at the courthouse in Lower Manhattan followed by a spiritual ceremony in Manalapan, Fla., on Dec. 14, 2013.

Sarah Ivory,
Carl Gambino

Sarah Ivory met Carl Gambino six years ago at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in New York. They became friends and started dating. Mr. Gambino, an actor who is now 28, soon asked Ms. Ivory, now 30, to join his family for an annual holiday tradition in which his father rents a limousine to ride around New York, shop and admire the holiday windows. She wasn’t thrilled.

“I come from a family of no traditions,” said Ms. Ivory, who is a talent manager. “Christmas barely makes a dent in our lives. So you can imagine my surprise, and wonder why anyone would waste time driving around looking at windows.”

She added, “They literally stop at every major department store so grandma, cousins, aunt, etc., can get out and admire the holiday scenes.”

When the limo fetched Ms. Ivory at a sushi restaurant in the West Village where she had been dining with friends, she climbed into a jam-packed vehicle filled with the family members talking loudly, laughing and joking. The first thing Mr. Gambino’s mother said was: “Hello. So you must be the young lady who has been violating my son.”

Ms. Ivory and her boyfriend were “mortified.” But while she was deciding how to respond, the banter among the family members immediately shifted to a more lighthearted direction. Within a minute or two, all was forgotten. The couple plan to marry May 24 at Blooming Hill Farm in Blooming Grove, N.Y.

Vanessa Menkes,
Alex Orlofsky

The first time Alex Orlofsky met his future mother-in-law, he was beyond nervous. He and his girlfriend, Vanessa Menkes, had traveled from Florida to Massachusetts to attend a friend’s wedding on Cape Cod. Although he had never met her mother, Mr. Orlofsky, a Miami lawyer, was planning to ask permission to marry Ms. Menkes, now 37

and the vice president for communications of the Opium Group, a Miami-based restaurant and nightclub operation.

“Since Vanessa is German, I decided to ask her mom in German to impress her,” Mr. Orlofsky, now 36, recalled of the meeting on Sept. 12, 2009. “I asked Vanessa how to say this, and while her German was rusty, she jotted down what she thought was correct on a piece of paper.”

When they gathered in his future mother-in-law’s garden on that perfect end of a summer morning, he read the words on the paper which translated, “May I marry HIS daughter?” She stared at Mr. Orlofsky with an expression of utter confusion and said, “Whose daughter?”

“My mom looked at Alex like he was crazy,” Ms. Menkes said. “Here he was asking her if he could marry someone else’s daughter.” While it wasn’t the seamless proposal that Mr. Orlofsky had intended, it resulted in a “yes.” And the couple married at the Miami Beach Resort and Spa on March 6, 2010.

Steffi Graf,
Andre Agassi

Andre Agassi began to date his fellow tennis star Steffi Graf not long after his 1999 divorce from the actress Brooke Shields. Both Mr. Agassi’s father, Mike, and Ms. Graf’s father, Peter, who died in December 2013, had been driving forces behind their children’s tennis careers.

When the two dads met, according to Mr. Agassi’s 2009 memoir, “Open,” the “unavoidable moment” took place. After Mike Agassi showed Peter Graf a machine that he had rigged for 7-year-old Andre to shoot as many as 2,500 tennis balls a day at him, each flying 110 miles an hour, the fathers got into an argument over the merits of Ms. Graf’s one-handed backhand and of Mr. Agassi’s two-hander. Both men raised their fists before Andre Agassi broke them apart.

Ms. Graf and Mr. Agassi had a secret wedding at his Las Vegas home on Oct. 22, 2001. Neither father was present.

‘With Grandma’s Ring, I Thee Wed’

By YELENA SHUSTER

April 6, 2014

Nervous yet hopeful, Ian Ross knew what he wanted to ask, but he wasn’t sure just how to say it. He stared into her eyes, knowing that the whole proposal was riding on this moment.

But it wasn’t his girlfriend’s answer he was waiting for. It was her grandmother’s. He was asking for her diamond ring.

Mr. Ross had not planned on proposing to Maddy Wendell with a secondhand diamond last May. But working as a freelance emergency medical technician, he had barely made a dent in his \$25,000 student loans, and buying a new ring would have meant raiding his savings. Instead, the couple, both 24 and living in Chicago, saved thousands by using “Grammy’s” 0.77-carat old-European-cut diamond ring.

Mr. Ross is among many young people who have turned to heirlooms or other vintage rings for more affordable, often more meaningful, alternatives to new diamonds and wedding bands. Family members often pass down these rings freely or after some hand-wringing.

Concerns that newer diamonds might have been used to help finance civil wars in Africa — so-called conflict or blood diamonds — have also fueled interest in heirloom rings, though diamonds of all eras may carry some historical baggage.

Until the 1940s, brides generally did not expect to receive diamond engagement rings. But then De Beers, the world’s largest diamond producer, began aggressively marketing the link between diamonds and romance. In 1947, a Philadelphia agency hired by the company created a slogan — “A Diamond Is Forever” — that cemented that connection in the American mind.

“The De Beers campaign and the increased wealth in the economy meant that people were buying many more diamond engagement rings than they had previously,” said Tim Jackson, the chief executive of the Jewelry Industry Research Institute, a consulting practice. “With the passing of those that married in the postwar years, their precious jewelry has been handed down to a younger generation.”

Later, De Beers advertising added another caveat, suggesting that grooms should spend two months’ salary on the ring.

But Ira Weissman, the founder of the consumer education website The Diamond Pro, says that couples today are more reluctant to spend that kind of money on an engagement ring.

“This generation, more than any in the past, knows what De Beers is all about, so to have them tell you that you need to spend two months’ salary to buy one is crazy,” he said.

Mr. Weissman, a former diamond salesman, answers thousands of reader emails and has seen a 50 percent increase in questions related to hand-me-down gems.

There is a good reason that more young couples are turning to the family jewelry box. According to a recent Pew Research survey, millennials have higher levels of student-loan debt, poverty and unemployment than the two previous generations had at the same stage of their lives.

That forces would-be grooms like Mr. Ross to choose between diamonds and debt. “I was nervous about using an heirloom,” he said. “It certainly felt weird, because it seemed not how you were supposed to go about it,” he added, explaining, “I felt a pressure as a man of, ‘I should go out and buy a ring.’ ”

Stephen Lussier, the executive vice president for marketing at the De Beers Group, said that the two-months’ salary benchmark originated from consumer research and that it might not apply to every situation. Still, he advised grooms of all income levels to view the purchase as a long-term investment.

“If you buy a car, you’d probably finance it over a few years, and at the end, it’s a goner,” he said. “With a diamond, you’re going to have it forever, so taking advantage of financing plans in jewelry is probably a helpful thing, because it means you’re going to be able to buy the diamond you’re going to be happy with for your whole life.”

But for some couples who share an apartment — and the bills — before marriage, the idea of a groom’s being required to spend an arbitrary amount on a ring is viewed as antiquated, if not outright anti-feminist.

Not only was Ms. Wendell opposed to Mr. Ross’s paying too much, but she also offered to split whatever the cost turned out to be. “I felt like it was just crazy that he should have to pay for the whole thing, for something that I was going to wear my entire life,” said Ms. Wendell, a graduate student at the University of Chicago.

Those without access to Grandma’s ring can explore the booming antique-jewelry market, which offers unique designs in addition to cheaper prices. “Typically, other jewelers will buy old-cut stones for less, and, therefore, they have room to sell them for less,” said Ilya Kunin, a jeweler and distributor of certified old-cut diamonds in Chicago. “It’s pretty much a buyer’s market, because it’s a niche product.”

Mr. Kunin started designing his own vintage-style line in 2007 in response to demand. “The young hipster movement has definitely opened up the vintage-jewelry market,” he said. “It’s not like those boring halo rings that you can find in your everyday mom-and-pop jewelry store. It’s something that’s rare and one of a kind.”

Many retailers have started catering to that spirit of individuality. “Millennials want everything to be personalized and nonuniform,” said David J. Bonaparte, the president and chief executive of Jewelers of America, a national trade association.

When Michael Mallick, 39, dropped to one knee last August, his girlfriend, Katie Wagner, 31, couldn’t have hoped for a more perfect ring than her grandmother’s 0.67-carat diamond. Its Art Deco style suited Ms. Wagner’s vintage taste — her clothes hail from Goodwill and her furniture from flea markets. But more important was the ring’s link to her past. Both of her paternal grandparents died when she was 6, and the ring is her only remaining connection to them. “They spoiled me because I was the first grandchild,” said Ms. Wagner, the founder of Remark Media Relations in San Francisco. “I just remember being the center of their world.”

Not everyone wants an engagement ring to be their “something old,” however. “We particularly see that a lot for the bridal market, where people refer to them sometimes as ‘virgin diamonds,’ ones without any history,” said Mr. Lussier, of De Beers. “They want to make their own history.”

Last May, when Matt Fellows asked Brittney McDermott (now Fellows), both 26, to marry him, he bought a new ring instead of using her grandmother’s 1950s diamond. “I wanted to get something special that just my wife, and only my wife, would ever wear as her ring,” said Mr. Fellows, an accountant in Salt Lake City. “There was a degree of wanting to show that this is my commitment and this is my investment into us.”

Buying a store-bought ring, though, has some couples worried about supporting “blood diamonds” — illegally mined stones used to finance armed rebels in conflict areas of Africa.

In October, Andrew Martin, 28, proposed to Mallory Pickard onstage at a concert in Raleigh, N.C., presenting her with a conflict-free 1.96-carat engagement ring that originally belonged to Ms. Pickard’s great-great-grandmother.

“I would not be wearing a giant diamond that was new from a store had this ring not come into play,” said Ms. Pickard, 27, a community coordinator, who will also use her great-great-grandmother’s wedding band this weekend when the couple marry. “I would have been looking at vintage rings on Etsy or getting a ring that was eco-friendly, and I knew the source of the metals or the stones.”

But major retailers like Tiffany’s say that they also take special efforts to ensure that

their jewels have been mined and processed in an ethical manner.

And less than 1 percent of diamonds mined in the world are conflict diamonds, according to Andrew Bone, the head of government relations for the De Beers Group and vice president of the World Diamond Council, a coalition representing diamond and jewelry industries. He attributed the decrease to the Kimberley Process, a United Nations-backed initiative that has for more than a decade worked to stem the flow of conflict diamonds.

Yet groups like Amnesty International are skeptical of the 1 percent figure and say that the Kimberley Process has not been as effective as it should be.

Of course, older rings can also have dark origins. Diamonds mined in colonial Africa exploited the continent's indigenous inhabitants. Other rings were seized during the Holocaust and their provenance hidden when they were eventually sold.

"Late in the war, the Germans, knowing they were going to lose, took a lot of small, valuable items like diamonds into neutral countries like Sweden or Switzerland," said Greg Bradsher, a senior archivist at the National Archives. "It's almost impossible to ascertain if a particular diamond came from a victim."

Yet because these events were so long ago, many see nothing negative about using antique rings. "Buying a vintage diamond, you're not perpetuating ongoing abuses, because you're just recycling and reusing," said Beth Gerstein, the co-founder of Brilliant Earth, an online jeweler that uses only recycled gold and platinum in its engagement rings. In 2011, the site introduced antique rings, which became its fastest-growing category.

Ethical concerns aside, sometimes the preference for vintage diamonds just comes down to sheer romance.

For Stephanie Musso, 30, slipping on the ring of the great-grandmother of her fiancé, Cody Goodwin, 28, in January 2013 became her own Cinderella moment. "It felt like the universe aligned with us falling in love and deciding to get married, and then he gave me this ring, and it fit perfectly," said Ms. Musso, a public relations account executive in San Luis Obispo, Calif. "It felt like destiny."

Before Saying ‘I Do,’ Define Just What You Mean

By **LOIS SMITH BRADY**

August 18, 2013

Writing your own vows, Lois Kellerman says, is like making homemade cookies.

“If you can find the right ingredients, the right words in the case of vows, it is almost always better,” said Ms. Kellerman, a former leader of the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture who has officiated at hundreds of weddings.

Many brides and grooms are choosing to say vows they have written themselves, whether marrying in a meadow or a cathedral. Writing your own vows, then standing up and saying them in front of a crowd definitely heightens the emotions at a wedding ceremony.

“Some couples have stage fright and don’t want to get up there and bare it all in public, possibly crying, just being a mess,” said Rachael Hofmann, a wedding planner in Boulder, Colo. “It’s tough to get that emotional publicly.”

But homemade vows can add much to the ceremony. “I think a lot of people overlook the fact that the ceremony should be really lovely and heartfelt,” said Amanda Kingloff, 38, a writer who lives in Brooklyn and who wrote her vows for her marriage to Michael Cohen in Garrison, N.Y., in May 2009. “They think more about, ‘Should I be serving fish or chicken?’ ”

“I wanted my vows to be a creative spin on who we are,” Ms. Kingloff said. By the time they wed, she and Mr. Cohen, now 42, had lived together two years. Her vows read more like a short story about how, once they started dating seriously, her furniture and various collections had merged with Mr. Cohen’s, a metaphor for how their lives had joined.

She made just a few promises in her vows. “I didn’t need to say, ‘I vow to honor and cherish you’ because we already cherished each other,” she said. “It seemed obvious.”

Brides and grooms began writing their own vows in the mid-19th century, according to Elizabeth Abbott, who has written several books about marriage. American feminists and the like-minded men they married were among the first to reword traditional vows.

“They wrote vows together to express a common view of marriage,” Ms. Abbott said. “They thought about it really carefully because it was quite radical at the time, whereas today, I would say, it’s very personal.”

In the 1960s and 1970s, couples often wrote their own vows as a way of rebelling against their parents’ marriages, which many brides and grooms then viewed as unequal, unexamined and uncool.

“My first wedding, I performed in 1975 in Santa Barbara,” said the Rev. Roger Fritts, who wrote “For as Long as We Both Shall Live,” a guide to creating your own vows and ceremonies and who is now the pastor of the Unitarian Universalist Church in Sarasota, Fla. “That summer, I did 27 weddings, and almost all of the couples wanted to write their own vows.”

Today’s homemade vows rarely aim to change society, but they can be remarkably personal and idiosyncratic. Brides and grooms promise to honor and cherish things like each other’s sense of humor, movie preferences, shopping sprees, long work hours, a love of swimming in cold water or of driving old Volkswagens.

“The best vows I’ve ever heard were at a wedding I thought was just a party, and it ended up being: ‘Surprise! We’re getting married right here on the spot,’ ” said Kate Lacroix, 39. She recalls how the groom said, “ ‘I promise I’ll never forget your number again’ — and he recited her phone number — ‘and I now know exactly what you like in a Chipotle burrito.’ ”

Ms. Abbott said couples today place great importance on these kinds of highly personal, carefully crafted vows. “It’s a talisman against the misfortunes of marriage,” she said.

On the Weddingbee blog, couples share and discuss one another’s homemade vows-in-progress. One bride posted vows there that included the lines: “I promise to be corny every chance that I get and to ask you to dance whenever I can. I also promise to laugh and agree with you when you tell me I can’t dance.”

Also, writing your own vows is in the ‘my life is your life’ spirit of Facebook, Twitter and reality shows about marriage. “This is just one other way we’ve broken down the walls and are allowing people to see our humanity,” said Ms. Lacroix, who married Joel Barnard on June 29 with homemade vows, in their backyard in Boulder.

When composing her vows, Ms. Lacroix did not seek inspiration in novels, poems, wedding books or wedding blogs. The point was to avoid a template. Instead, she relied on a diary she and Mr. Barnard, now 42, had kept together, along with the e-mails and texts they had sent to each other since meeting online.

He began his vows this way: “I, Joel Barnard, am the luckiest man alive. Who

would have guessed a few clicks of a mouse could have led me to you? A woman so fascinating, so brilliant, so hilarious, so loving, so utterly bizarre at times.”

Ms. Lacroix said she had organized her vows into two sections: How I Knew I Wanted to Marry You, and Here Are My Promises to You. Among those promises: “I vow to at least attempt to stop putting paper towels into the recycling bin, even though it’s confusing because of the word ‘paper,’ ” and “I vow to see what the relationship needs and to look deeper than my self-interests.”

She avoided anything that resembled pillow talk, that rhymed or that was too precious or poetic. “A marriage is about the day-in-and-day-out workings,” she said, something many wedding officiants advise couples to keep in mind when coming up with their vows. “It’s not florid and lofty and remarkably romantic. It’s ‘Hey, Babe, it’s your turn to empty the dishwasher.’ ”

Mr. Fritts even suggested sitting down at the kitchen table to write them. “So many vows have grandiose promises in them, but at the kitchen table, you’re more likely to be down to earth, practical, modest,” he said.

Ms. Kellerman, an author of “Marriage From the Heart,” a book about how to build a healthy and enlightened marriage, encouraged couples to write vows together and to polish them like silver.

“For vows to work properly, they have to be carefully reviewed, discussed, pulled apart, put together again until an ‘aha’ moment arrives when the couple feels the rightness of what they’ll be saying together,” she said.

The Rev. Calvin O. Butts, pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, advised couples to keep the vows succinct, about three minutes each, and to memorize them. “I would like it if they didn’t have to pull out a little funky piece of paper or reach down in their bosom,” he said.

Ms. Kellerman also said couples must be willing to work hard and dig deep to write strong homemade vows. “If you are not really engaged and just going through the process, it will backfire,” she said. “If you have a lot of stress, it’s not worth it. I love some of the traditional vows. If you’ve been married long enough, like me, you’re real happy about ‘in sickness and in health.’ ”

Homemade vows are still serious lifelong promises. “These are incredible things people are promising,” Mr. Fritts said. “They’re saying: ‘Look, if we have a child born with a chronic disease, I’m going to be there. If you get hit by a car and you’re crippled and in a wheelchair, I’m not going to leave you.’ ”

Some couples find the words for their vows from movies or television shows like “Girls.” (In one episode, the character Marnie said to her boyfriend: “I want to have your

babies. I want to watch you die.” That would be a wedding vow that would pretty much say it all, in two short sentences.)

Mr. Barnard, who also vowed to help search for Ms. Lacroix’s cellphone whenever she loses it (which is often), plans to frame his vows and hang them on the wall above his desk.

“It’s easy to forget about them and let them drift off into the ether,” he said. “I think it’s really important to stay aware of them and keep yourself in check.”

Free to Marry, and Not Bound by Rites

By **STEVEN PETROW**

September 15, 2013

No wedding rule book exists for gay men and lesbians who find themselves in equal measure confused and liberated by the etiquette free-for-all that has accompanied the expanding legalization of same-sex marriage. Evan Wolfson, the president of Freedom to Marry, an advocacy group based in New York, argues that while it's tempting to say, "Our weddings are the same as everyone else's, only gayer," the truth is more complex.

This first generation of marriage-minded same-sex couples has a long menu of old and new to mix and match from. Some are loading their vows with political TNT or choosing to call their wedding attendants "best maids" or "grooms maids." Others are so confused by the traditions, they've turned their backs on all of them.

Roseann Foley Henry, a writer and marketing manager, and Margaret Foley, a magazine editor turned stay-at-home mom, were married on a California bluff overlooking Lake Tahoe in a bare-bones ceremony that lasted just minutes. Ms. Henry asks: "How do you even begin to figure out what to do because so many traditions are based on gender roles? Dads walking brides down the aisle. Everything is based on whether you're the bride or the groom."

Gabriel Arana, a senior editor at The American Prospect magazine, and Michael Collis, a graduate student, who married in Washington in 2011, dispensed with nearly all the traditions: There was no procession, no wedding party, no wedding cake. Their parents had no role in the ceremony.

Mr. Arana, who acknowledges being a wedding subversive, said: "I rebelled against a lot of these things. When we were planning we had to discard or modify so many traditions because they were so hetero-normative."

"I got rid of anything that called a wedding to mind," he said.

Mr. Wolfson and Cheng He, his husband, gave each other platinum bands from Cartier in 2008 — wearing them on their right hands to dramatize the lack of marriage equality in their home state, New York. They switched them to the traditional left hand during their 2011 wedding ceremony, soon after New York legalized same-sex marriages.

"Same-sex couples are less beholden to the expectations of family members and externally imposed traditions, and are more likely to make choices that resonate with

them personally,” Kathryn Hamm, the president of GayWeddings.com, wrote in an e-mail.

Jo Deutsch, who oversees Freedom to Marry’s lobbying efforts in Washington, and Teresa Williams, a massage therapist, are Marylanders who married in May. They redesigned the traditional Jewish four-sided canopy into a three-sided version resembling the classic L.G.B.T. triangle symbol.

Then there was the compelling mixture of old and new when the author Andrew Solomon and the editor John Habich celebrated their civil partnership at Althorp in Northampton, England, the ancestral estate of Princess Diana. And you can’t get more staid than that.

Mr. Solomon wrote in an e-mail that he and Mr. Habich “wanted to have a wedding that echoed the weddings of our parents and of others,” but without parroting heterosexual customs. “Everything traditional was nontraditional simply because we were both men,” he said of their civil ceremony, which was followed by Christian and Jewish ceremonies. “The more of a ‘wedding’ it was, the more revolutionary it was.”

It was also a contrast in personal style. Whereas Mr. Habich chose to wear traditional English morning dress, Mr. Solomon turned up in a salmon-colored Asian tunic tailored by Hardy Amies, the Savile Row clothiers. And for their departure from their ceremony, the couple donned pink helmets and climbed aboard a military tank that was bathed in pink paint and that spewed bubbles out of its gun turret.

The changing legal landscape continues to play a role, even amid the not so unrealistic fear that rights, once granted, may be revoked. Spur-of-the-moment, short engagements are still the norm. In 2004, Dr. Susan Love, a surgeon and author of a book on breast cancer, and Dr. Helen Cooksey, also a surgeon, of Pacific Palisades, Calif., decided to marry right away when Gavin Newsom, then San Francisco’s mayor, first allowed same-sex weddings. “I turned to Susan and said ‘Let’s get married tomorrow,’ and we actually eloped with our daughter Katie and got married in City Hall,” Dr. Cooksey said.

As it turned out, they were right to have hurried. Soon after, a court order put an end to same-sex weddings in San Francisco. As marital rights become more secure, however, some say that longer engagements are starting to take place with greater frequency.

Despite tweaks and twists on tradition, many L.G.B.T. couples are following the same well-worn path forged by heterosexual couples. Audrey Bilger, a professor of literature at Claremont McKenna College and an editor of “Here Come the Brides! Reflections on Lesbian Love and Marriage,” said that gays and lesbians “grow up with

the same movies, go to the same rituals as straight people, and when we want to commit to one another it's not surprising that we would choose the same forms."

"We're claiming the right to equal citizenship — to dream the same dream as straight people," she said. "That's a big deal."

Still, rings didn't seem right for Cub Barrett, the public relations director for Architectural Digest at Condé Nast, and his boyfriend, Chris Rovzar, the digital editor at VanityFair.com in New York. Instead, Mr. Barrett decided to surprise Mr. Rovzar with sterling silver "airplane" cuff links from Tiffany. "We're gay," wrote Mr. Barrett in an e-mail. "We can make our own rules on this stuff."

Jonathan Saw, a communications consultant, and his husband, Geoff Capes, a banking technology director, plan to retroactively commemorate their engagement with "his and his" watches — timeless and infinite like a ring, but different. Asked about the unorthodox sequence of events, Mr. Saw replied in an e-mail: "When you create your own rituals, it takes a lot more time."

Not surprisingly, footing the bill for your own wedding makes it easier to go rogue. According to Bernadette Coveney Smith, a New York-based wedding planner who specializes in same-sex ceremonies, "Many same-sex couples are paying for their own weddings either because they lack the emotional or financial support of their parents or because they've been independent for a long time."

Matthew McQuilkin, an assistant merchandiser, wrote in an e-mail that he and his husband, Shobhit Agarwal, an actor, who were married in Seattle in June, "had zero expectation of any of our parents contributing, not even the ones who were incredibly supportive." With their gay offspring taking care of business, parents find themselves with less opportunity to meddle.

Another ritual easily tossed aside is the idea of a parent "giving" someone away. This is not just about bucking tradition. Same-sex spouses tend to be older than heterosexual ones. Ms. Deutsch and Ms. Williams gave themselves away at their Maryland wedding. "We are both in our 50s, have been together for 30 years, are feminists and no longer 'attached' to our fathers," Ms. Deutsch said.

At least for now, a little bit of political theater resonates for many. There may be a formal, public signing of the marriage license itself, for instance. Other couples quote a passage from the landmark 2004 Massachusetts Supreme Court decision allowing same-sex marriages.

It's an evolution, not a revolution. Howard Menaker, a Delaware wedding officiant ordained by the Universal Life Church, who married his partner, Patrick Gossett, in Washington, said, "For the first few years we will acknowledge that each gay wedding is

legally acknowledged by the state and federal government, but I think eventually it will become unremarkable.”

That’s good news for those couples planning to marry; they now have nearly a decade of gay wedding etiquette from which to cut and paste. But as new and novel become tried and true, Mr. Solomon said, “I hope that doesn’t diminish the thrill of it for couples today.”

Planners Adapt as Gay Unions Become More Common

By **SHEILA MARIKAR**

May 18, 2014

Not very long ago, having a same-sex wedding was noteworthy enough, and those looking to wed often sought comfort and support in wedding websites and party planners whose orientation closely matched their own.

But in the more than 10 years that have passed since Vermont opened the floodgates with its civil unions statute, and Massachusetts followed with same-sex marriages, many gay and lesbian couples have come to realize that what they want closely mirrors what all couples want: a beautiful and tasteful event that celebrates their love and might also give their mothers something to get misty-eyed about.

Early on, a host of entrepreneurs popped up to offer planning services for gay and lesbian couples, eager to take advantage of a previously untapped market. The sites that developed tended to be basic, forthright, earnest and earthy — the web equivalent of Birkenstocks.

“On the whole, I’ve found things that are sort of geared toward same-sex couples have a sort of kitschy feel,” said Joseph Papa, 31, a book publicist for HarperCollins who plans to wed John-Stuart Fauquet, 32, a theater instructor at Pace University, next May.

Now that about a third of the states allow same-sex marriages, couples are casting a wider net when it comes to wedding planning, and the desire for something “gay specific” is giving way to “gay friendly.” That change in attitude has inspired a new set of entrepreneurs offering products and services that are comprehensive and sophisticated — and, in most cases, pointedly inclusive of gay and straight couples alike.

“The space has changed rapidly in the past five years,” said Steven Petrow, the author of “The New Gay Wedding: A Practical Primer for Brides and Grooms, Their Families and Guests,” and a columnist on gay and straight etiquette issues. “What was ‘a same-sex wedding’ is now just ‘a wedding,’ and those same-sex couples that plan, in the way that most straight couples do, are looking for sites that are inclusive. Diversity and inclusion are the new normal.”

One site some couples are gravitating to is Style Me Pretty, a font of photos, recaps and do-it-yourself solutions from real weddings that can be engaging to a fault. Last year,

Christina Caron, 35 and an editor for the website of NBC News, said she became “a bit obsessed with it” while planning her September 2013 wedding to Danielle Carter, 34, her partner of 13 years. They did not seek out websites, planners or vendors that specialize in same-sex weddings.

“That Christina and I are two women wasn’t the focus of our wedding, so it stands to reason that it wasn’t our focus to seek out vendors that only served gay clients,” said Ms. Carter, an associate for the law firm Weiss, Buell & Bell.

She added: “Can you imagine saying, ‘Well, yes these cakes taste delicious, but how many gay couples have you made wedding cakes for?’ Actually, that would be pretty amusing.”

Online, some web entrepreneurs have seized on a need for resources that combine the inspiration offered on social-media networks like Pinterest and Instagram with information real-world couples can use. Such is the theory behind Love Inc.’s online magazine and site, Loveincmag.com, which feature photos from weddings both gay and straight and has a directory of frequently asked questions about marriage laws, equality-related and otherwise, in each state. Love Inc.’s founder and editor in chief, Brittny Drye, previously edited a site geared exclusively toward gay weddings but said she thought that kind of resource had become out of date.

“Our society has gotten to a point where it’s time to move the gay out of the gay weddings,” she said. “It’s just a wedding. I don’t want it to be, ‘Oh look, it’s a lesbian couple.’ I want it to be, ‘That was a gorgeous wedding, their dresses were amazing, look at those floral designs.’ ”

Style Me Pretty also emphasizes the beauty of all weddings. “Same-sex couples often want the same ideas and inspiration that a heterosexual couple might want,” said the site’s founder and editor, Abby Larson.

Then there’s Carats & Cake, a Yelp-like directory for all couples, which posts information from other couples, noting, for instance, whether a particular baker will top a cake with two grooms.

“There’s really not a lot of other ways to have one couple tell another couple going through the planning process what they wish they had known,” said Jess Levin, the site’s founder.

Much of the inspiration for Mr. Papa and Mr. Fauquet’s wedding has come from online sources (they recently ordered customized cards for their groomsmen from the craft-centric site Etsy), “except for a book that I bought called ‘Getting Groomed,’ ” Mr. Papa said, “which is a lovely book but I haven’t found it particularly useful.”

Some older planning businesses and sites, like 14 Stories, which began specializing

in same-sex weddings in 2004, are finding that competition from the broader wedding-planning sites is forcing them to up their games. “When I started, having a specific niche gave me a bit of a competitive advantage,” said Bernadette Smith, its founder. “Now, I can’t just get away with being a gay wedding planner, I have to be an excellent wedding planner.”

To stay viable, Ms. Smith schooled herself in trends that don’t have anything to do with gay weddings, like using colorful “uplights” to illuminate venues. She also learned to incorporate elements of gay culture into weddings in unique and subtle ways. For a recent reception, she arranged for video screens that played new wave, 1980s hits, as she said, “things that harkened back to the gay-bar video scene from that era.”

Michael Jamrock, the owner of Engayged Weddings, a rainbow-emblazoned wedding planning site, said that he’s trying to stay ahead of the competition by personally seeking assurances from the more than 2,000 wedding vendors he lists that they are gay friendly. “No one gets on this website without talking to me first,” he said.

Personal touches do matter. Before Matt Hicks, 41, the senior director of corporate communications for the software company Zendesk, and Harshal Sanghavi, 38, a designer of mobile apps, were married last fall in Sonoma County, Calif., they wondered how they would navigate their first dance. An associate of their planner, Robert Fountain, sent them to Val Cunningham, a San Francisco choreographer, who came up with steps so that each had turns taking the lead as Mr. Hicks and Mr. Sanghavi swayed to “Always on My Mind” by the Pet Shop Boys.

“Not all service providers would do that,” Mr. Hicks said. “It was a subtle detail that same-sex couples would appreciate.”

Travis Crytzer, who started the website and wedding officiating business Tie the Knot DC in 2012, has found that there’s a market for services tailored to the logistical challenges of these unions. While Mr. Crytzer, 31, performs ceremonies for all types of couples, he specializes in helping same-sex couples living in states where same-sex marriage is not legal to obtain licenses and to wed in Washington, D.C., where it is.

“You can sense the frustration in their email: ‘Oh my God, we were so confused about what to do,’ ” he said of his clients. “They’re already out of their comfort zone.”

That said, in this new, more-open era of weddings, some same-sex couples relish the ability to push boundaries in ways that straight couples may not. For example, Ms. Carter and Ms. Caron went wedding-dress shopping together to ensure their gowns wouldn’t clash. “There was none of that whole notion of ‘No, you can’t see it until I’m walking down the aisle,’ ” Ms. Carter said. “We went and tried on everything together. We had more freedom to improvise.”

Still, there appears to be room for innovation. When browsing Etsy and other sites, Mr. Papa said, “So much of the guys’ stuff was a cigar or bow tie and all the girls stuff was pink and flowers and I was just really surprised, because everyone’s weddings are slowly bucking the system a little bit.”

Hyphens, Hybrids and Getting a Hand

By BEE SHAPIRO

September 8, 2013

The aisle has been walked, the cake eaten and the bouquet tossed. Now, what name or names will the happily married couple use? These days, the options have become more varied.

But six years ago, when Brian Wilkins (then Lagasse) took his husband Bill's last name, the range wasn't quite so free. The couple, who now run the Snug Cottage Inn in Provincetown, Mass., married in Massachusetts, the first state to legalize same-sex marriage, and they hadn't given much thought to what names to use until they were filling out the application for a marriage license.

"That was a great moment, to realize it's a choice," Brian Wilkins said. "We're not activist kind of people. We live quiet lives. By taking his name, it was, in our small way, a witness to marriage equality." They settled on both of them using Wilkins, because it was easier, he said.

"All my life it was explaining how to spell Lagasse, how to pronounce it, and I have no relation whatsoever to Emeril," he added, laughing.

The new name change became quite the conversation starter.

"We definitely got a lot more questions back then, especially, 'Are you brothers?' " Brian said. "It's still not quite standard today, but society has really become more and more accepting."

Among the options for newlyweds to consider: hyphenated names; hybrids that use pieces of both spouses' names; the bride keeping her maiden name, at all times, or just professionally; and, of course, the bride adopting the groom's name. And it can be hard to choose.

After marrying in 2009, it took Alexis Rodriguez, 33, a beauty publicist in New York, two years before she legally took her husband's last name, Alvich.

"A lot of women I know waited to change their name or are waiting," she said.

Her friends were getting married later, she said, after putting years into educations and careers.

"We're all a little more realistic about marriage in general," she said. "You go in hoping and praying you'll be in it forever. But a lot of times these women are the breadwinners or are the solo incomes. Just in case, you'll still have your name."

Besides, in her industry, recognition is particularly important. “When you work in P.R. and have established yourself amongst a set of editors who know you as one person, it’s hard to quickly transition to something else and to get them to recognize who you are,” she said.

Ms. Alvich is also tied to her Hispanic heritage (“I don’t look like an Alvich,” she said) and is close to her family.

But she began to notice that a few of her girlfriends were keeping their maiden name for work but adopting their spouse’s name for everything else.

“I realized there could be this delineation between personal and professional, and I realized it did mean so much to my husband,” she said.

She settled on Alexis Rodriguez Alvich.

“The first place I changed it was on Facebook,” she said, chuckling. “I thought, well, if it’s on Facebook, it’s out there. That’s the place that mattered.”

She said the legal stuff — tasks like changing names on credit cards and dealing with the Social Security office and the Department of Motor Vehicles — “seemed like such a pain.” So she tried HitchSwitch.com, which, with packages starting at \$25, offers help with the name-change process, after reading about the service in a magazine.

“It’s a lot of virtual hand-holding,” she explained. “They fill out everything for you and then send you the documents with tabs on where to sign and what checks to write.”

Other outfits like MissNowMrs.com and NameChangeExpress.com offer similar services.

HitchSwitch was founded in 2011 by Josh Gelb and Jake Wolff, who met at Fordham Law School and whose wives complained about the name-change process. It now has a new name itself — Kleinfeld Name Change — after partnering with Kleinfeld Bridal, the store in New York.

“About 90 percent of our clients are women who are taking their husband’s name,” Mr. Gelb said. “About 7 percent hyphenate and 3 percent are men taking their partner’s last name.”

But even if most newlywed name changes are more Jane Austen than Gillian Flynn, it’s still “a huge decision,” Mr. Wolff said. “In the last two-plus years we’ve really come to appreciate that everyone views this decision differently.”

And actually, convention, in some cases, has turned out quite profitably, at least in the field of fashion. Tory Burch has a catchier ring than Tory Robinson. Tamara Mellon is more memorable than Tamara Yeardye.

Or in the case of the dual Veronica Beards, sisters-in-law who founded an eponymous apparel line, it provides an amusing back story.

The first Veronica Beard, formerly Miele, married in 1999 and was loath to change her name.

Beard, she thought, “was the least feminine name you could have.”

“The other thing is my name, Miele, is Italian and I grew up in an Italian neighborhood in New Jersey,” she said. “When you change, your identity does get stripped from you.”

To complicate matters, another Veronica married her brother-in-law, and, in due time, there were two Veronica Beards in the family.

The second Veronica Beard, born Swanson, recalled: “I didn’t change my name for a long time after I got married. It was partly laziness, but also there was already a Veronica Beard.”

More couples are choosing to combine parts of each of their names to come up with a hybrid moniker. “It’s a different process, because it’s a legal name change as opposed to a marriage one,” Mr. Gelb said. “It’s a little more tricky, more steps to do.”

That didn’t deter Sarah Marbach, 28, a content and new media specialist in Richmond, Va., when she married Josh Greeson a couple of years ago. The two now go by Greesonbach.

“Some people don’t mind taking the last name, but it wasn’t really something I was excited for,” she said. For one, “ ‘Mrs. Greeson’ made me think of my husband’s mom, which is weird if you get down to it,” she said. There were also feelings to consider.

“Josh’s family is from Tennessee and it’s more traditional there,” she added.

Mrs. Greesonbach shared her experience on TheEveryGirl.com, a site that she frequents.

“I was surprised by all the comments, all these women talking about their stories too,” she said. “Maybe I still had that attitude that I was going to get into trouble — it really was not something any of my friends had done. But when it came down to it, I wanted a name that I could live with.”

A Game of Catch, or Hot Potato?

By JESSICA BENNETT

August 11, 2013

It started like most, with a call from the wedding D.J. for the unattached to make their way to the dance floor. The group of women gathered slowly, in silk and taffeta, arms ceremoniously outstretched. The bouquet went flying, the California desert sky in the background. Then it fell, bounced and rested squarely at the group's feet.

The women looked at one another, then back at the floor, then back at one another, then back at the floor. Finally, there was a nudge, a grimace, and a hand went down and the bouquet came up. The room clapped, the music went back on and the so-called lucky woman tossed the flowers onto a dining table and knocked back a chardonnay.

"Thank God that's over," another guest said with a shudder.

In truth, it was a good bouquet toss; any one of the women could have caught it. But none of them wanted to.

"I don't think any of us had any intention of catching it," said Crystal Cappuccio, the 31-year-old school counselor who rescued the wilted succulents from the floor. "I like tradition and I like ceremony, but most of my friends have stopped throwing bouquets at this point, to spare their single female friends the torture."

Remember the days of women elbowing for the chance to catch the wedding bouquet? Of reveling in the silly symbolism of being the next in line? The bouquet toss has been around for centuries as a ritual of good fortune. And yet today many women are not so subtly rejecting it, the latest tradition teetering on irrelevance, thanks in part to women's rising economic status and changing views on marriage.

"There's something about jumping for a bouquet that reflects the era, not so long ago, when getting married was seen as the pinnacle of a woman's existence," said Sara Wilson, a former editor of the wedding and divorce sections of The Huffington Post.

She has noticed that the tradition had disappeared from most of the dozen weddings she has attended in the last two years. "Despite what rom-coms might have us believe, most women who are old enough to have C-suite jobs and mortgages don't relish the opportunity to catch airborne hydrangeas," she said.

Sure, catching a bouquet might have been fun in your early 20s — when you could make a joke out of it, and nobody expected you to marry. But for some women in urban circles, where the ages of those marrying for the first time tend to be higher than average,

the mere act of tossing a bouquet (and even more so, any attempt to catch it) has been inching toward becoming all but taboo.

Let's face it, in a group of women in their 30s, who among them wants to risk being viewed as desperate?

"As someone who was among the last of my friends to get married at 34, I hated when I was expected to go out onto the dance floor as a single adult woman and wait for someone to throw her bouquet in hopes that it would mean I might be the next to get married," said Lauren Kattany Black, a trauma nurse. So out went the tradition when she was wed on Cape Cod in April. "I didn't want my single girlfriends to be subjected to that," she said.

Diana Nguyen, a 31-year-old television producer in Los Angeles, said, "I don't like the idea that my value might be attributed to what place in line I am to be married."

In many parts of the country, the bouquet toss is thriving. Jessen Myburgh, 27, a bride-to-be from Seattle, said, "I will guarantee that there will be a crowd of barefoot, elbowing women jumping when I throw those flowers."

But wedding planners and photographers say that the popularity of this ritual has been sliding for some time. In Minnesota, Natasha Frost became a local celebrity when, at her wedding in April, she presented her bouquet to her lesbian sister and her sister's partner, as a statement of support for same-sex marriage, which became legal in the state earlier this month.

Kate Middleton didn't throw her bouquet, opting instead to place it at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey. (In this case, tradition dictated she should follow the pattern set by the mother of Queen Elizabeth II.)

"Yes, I think that this particular ritual is either treated as camp or mildly embarrassing where it's still used at all, which is quite a contrast from the 1950s and 1960s," said Stephanie Coontz, author of "Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage." "There are some rituals that, despite their unsavory origins, have a bit of sense today. I don't see anything very positive about the idea that every woman who is not married is desperately waiting to be."

Philip N. Cohen, a sociologist at the University of Maryland at College Park, said: "People increasingly see marriage as a part of their whole life package, something that follows educational and career achievement. If that is the attitude, then the idea that a woman would be thrilled by an early, unplanned marriage proposal seems anachronistic. Catching a bouquet doesn't mean you or your boyfriend has a secure job. It doesn't mean your relationship is stable."

As it turns out, expressing even the faintest desire to catch a bouquet these days is

like a giant red warning label.

There was a time when you were a freak if you didn't dive in for the catch. As late as the 1950s, Ms. Coontz said, almost 90 percent of Americans believed that a woman who didn't want to marry was "maladjusted." But nowadays, it's the overeager bridesmaid with her elbows out who's the laughingstock.

"This tradition pulls at two competing societal messages," said Ms. Cappuccio. "First, that we should get married and want to get married to have a full and complete life. And second, that it's O.K. not to be married by age 30, but just don't be the type of person who is pursuing marriage, because that is desperate."

Like many a tradition before it, perhaps the bouquet toss will fade from view — replaced, instead, by varying attempts at ritual deconstruction in the hope that it can disperse the symbolism of the toss.

Rebecca Dolgin, the editor in chief of theKnot.com, said she has heard of a number of brides who had tossed loose bouquets, so that everybody got a flower, and lesbian couples who had each opted to carry a bundle.

At one recent wedding, the bridesmaid who caught the flowers proceeded to unfasten and hand them out to the crowd. And at least three recently married women who were interviewed said they could not remember whether they had tossed their bouquets or not.

Ms. Nguyen is not prepared to give up having and passing on a bouquet for her own wedding next summer. But she won't throw it. "I might gently give it to someone who likes flowers," she said.

But even as these women back away from the bouquet toss, others who were long denied the pleasures of this and other wedding traditions may be ready to embrace them.

Liba Rubenstein, 29, who works in social media in Los Angeles, said, "I can say that of the dozen weddings I've been to in the last few years, only one of them has included a bouquet toss." She added, "Naturally, it was caught by a gay man."

Divorce Whisperer? Mediating With Parents Isn't Easy

By **MONICA CORCORAN HAREL**

April 28, 2013

For some couples, deciding where to seat narcoleptic Uncle Reginald is the least of their wedding planning worries. Those with divorced parents are assured of having quite a few more hours of anxiety as they engage in additional negotiations with them.

“There are all kinds of minefields, from where does everyone sit to the receiving line,” said the etiquette expert Peggy Post, a director of the Emily Post Institute. “It’s particularly tricky when estranged parents do not want to be in the vicinity of each other.”

For the future bride Shannon Sweeney, 28, a chilly chasm between her mother and father, who were divorced a decade ago, has required her to consult each parent separately and delicately on each issue. This confounds her fiancé, Tyson Seely.

“He has no idea what I mean when I say, ‘I will talk to my mom and then I will talk to my dad.’ My parents won’t get on the phone together and they both want to be asked everything first,” said Ms. Sweeney, a researcher and Ph.D. candidate in planning and public policy at Rutgers.

The couple’s wedding will take place in late September at the home of the groom’s great-aunt in Woodstock, Vt. Ms. Sweeney, whose parents are currently single, said: “I get questions from my father like, ‘How many people is your mother inviting? How many people can I invite?’ ”

To avoid any strife over seating, Ms. Sweeney convinced Mr. Seely that they should opt for a cocktail-style reception with food stations and unassigned tables. “It could become dramatic if we didn’t come up with solutions,” she said. She will forgo the customary walk down the aisle with either parent; the groom, an M.B.A. student at Dartmouth, will escort her.

Rebecca Dolgin, the editor in chief of *The Knot*, said, “It comes up on a daily basis on the message boards, whether it’s how to word the wedding invitation or who will walk the bride down the aisle — her biological father or stepfather.”

Often, old wounds reopen over money, which becomes a psychological hot button. “If the mother was jilted or feels like she was shortchanged in any way, there is a push to make the father pay for everything,” said Renée Strauss, a bridal stylist who, until

recently, owned a wedding gown boutique for 30 years in Los Angeles. “She sees it as a way for him to make up for whatever he lacked in the marriage.” When tempers flared among exes in her salon, Ms. Strauss would serve Champagne, put on soothing music and try to direct the focus back to the bride.

Couples contending with contentious exes might appreciate the new film that opened this weekend, “The Big Wedding.” In it, Robert De Niro and Diane Keaton, who are divorced, toss verbal grenades at each other over a weekend of festivities surrounding their son’s wedding.

Not surprisingly, a recent split among parents means more intense emotions and calls for extra diplomacy. Amanda Riedinger, 26, experienced that when Kyle Riedinger, 27, her fiancé at the time, had proposed on a vacation in 2011, just two months after her stepfather abruptly left her mother.

“I thought: ‘Oh my God. How am I going to tell my mom because this is the most exciting time in my life and she’s dealing with that?’ ” said Ms. Riedinger, whose wedding was last October in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. During the planning, she found herself exercising self-censorship. “I tried to be sensitive and not bombard her with daily updates, but never once did she get upset or negative.”

Not all parents put their egos first. Zinzi Edmundson, a keyboard player who in September plans to marry Jesse Kivel, her band mate in a Los Angeles group called Kisses, was initially a little nervous when she told her biological father that her stepfather would marry the couple.

“In essence, my dad, who does not wear his heart on his sleeve, said that he appreciated that my stepdad had been there for me for all those years,” said Ms. Edmundson, 27, whose wedding is scheduled to be held in her family’s summer home in Small Point, Me. “He even offered that they co-walk me down the aisle. I didn’t anticipate that at all and it was such a sweet gesture.”

Yifat Oren, an event designer who has planned high-profile weddings for clients like Drew Barrymore and Anne Hathaway, estimates that about half her wedding clients have one set of divorced parents to please or to offend. “It can get super petty,” she said. “One bride wouldn’t let her stepmom have her hair and makeup done with the rest of the bridal party. I have seen divorced parents who refuse to stand in the same picture.” Incidentally, according to Ms. Post, who also writes the online Well-Mannered Wedding column for The New York Times, divorced parents shouldn’t stand together in pictures because it can be confusing. Guidelines for how couples with divorced parents should navigate potentially sticky situations like receiving lines, seating and invitations can be found on the Emily Post Institute’s Web site.

But perhaps one of the toughest hurdles for all for these couple is besting crummy statistics. Studies show that children of divorce may be twice as likely to perpetuate the cycle. Ms. Riedinger, a pharmacist, and her new husband, a graphic designer, whose parents are also divorced, aren't taking any chances. "It's an important ongoing discussion for us," she said. "We talk so much about communicating. Kyle makes fun of me because I always say, 'We need to acknowledge our feelings.' "

In the "The Big Wedding," Mr. De Niro's character suggests to his children a different approach: "Stay single as long as you can."

A Blushing Bride May Match Her Dress, and Her Guests

By **CHRISTINA VALHOULI**

February 16, 2014

Everyone knows not to wear white to a wedding so as not to upstage the bride, but what happens if a bride decides to wear pink, yellow or even blue? The answer: added stress for some brides and sartorial confusion for wedding guests.

Chrysten Cloud-Forrest, 31, chose a beige dress in a shade called “cement” for her November 2012 wedding to Matthew Forrest, 34, in Rincón, P.R. She worried about matching her wedding guests, and although she stopped short of issuing a dress code, the bride, an acupuncturist based in Santa Monica, Calif., asked her maid of honor to spread the word to “not wear khaki.”

But one guest didn’t follow the rules, and on her wedding day Mrs. Cloud-Forrest found herself next to a woman in a dress almost the exact shade as her gown.

“It was very embarrassing,” said Mrs. Cloud-Forrest, who also had a battle with her mother over her choice of color. Though her wedding guests had a positive reaction to her nontraditional gown, she said, “who is going to tell a bride they don’t like their dress on their wedding day?”

More brides like Mrs. Cloud-Forrest are choosing to not wear white, a choice that has long been embraced in Hollywood — particularly for second, third (or more) marriages. The actresses Kaley Cuoco and Jessica Biel, who had never married before, both wore pink dresses to their weddings. The singers Avril Lavigne and Tina Turner wore black and green, respectively, for their second marriages. Elizabeth Taylor famously wore a yellow dress to marry Richard Burton in 1964, after donning green to wed Eddie Fisher in 1959. (She did wear white for her first marriage, to Conrad Hilton, in 1950.)

According to the Old Farmer’s Almanac, which is for some a long-range planning guide for wedding weather, brides historically wore their best clothes, irrespective of the color, to their wedding. It wasn’t until Queen Victoria chose white for her 1840 wedding to Prince Albert that a white gown became the norm.

Although white wedding gowns once symbolized purity and innocence, that isn’t necessarily the case anymore. “That whole idea that only virginal or first-time brides can wear white went out in the ’60s,” said Lizzie Post, an etiquette author and a

spokeswoman for the Emily Post Institute. “Some brides want to look bridal on their wedding day, while others just want to look like themselves,” she said.

David’s Bridal, one of the nation’s largest wedding gown retailers, introduced colored wedding dresses in 2010. Michele von Plato, the senior vice president for design at David’s Bridal, said that sales of colored gowns have doubled every year since then, and that the sector accounts for 4 to 5 percent of all its bridal gown sales.

Brides of all ages and marital statuses are embracing color, Ms. von Plato said. “It comes down to brides wanting to be unique and stand out on their wedding day, and wanting to wear a dress that reflects who they are,” she said.

Terry Hall, the fashion director at Kleinfeld Bridal in New York, said that young first-time brides are driving the trend: “Colored wedding dresses speak to some brides’ personalities. They want to have their Hollywood red-carpet moment.”

In December, David’s Bridal introduced the White by Vera Wang Ebony Collection, featuring all-black gowns. Vera Wang’s own fall 2014 bridal collection includes pinks (petal, rose, coral and peony, according to a spokeswoman), while its spring 2013 line featured shades of red. The current issue of Brides magazine has a spread of colored dresses from Angel Sanchez and Monique Lhuillier.

When a bride chooses a nonwhite dress, it can set the tone for the entire wedding, said Kellee Khalil, the founder of Lover.ly, a wedding website. “The first thing a bride tends to do is book the venue and then pick a dress, and it all trickles down from there,” she said.

If a bride goes for a nontraditional dress, she will often have other nontraditional elements, Ms. Khalil said. “You might see a wedding party where the bride has guys on her side, or there’s a piñata instead of a bouquet toss as a way to get everyone on the dance floor,” she said.

Mrs. Cloud-Forrest in her beige dress, for example, did a dance-off with her mother, and her ceremony was led by a Tibetan Buddhist psychotherapist, she said.

Stella Hernandez, 30, had many quirky touches at her November 2013 wedding to Diego Pinzon, 32, at the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens in Miami. Ms. Hernandez works as a wedding photographer and said she didn’t want to look like every other first-time bride.

“I feel like weddings are so cookie cutter now,” she said.

She chose a rose-gold gown from Bhldn and paired it with a vintage-style birdcage veil, made her own centerpieces out of paper flowers, and built a boutonniere out of bicycle cogs for Mr. Pinzon, who owns a bicycle shop. Mr. Pinzon wore a seersucker jacket and a polka-dot bow tie instead of a traditional tuxedo.

Choosing not to wear white can create complications and raise etiquette questions: Should a bride inform her fiancé, and wedding guests, about her choice of color? Can she create a dress code for her guests? And can the bridesmaids wear white, as Pippa Middleton did?

Keija Minor, the editor in chief of Brides magazine, advised against dressing bridesmaids in white. “I would suggest choosing a complementary color for the bridesmaids, but don’t put them in a color that is brighter than the bride’s gown,” said Ms. Minor, who added that a champagne hue is a safe choice.

Kpoene’ Kofi-Nicklin, the owner of Mignonette Bridal, a bridal salon in Chicago, said that 20 percent of its gown sales in 2013 were a color other than white, with the majority being “pinky blush,” followed by silvery gray, green and blue from designers like Ms. Wang and Elie Saab.

“Just about every girl who didn’t pick a white gown put her bridesmaids in gray,” Mrs. Kofi-Nicklin said. “It just makes the wedding gown pop.”

But if a bride wants to ensure she’s the only one wearing a particular color on the big day, how does she get the word out to her guests? Ms. Post said: “If a bride chooses to wear pink, she can’t dictate what her guests can wear, but she can request it. But what are you going to do, include a swatch of fabric with your wedding invitation? If you’re taking a risk by not wearing a white wedding dress, you have to accept that some people may be wearing the same color as you.”

Ms. Post said that brides can enlist their mother or bridesmaids to spread the word to avoid certain colors, but brides must understand “it’s only a request.”

Yifat Oren, a Los Angeles-based wedding planner who counts the actresses Anne Hathaway and Reese Witherspoon among her clients, said it would be very unusual for a bride to let her guests know the color of her wedding gown ahead of time. (For her second marriage, Ms. Witherspoon wore a blush Monique Lhuillier gown. Ms. Hathaway, who had never been married before, chose a Valentino dress that was hand-painted pink.)

“The color of a wedding dress becomes the talking point,” Ms. Oren said. “The brides who don’t wear white are certainly the women with a strong sense of fashion, and they’re a little daring.” Ms. Oren herself wore a peach-colored gown at her 2006 nuptials, she said.

Ms. Khalil agreed that most brides wouldn’t share details about the dress: “It’s like the big reveal. Why would you give that away?”

But when a bride tells her guests she won’t be wearing white, it can leave people confused about their own dress code.

There is a website to help. Couples can register their upcoming weddings

addressyourguests.com and invite family and friends to post pictures of their outfits to get visual guidance and inspiration.

“It’s a way to avoid the uncomfortable feeling of walking into an event wearing the wrong thing or making the faux pas of showing up in the same dress as someone else,” said Kate Brennan, a New York City stylist and a co-founder of the site. “We’ve all been there.”

Another site, what2wearwhere.com, showcases typical outfits for a variety of weddings, from winter to island themed, and offers shopping advice. Some couples even use Facebook to form private groups for their guests to help them decide what is appropriate to wear.

Such sites might have come in handy for those who attended the wedding of Kait Drace and Ben Van Houten in January.

Ms. Drace, 33, and Mr. Van Houten, 32, married at her parents’ house near San Francisco. She chose a nude, dusty rose dress with flowers on the hem that she bought from ModCloth.com. There were several reasons she didn’t wear white. She had given birth two months earlier and didn’t want to spend a lot of money on a dress that might not have been a perfect fit, and Ms. Drace, a middle-school teacher, said she was never one who dreamed about her wedding dress.

“It just didn’t seem appropriate to stand in my parents’ living room in a big white dress,” she said. “I wanted my dress to represent who I am, and I’m a pony-tail-and-sweatshirt kind of girl.”

But her relaxed attitude led to some confusion about dress codes. She said her parents dressed up for the wedding, but her in-laws did not (her mother-in-law wore a fleecy sweatshirt). “I think the combination of having the wedding at my parents’ house and me not wearing white just confused them,” she said.

For some brides who choose not to wear white, it’s not about being daring or making a fashion statement; they just want to look good. When Missy Carpenter, 31, an education advocate based in Chicago, married Paul Glanville, 32, a mechanical engineer, the 6-foot-tall bride chose a royal blue gown for the August 2013 event. She thought that wearing white would make her look pale. Ms. Carpenter said she didn’t tell her guests she was wearing blue, and wasn’t concerned that a guest might wear the same shade of blue.

“Everyone at my wedding knew who the bride was,” she said, “even if I wasn’t wearing white.”

Breaking the Monkey-Suit Mold

By **DEVAN SIPHER**

August 24, 2014

When Christy Ely was married at the Bowery Hotel in New York last December, she wore a sleek ivory gown. But unlike most brides, she wasn't the only person walking down the aisle dressed in white.

Her groom, Peter Tiboris, sported a confident smile and a white dinner jacket that would have made Humphrey Bogart proud.

"Everyone always makes such a big deal about the dress of the bride," said Mr. Tiboris, a 34-year-old financial consultant in New York whose marriage to Ms. Ely was featured in this newspaper's Vows column. "I wanted to have my own personal style reflected in what I was wearing as well."

Although the bridal gown business in this country generates more than \$2 billion a year, the groom's attire is often little more than an afterthought. That approach rankles men like Mr. Tiboris who take pride in their appearance.

"Grooms are focusing more on fashion than I've ever seen before," said Bryan Rafanelli, the Boston-based event planner who coordinated Chelsea Clinton's wedding. "There's so much focus on what the bride is going to wear. The grooms feel like, 'This is great, but what about me?'"

Some grooms today don't want to look the same as every other marrying man, and if they're having a black-tie wedding, they don't want to look like every other male guest. But it's easier said than done. "If you start to veer away from a black tuxedo, there aren't that many alternatives," Mr. Rafanelli said.

There's the gray or midnight-blue tuxedo. And there's the white dinner jacket.

It first showed up around a century ago. Made of a lighter material than black dinner jackets, it was designed to be worn at formal events during summer months in tropical climates. Hollywood popularized the fashion, first in the 1930s and 1940s in black-and-white films like "Casablanca." Later, Sean Connery famously pulled off the look in "Goldfinger."

Though Mr. Rafanelli steers most grooms toward a black tuxedo, he admitted to a soft spot for "the great James Bond look."

"I haven't yet seen a guy wear a white dinner jacket who didn't look cool," he said.

Andrew Kozinn, the owner of St. Laurie, a bespoke tailoring shop in New York founded by his paternal grandfather in 1913, said that to this day clients often say, “I want to look like James Bond.”

Nowadays what actors wear off screen can have almost as much cultural impact; stars like Matthew McConaughey and Brad Pitt have shown up on red carpets in white dinner jackets, even after Labor Day, the traditional cutoff.

Mr. Kozinn said he’s experienced a marked increase in sales of white dinner jackets in the last five years, and half his clients now choose what he calls “creative black tie,” something outside the conventional rules for men’s formal attire.

Those rules have historically been on the narrow side, said Chloe Chapin, an assistant professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology who specializes in the history of men’s suits. “Male dressing is more about fitting in and wearing what everyone else is wearing, while female dressing is about standing out and being decorative,” Ms. Chapin said. “In a room where everyone is wearing traditional formal dress, all the men are wearing exactly the same thing. They stand out by their faces, their actions and what they say. The women stand out for their decoration.”

But the rules are changing.

“There’s been an uptick in grooms wearing white dinner jackets,” said Heather Lowenthal, the owner of Posh Parties, a wedding planning company in Palm Beach, Fla., where the seasons tend to blend together, as do the fashion choices. “It gives the wedding a formal look but it also gives it a bit more glamour, because it’s not the usual. It’s not what people are expecting.”

That’s what attracted Jesse Corben, 27, who is to marry Emily Duneier next month in Old Westbury, N.Y. Mr. Corben, a physical education teacher, plans to wear a white dinner jacket along with custom-made white Chuck Taylor-style sneakers.

“If the bride can pull off wearing white, then I think the groom can pull it off,” Mr. Corben said. “It’s my day also to stand out and pop in the pictures.”

Technically speaking the jacket usually isn’t white but a shade of ivory or cream. Tracy Taylor Ward, the New York wedding planner overseeing Mr. Corben’s wedding, said, “You don’t want a bright white jacket on a guy when the bride’s dress is usually off-white.”

Mr. Corben doesn’t want to clash with or detract from his bride-to-be. Ms. Ward expressed confidence that wouldn’t happen.

“I don’t think the bridegroom has to worry he’s going to take anything away from the bride,” she said. “The bride is still the bride. The dress is still the dress.”

It's Now a Party Dress, Not a Uniform

By BEE SHAPIRO

June 9, 2013

It used to be that being a bridesmaid was an honor requiring loyalty, friendship, patience and the willingness to wear a clownish taffeta dress that could have been a hit only at a 1980s prom.

“There are people who mine the ’80s for inspiration, but they probably didn’t live through it,” said the ready-to-wear and bridal designer Lela Rose, chuckling.

“It was just bad,” she added, referring to the exaggerated shapes and stiff textiles. “Taffeta to me always said ‘bridesmaid.’ It’s really any fabric that makes that sound when you walk: ‘tsh tsh.’ ”

Bridesmaids today have it significantly better. The niche has spawned sophisticated collections offering attractive, rewearable designs that can occasionally usurp even the bride. Particularly, designers have given wedding parties flexibility in materials, cut and color.

Angela Craig, 29, is a nine-time bridesmaid (she calls her wedding party duties “like a second career”).

“I’ve had some really hideous bridesmaid dresses,” she said, remembering an “ugly cranberry dress, floor-length, made of cheap fake silk.” (Reality television buffs might tune in to TLC’s “Say Yes to the Dress,” which features a bridesmaid spinoff with episode titles like “I’m Terrified of This Dress.”)

Ms. Craig, a senior strategist at Redscout, a marketing consultancy in New York, said she was luckier in the most recent wedding, last month in Chicago. The bride was adamant about no taffeta for her wedding party. Ms. Craig and the bride had visited several stores in Chicago, trying on about 15 dresses. Ms. Craig said she was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the fabrics.

Eventually, the party agreed on an empire-waist knee-length plum-colored chiffon frock by Donna Morgan (\$178, found in Nordstrom’s wedding section).

“Most of us are fit, so we could do the strapless sweetheart neckline, and the chiffon was really good for the price,” she said, while the empire waist was for a bridesmaid who was pregnant.

Fabrics that drape are flattering for many women, said Ms. Rose, who also uses chiffon in her bridesmaid collection, which she introduced shortly after her bridal-line

debut in fall 2006. She partnered with the Dessy Group to produce the designs, with details borrowed from her ready-to-wear and wedding gowns, some with upscale fabrications like silk gazar. The designs are “very individualized,” she said.

“Often there is one detail that brings them all together,” she said, but women can choose among different cuts to suit their body shape but in the same color.

That very-uniform look is not very modern, Ms. Rose said: “Some girls look great in anything, but not everyone does. Bridesmaids are part of your pictures, so why wouldn’t you want them to look great?”

Her bridesmaid collection is now carried at retailers and on social wedding-shopping sites like WeddingtonWay.com, which was started in 2011 in San Francisco. The site’s founder, Ilana Stern, a former buyer at Bloomingdale’s, came up with the business plan while attending Stanford’s M.B.A. program. A lot of her fellow students were marrying or were part of wedding parties, said Ms. Stern, 30.

“People were pouring a lot of time and money into these weddings, but they were complaining a lot,” she said. One of the biggest headaches for brides, she said, was outfitting their bridesmaids. “I know there are jokes out there about bridesmaid dresses, but I didn’t realize brides found it so difficult,” Ms. Stern said.

The process is a balancing act: keeping bridesmaids happy while accomplishing a certain cohesive aesthetic, she said. (“There’s nothing worse than an angry bridesmaid who hates what’s she’s wearing and secretly thinks the bride had it in for her,” Ms. Rose said.)

Weddington Way’s site links members of wedding parties, offering bridesmaids and groomsmen fashion options to discuss online or to buy. Ms. Stern is now planning her own wedding, for August at the Bel-Air Bay Club in Pacific Palisades, Calif. It will have a beach boho theme and 11 bridesmaids with varying body shapes.

“One of my friends is a recent mother and wanted straps,” she said. A couple of other women requested sweetheart necklines, she said. After considering styles from Joanna August, Donna Morgan and Ms. Rose’s line, the group settled on “flowy” dresses by Watters in a similar color scheme, a coral palette but with varying shades to suit different skin tones. There are also five different dress styles.

“I really want them to feel good,” Ms. Stern said.

Spinning the color wheel is something Tom Mora, head of women’s design at J. Crew, has noticed for a few seasons. The company’s bridal business, started in 2004, first built a name on plentiful color options and several silhouettes to ensure the wedding party matched. But one of the newer developments, he said, was a mix-and-match approach. In

a single bridal party, “there are some who really step out with mixed colors and mixed dresses,” he said, suggesting, for example, differing pastels for a summer wedding.

Driven by informed customers, the bridesmaid-dress business has also become significantly more soignée.

“Women are becoming much more savvy,” Mr. Mora said. “People are actually looking at magazines more than bridal magazines.”

Sweetheart necklines are still popular, but one of J. Crew’s best-selling styles is the one-shouldered Kylie in silk chiffon.

“It’s just the new way of thinking,” he said. “The idea that women are just wearing cocktail or long formal dresses.”

Ms. Craig noted that while shopping for dresses in Chicago, she and the bride visited both bridal and nonbridal departments.

“You often can’t tell the difference between a bridesmaid dress or a party one,” she said. “You just have to be sure that it doesn’t show too much skin.”

Such is the crossover these days that the designer Alice Temperley, whose bridal line is sold at retailers like Net-a-Porter.com, recommends dresses from her ready-to-wear and contemporary collections for wedding parties. She also creates custom bridesmaid attire for special clients, like the model Jacquetta Wheeler, who was married in England last year. Ms. Wheeler’s bridesmaids were young girls, whom she dressed in white “like little angels,” Ms. Temperley said. “It looked fresh and clean and worked with the church setting.”

But Ms. Temperley, who plans to start a bridesmaid collection in October, said white can work for all ages. In England, the prohibition against white (brides only) has waned since Kate Middleton’s royal wedding in 2011, when her sister, Pippa Middleton, made headlines in a snowy Alexander McQueen column. A few months later, Kim Kardashian adopted the look, dressing her sisters in white strapless gowns for her wedding to Kris Humphries.

“If I was to get married again, I’d have my bridesmaids wear white,” Ms. Temperley said. She has even attended weddings in Europe at which guests were required to adopt the milky dress code.

While the look has trickled down among the fashion-forward set, “it is still about the bride,” Mr. Mora said. Even if J. Crew offers a few bridesmaid styles in white, he said, the designs are simpler than wedding dresses.

“Nothing too low cut, and something more universal,” he said.

More-voguish options or not, wedding-party dressing is no democracy.

“It really depends on the bride,” Ms. Craig said, the nine-time bridesmaid, adding

that disasters are still possible. The job description requires giving up negotiating power.

“I’m there as her wingwoman,” she said. “You’re there to support your friend and to be prepared for whatever she needs. You just hope it’s not a frumpy dress.”

Fairy Tales Come True, Even on Monday

By CHRISTINA VALHOULI

February 24, 2013

What is a bride to do when she falls in love with a reception site that is beyond her budget? Start negotiating or consider a Thursday.

When Jenny Pinzari, 28, was planning her August wedding to Adam Blotner, also 28, she fell in love with the Mountain Top Inn and Resort in Chittenden, Vt., but it was at the top end of her budget. She asked the hotel if there was any wiggle room on price.

Their answer: consider a midweek wedding. But she initially balked.

"I had to think about what was more important," said Ms. Pinzari, of Hoboken, N.J. "Did I want to have a Saturday wedding at a place that I didn't really love, or have a Thursday wedding at my top choice of a venue?"

In the end, the location won out, and she and Mr. Blotner are to be married on a Thursday.

While Saturday weddings remain the norm, more couples are considering midweek weddings because of the significant savings associated with them.

At Oheka Castle, a Long Island house once owned by the financier Otto Kahn, an average wedding costs \$100,000, according to their marketing director, Nancy Melius. Moving the event to the middle of the week can offer savings of 30 to 50 percent.

At the JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort and Spa in Phoenix, a Saturday wedding entails a \$3,500 ceremony fee, and food and beverages, including alcohol, cost about \$150 a person. For a midweek wedding, the ceremony fee is cut by 50 percent and the food and beverage discount is 20 percent, according to the hotel. Throughout last year, according to Natalie Hall, a senior catering sales representative there, a wedding was held at the hotel on every day of the week except a Tuesday.

For Ashley Glenn, 25, cost was a concern when she married Gary Glenn, 43, last July on a Thursday at the Charles Krug winery in St. Helena, Calif. She said she saved about \$8,000 between the site rental fee, the photographer, florist and D.J.

But did her guests resist attending a wedding on what is for most a workday?

"I really wanted a Saturday wedding to make it convenient for our guests," said Mrs. Glenn, of Vacaville, Calif., so she first cleared the date with her family, who she said

were all happy to take time off from work.

Still, some guests grumble at the inconvenience of it all.

Last summer, Cindy Dishmeyer, 29, of Jersey City attended her first hump-day wedding. “It was a beautiful, lavish wedding, but I had to leave early to go to work the next day, so I couldn’t enjoy the whole evening,” she said. “A lot of people cut out early and the groom was really upset.”

While budget is one of the biggest motivators behind choosing a midweek wedding, it isn’t the only one.

According to Mrs. Hall of the JW Marriott, nostalgia was behind some couples’ decisions, choosing a grandparent’s anniversary, perhaps, or leap day or some other quirky date like 12/12/12. For others, she said, military deployments have required a switch to a Monday event.

At Oheka, Ms. Melius said, “For a lot of these couples, their guests may be traveling to their summer homes on the weekend, so a Thursday wedding can accommodate that.” Other couples, she said, book midweek because of a short engagement or religious or cultural restrictions that do not allow Saturday weddings.

For some couples, it is all about doing something different and pushing the envelope, said Wayne Gurnick, who operates a Los Angeles wedding planning service bearing his name. Some, he said, are turning midweek weddings into lavish three-or even five-day events with brunches and activities.

Saving money was not the primary motivation for Mira Peck, 31, and Ron Shaffer, 44, of Dover Plains, N.Y., who were married last year on an October Monday at the B. R. Cohn Winery and Olive Oil Company in Glen Ellen, Calif. Ms. Peck didn’t set out to have a weekday wedding; she said she simply wanted an intimate destination wedding that was attached to a weekend.

“The celebration started on the Sunday with the rehearsal dinner, and we spent the rest of the week there,” she said. The couple and six of their eight guests spent time together hiking and exploring Yosemite National Park.

“I didn’t think too much of it happening on a Monday, but I guess it was surprising as a guest to receive an invite to a Monday wedding.”

Age and experience play into this trend. Some older affluent couples, who are perhaps on their second marriage, want an alternative to “the big, Saturday night ballroom wedding,” said Shelby Taylor, a spokeswoman for the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village near Los Angeles. “At this point in their lives, these couples are focused on their careers or a vacation home, and they don’t necessarily want a big, over-the-top wedding,” she said.

So in 2010 the hotel started a Weddings on Weekdays package that begins at \$95 a person, compared with \$138 for a standard Saturday evening reception.

Mr. Gurnick said that although the biggest saving is with the site rental fee, couples may also receive additional services from other vendors, like the photographer and florist, who may not have any work lined up on, say, a Monday.

Some photographers, he said, will offer extra hours, or sometimes include a free guest book for the bride and groom that is designed using images from an engagement sitting.

For couples with small budgets but a large collection of family and friends, Mr. Gurnick said, a weekday wedding can offer an out that is both cost-and face-saving. "Some clients are planning a midweek wedding because they know a large number of people cannot attend," he said, "so it is a way to keep numbers down."

A Dream Wedding in Someone Else's Backyard

By MARCELLE S. FISCHLER

January 6, 2013

Marina Giovannelli, in her quest for a distinctive wedding location, said she wanted to break from the “formulaic feel” of affairs in hotels and museums in the city of her childhood, San Diego.

“I was looking for an alternative to the prefabricated wedding experience that was unavoidable with a lot of the venues,” said Ms. Giovannelli, 32, who now lives in Boston and is a communications strategy consultant. “You have to use their caterer, stick to their timeline. I wanted it to be different.”

So she and her fiancé, Andrew Scherr, 30, a multimedia producer, opted for what may seem old-fashioned: a backyard wedding. But not an ordinary backyard at an ordinary house.

After browsing through dozens of homes and estates in Southern California at estateweddingsandevents.com, Ms. Giovannelli visited and booked her dream location: the Emma Estate, a four-bedroom Tuscan-style ranch on three lushly landscaped acres in Rancho Santa Fe.

“I could create what I wanted, instead of adapting what I wanted to a venue,” she said. “It felt elegant and comfortable and intimate. It’s like hosting people in your home.”

The 115 guests entered the house at the Sept. 29 wedding through the double-height foyer, peeking at the living room, dining room and den on their way out French doors to the ceremony by the rose garden. After cocktails on the patio by the pool, spa and outdoor fireplace, guests crossed a lawn lighted by lanterns to a tent for dinner and dancing.

Jane Siann, the homeowner, said she listed her house on the Web site four years ago at a caterer’s suggestion when friends borrowed the property for their wedding. The fee starts at \$3,500.

“All I have to do is make sure my garden is presentable and my house is pretty picked up,” Ms. Siann said, adding that the weddings have incurred “very little breakage.” She said she rolls up a few rugs, locks up valuables, boards her parrot, puts her five cats in the garage and checks into a hotel with her two dogs, leaving the party

management to Jamie Ehram, who owns estateweddingsandevents.com. With a dozen weddings scheduled this year, the Emma Estate is fully booked.

Ms. Ehram said her company holds a refundable security deposit (50 percent of the rental fee) for all minor damage and incidentals. Additionally, homeowners and vendors must obtain special event and general liability insurance. Ms. Giovannelli said her \$2,500 security deposit for the Emma Estate was fully refunded after her wedding.

Over the last decade the “fantasy of having a wedding at a mansion on the water in the Hamptons” became a “first choice” among brides, said Jill Gordon, a wedding planner in East Hampton, N.Y. But renting someone else’s yard for a day is not cheap.

“People come into this thinking they will get some sort of Gatsby residence on the ocean,” she said. “Sometimes that’s unrealistic thinking,” she added, unless they have \$75,000 to \$100,000 to invest in the event, not counting the tent, table and chair rentals, caterer, band or flowers.

Nancy Grigor, a location scout for events and the movies “The Nanny Diaries” and “Something Borrowed,” said she gets 15 to 20 calls a week from brides looking for wedding sites in the Hamptons. She said it was “just as easy” to find the perfect private residence for a wedding as it was to arrange a movie or a magazine shoot for Calvin Klein.

“The girls want to get married in the Hamptons and on the beach,” she said. “There are a lot of great properties out here to do weddings.”

Among her clients were Paul Rodriguez, 30, and Judith Carr, 35, of Manhattan, who after a tour last year, made a list of their top 10 wedding properties. For the week before their June 9 wedding, they paid \$25,000 for a nine-bedroom Victorian in Southampton, N.Y., so that their siblings could stay there.

“We wanted to feel like we were bringing Paul’s family from Texas and my family from England into our own home,” Ms. Carr said. The family members could also get to know one another as they saved on hotel expenses.

The ceremony was held in a walled “secret garden,” followed by poolside cocktails and a family-style buffet reception and pig roast for 100 guests under a tent on the front lawn.

“It was very relaxed and felt more like a garden party than a stuffy wedding,” Ms. Carr said, down to the lime tart with berries instead of a wedding cake. Afterward, the couple and their guests spent time by the pool.

“It was everything that we both dreamed of, very intimate,” she said, rather than the “conveyor belt” feel of a vineyard and other “cookie cutter” venues.

Sometimes, a house has special significance. Troy Gallas, 29, and Erin Schumacher

Gallas, 30, who met as architecture students at the University of Minnesota, paid \$2,165 to rent Still Bend, a privately owned residence designed by the architect Frank Lloyd Wright in Two Rivers, Wis., for their September 2011 wedding weekend.

“The unique atmosphere of his structure lent itself perfectly to what we wanted for our wedding,” Mr. Gallas said. After the ceremony and dinner outside, their 50 guests danced in the living room. “For an event that special we wanted to make sure the venue was just as special.”

Closer to New York City, another architecturally significant house, the Philip Johnson Glass House in New Canaan, Conn., will be available for weddings beginning in the spring, according to Christa Carr, the director of communications. Guests will be limited to 35, and packages running from \$10,000 to \$50,000 will include a tour of the house site with lunch or brunch on the lawn or in the painting gallery. The costs of food, beverages, tent, ceremony and rentals are not included in the price, and red wine is not allowed.

In Burleson, Tex., it’s Patricia Sullivan’s Lone Star Mansion, an antebellum-style home on 18 acres in a residential neighborhood. She converted the garage into a 2,500-square foot “crystal cathedral,” as she calls it, with a caterer’s kitchen attached.

But what persuaded Alex Ailara, 22, and her groom, Jamie Whitman, 23, to wed there on Oct. 13 was a man cave in the basement that the groom and his entourage could use while getting ready. It had a 73-inch flat-screen television, a pool table, poker room and dry sauna.

“It felt like the day was special not only for the bride but for the groom as well,” the bride said.

In Malibu, Calif., Richard and Charmaine Mark rent out their oceanfront property, Cypress Sea Cove, for eight weddings a year. Though guests are not allowed inside their ship-shaped, storybook-style white Victorian, the bride and groom have the use of the Marks’ two acres of palm-and cypress-studded gardens and beachfront, complete with a tiki bar (built for the filming of an episode of the television show “House”). Nearby, sea lions sun on rocks and dolphins frolic in the Pacific waves.

Mr. Mark takes part in the couple’s magical day, as he sometimes opens a window to enjoy the music and get a “bird’s-eye view of two families coming together.”

“It’s like a canvas and then they paint it,” he added. “Every one of these events is an exciting thing to be part of. It is a blessing.”

When the ‘Aisle’ Is Slippery and Buggy

By **MARIANNE ROHRLICH**

September 23, 2012

For some wedding couples, Labor Day’s passing simply signals that there is still plenty of time to lace up those sneakers, pack the bug spray and wed at a summer camp.

Nostalgia is back in weddings, said Darcy Miller, the editorial director for Martha Stewart Weddings. “I’ve been to weddings with a campfire and s’mores; people are going back to what they like to eat, hot dogs and milkshakes.”

Which helps to explain a growing interest among couples in renting summer camps as post-Labor Day or pre-Memorial Day wedding destinations.

“A camp is a perfect setting for a destination wedding; there’s lodging, activities and a place to eat,” said Ms. Miller, who allows that there is a desire among wedding couples for ever greater levels of personalization. And for some people, she said, a camp is a special place. “You can sit on a hill and look at the stars. It reminds you of your childhood.”

“It’s all about personal touches” and about being together, she said. “A camp is private — just you and your guests, rather than a hotel in the Bahamas, which is open to the public.”

Ms. Miller helped plan the Sept. 9 wedding party of Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds at a plantation in South Carolina that she said was very elegant and personal, with s’mores on the dessert buffet. People magazine reported that the event, although in a tent, had the feel of the outdoors, complete with the camplike banter of crickets and frogs in the background.

But if you’re more comfortable wearing Eddie Bauer than Ralph Lauren, a camp wedding might be worth investigating, like those that take place at Camp Arcadia in Casco, Me., before the campers arrive, or just after they have departed. Louise Johnson, an owner of the camp, has noticed a significant increase in requests for renting the property for wedding parties in the last three or four years. “The smell of pines and the view of a lake is fabulous, and that makes for a special bit of time — it’s a nice change from our world,” she said. And for some the price may seem just right. A two-night weekend for up to 80 guests with food and lodging is \$20,000.

Ms. Johnson hastens to add, “A camp wedding is for people who appreciate the outdoors, or those who live in rural areas and are comfortable in the country.” Which

means that couples and their guests need to be prepared to leave the high heels, gowns and tuxedos behind, arrive with their senses of humor intact, and be ready to roll with the punches that poor weather can occasionally bring. This is the nature girl's answer to the destination wedding.

Couples who have held camp weddings talk about how they were personally rewarding, welding the feel of a family reunion with a marriage celebration. "Being among Mother Nature is different than being in a hotel," said Whitney Chamberlin, a photographer who has photographed camp weddings. "You remove television and carpeting, and you begin to focus on family and friends. In a cabin there is more human interaction — nobody's watching the football game while dressing for the ceremony."

Monique Viard, 31, and Joshua Moise, 34, Brooklynites, married in an event for 130 guests on June 11, 2011, at Rockywold-Deephaven, a family camp in Holderness, N.H., that likes to refer to the weddings it hosts as "Champagne in a tin cup."

The accommodations are typical cabin style (but Ms. Viard said the mattresses are thicker than those in most camps, which she thought was important for her guests). The camp offers activities like canoeing, basketball, tennis and hiking. "I wanted a weekend-long wedding and I knew I didn't want a traditional one," Ms. Viard said, adding, "We got engaged on a hiking trip in Patagonia and we both love nature."

But it's not for everyone, Ms. Viard admitted. "There were people we invited who declined right away," she said. "This is not a wedding that you just show up for. It's very hands-on and I needed a brigade of friends and family to help. We had to plan and do everything, from decorating the place to planning activities and meals." Being from a Haitian family, Ms. Viard's mother had friends and favorite cooks prepare dishes like conch and goat stew for the celebration.

Much goes as planned, but one has to have the flexibility to deal calmly with the things that do not. Rain poured down on Ms. Viard and Mr. Moise's day, but rather than panic, the local florist they had hired as the day-of-the-wedding planner moved the ceremony from outdoors to a covered porch. (The bride wore red rubber rain boots under her gown and the groom carried an umbrella.)

"I'm not a girl who always dreamed of a wedding, and for me this was my storybook wedding," Ms. Viard said. "It was not my mother's style, but it was my style."

Michal McCarthy and Michael DeChellis married on April 12, 2012, at the John Knox Ranch, a summer camp in Wimberley, Tex., near Austin, that Ms. McCarthy attended as a teenager and remembers fondly. More than half of their 185 guests stayed in cabins with bunk beds, including the bride and her bridesmaids, who bunked together in her old cabin the night before the wedding. Upon arrival, Ms. McCarthy gave each guest

a survival kit that included sunscreen, bug spray, trail mix, peanut butter crackers and Advil. The couple employed Christina Lewis, a wedding planner, who helped with logistics and arranged the catering, which “was expensive,” said Mr. DeChellis, who reported that the grand total was \$20,000, including the \$3,000 rental fee charged by the camp.

The camp staff organized outdoor games, swimming, canoeing and archery. “Even snack time and rest period,” Ms. McCarthy said. The ceremony was held on the edge of a creek; Mr. DeChellis was taken there in a canoe, paddled by a few of his groomsmen, while a recording of the “Star Wars” theme played in the background. When Deborah Meyer, Ms. McCarthy’s mother, first saw the “aisle” down which she would be walking her daughter, the wooded path looked absolutely bucolic. In reality, it was strewn with “sticks, stones and slippery leaves,” she said. “About 10 feet down my right shoe started to slip off and I realized that Michal was gripping my arm and hanging onto me for dear life so as not to slip on the trail.” The shoe stayed on, and neither one fell. “But my dress collected lots of critters along the way,” Ms. McCarthy said, “and during the ceremony I noticed an inchworm crawling on the officiant, Uncle Eddie’s outfit. I reached over and flicked it off for him.”

“It was neat to see everyone come to an environment that was a little bit out of their comfort zone,” she said. “The effect was a big group of people playing silly games; many made new friends.”

Abi Arnold, 27, and Adam Chenault, 29, live in Jackson, Wyo. They chose to tie the knot before 150 guests on Sept. 24, 2011, at a privately owned, but inactive summer camp in Lyme, N.H., “because it’s very private and everyone could stay within walking distance of each other,” Ms. Arnold said. They also found the do-it-yourself aspect very appealing. “My mother even grew the flowers for the wedding,” she said.

The wedding cost “a little below average but not much,” she said. “Everyone loved our wedding; the experience was intimate and the sunset was fabulous. It was perfect.”

Although Mandy Seever, 32, and Luke Seever, 33, a Seattle couple, chose to elope last March, when it came to celebrating their marriage last August, they selected Camp Lane in Walton, Ore., because both had fond childhood memories of camp. Most of their 100 guests stayed in the bunks and shared communal showers, but her parents opted to sleep in their recreational vehicle, while the groom’s parents rented an air-conditioned house nearby.

“There was so much to plan and do,” Mrs. Seever said of her version of the destination wedding for which the couple had budgeted \$5,000 but which cost closer to \$7,000. “We were busy all the time; it was a weekend work fest.” And totally casual.

Some people who had spent the afternoon swimming showed up at the celebratory dinner party in bathing suits and cover-ups — a turn of events that the mother of the bride struggled with.

“My mother brought a silk pantsuit to wear and had a hard time reconciling what she was accustomed to with what we were doing,” the bride said.

“If you want everything to be perfect, do not have a camp wedding,” Mrs. Seever said emphatically. “There are bugs and stubbed toes.” But for herself, getting up the morning of her reception and baking pies with her friends is a cherished memory. And she said nobody was troubled by the lack of cellphone service, or minded making the 40-minute runs to the closest Costco to buy supplies.

She added, “Remember the cleanup is your responsibility, too.”

O.K., maybe some things are better in the Bahamas.

Paying the Hidden Cost of a Destination Wedding

By **CHRISTINE NEGRONI**

September 9, 2012

Danielle and Tim Jennings of Indianapolis booked a seven-night stay at the Couples Tower Isle resort in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, last August. They took advantage of one of those deals that couples considering destination weddings hear about all the time: pay for a week and get the wedding ceremony free.

But just how free is free?

The couple paid \$2,700 for their room at the all-inclusive resort and \$250 for government and processing fees for the ceremony, which included the wedding official, flowers, cake and Champagne for themselves and their two guests, Mr. Jennings's parents.

"If that's all they're giving, with everything else a resort will be making off the couple, that's nominal," said Marie van Rooyen, a hotel consultant in Connecticut specializing in the Caribbean. "A Champagne toast, maybe cake. If they have a restaurant, the cakes are probably prepared. You're not talking about a whole heck of a lot of money that they're giving for free."

In fact, had the couple hired the minister and gotten the marriage license from the Jamaican authorities themselves, they would have paid less than \$200. Whether the value of their free wedding is \$500 to \$750, as the resort's romance director claims, or something less, experts in the hospitality industry say that when it comes to the so-called free wedding, there is no such thing.

"The cost is buried someplace," Ms. van Rooyen said. "There has to be an additional revenue stream."

For very small ceremonies, between the weeklong booking and the administration fee, the hotel's costs are more than covered. For larger weddings, the hotel will often offer lower prices to the couple, knowing that it will make money on the wedding guests and what they spend for rooms, food and entertainment.

Destination weddings have been increasing steadily since the mid-1990s, when American couples first began going off to find places to marry more romantic than their hometown.

A Brides magazine study this year indicated that about 15 percent of its readers had a destination wedding, and that a top reason for choosing one was, perhaps surprisingly, to keep costs down. The study said the average cost of a destination wedding was \$23,800, more than \$3,000 less than non-destination weddings at \$26,989. One reason for the savings is that fewer invited guests are likely to attend a destination wedding.

Couples who chose a destination wedding said the event was more fun and lasted longer because they had in effect taken their guests with them on a getaway. The guests may get a mini-vacation, but they are going to spend a lot more than just the cost of a wedding gift. Attending a destination wedding can cost on average about \$1,500, industry insiders said, and that does not include a gift.

“It’s incredible money,” said Richard Markel, the director of the Association for Wedding Professionals International, because destination-wedding guests book large blocks of rooms well ahead; fill dining rooms, bars and gift shops; and spend on sports activities and spa treatments.

Michael Van Camp, an investment banker from New York who has attended several destination weddings in the last few years, including one in St. Barts and another in Isla Mujeres in the Mexican Rivera, estimates he spends about \$2,000 each time he goes. That includes his airfare and accommodations for what is usually a two-day event, though sometimes he spends more and stays longer. “Part of that is me, I like nice hotels,” said Mr. Van Camp, 40. “They do get expensive.”

But he does not mind going to one or two destination weddings every year. “I would have preferred not to have to travel to attend weddings in Northern California, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C.,” he said. The appeal, he said, “depends entirely upon the destination,” and for him, the Caribbean or Mexico are well worth the expense.

After they became engaged, Dewey Burke and his fiancée, Megan Kaltenbach, visited Maroma, a resort on the Mexican Riviera Maya, where they learned that their ceremony this month would coincide with the hotel’s low season. Mr. Burke, who lives in Denver, used that information to extract better rates for his guests.

“I knew right there that would be a bargaining chip for the negotiation,” Mr. Burke said. “We got them to cut the room rates in half and include breakfast for everybody.” But the hotel would make up for the discount, he said, because his guests would be spending even more money at the hotel. “That’s how I laid it out,” he said. “I said: ‘Give us these rates, and those people will be buying drinks and food. Some people are coming for an entire week and spending money.’ ”

When Rosie and Michael Klein of Cherry Hill, N.J., married in May at Playa del Carmen on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, they had 82 guests attend the three-day affair.

Considering that drug-related violent crime in Mexico has caused a three-year downturn in tourism and that the resort where Ms. Klein wanted to hold her wedding was brand new, she was counting on big discounts for filling dozens of rooms at the Paradisus La Perla with her friends and family.

“That was part of our initial conversation,” Ms. Klein said of the discussions with the travel agent who was also her destination-wedding planner. “We said, ‘What can we get?’ ” But Ms. Klein said the hotel did not budge much on the price of the ceremony or associated events and meals, though she did get some free accommodations.

“Every hotel offers incentives to the bride and groom,” said Marilyn Cairo, the romance-desk manager for Paradisus Resorts in North America. “They brought us this business. We are on the higher end in terms of price, but I also know we’re also on the higher end in terms of what we deliver.”

Ms. Klein said she and her husband paid \$75,000 for their “unforgettable” wedding at the Paradisus, which included hosting three evening events and entertainment like fire dancing, cigar rolling and a tug of war (bridesmaids vs. groomsmen) on the beach. For every 10 rooms they booked, they were given three nights free to dish out as they pleased. “We gave our parents three nights, we used a set for our videographer from New York, and we used the balance,” she said.

Their guests each paid \$215 a night, food and drinks included, Ms. Klein said. Of the \$75,000 bill, Ms. Klein said she was prepared to pay the same amount for a wedding at home, but at home she “would have had more guests but less of an experience.”

Free or upgraded rooms and a free one-year anniversary stay are the most common incentives given to couples. This can create conflict when guests discover that their attendance is subsidizing the wedding or the bridal couple’s expenses.

“I have seen instances where, within the immediate family, there has been some resentment,” Ms. Cairo said. A guest once demanded, “Why can’t I have some of the free nights because thanks to me my brother is getting free nights?” she said.

Mr. Van Camp said he has never believed he had subsidized his friends’ wedding ceremonies. In fact, he has seen otherwise. “Special considerations were made for our safety at the expense of bride and groom in Mexico and in the St. Barts wedding,” he said, and weeklong events were also covered by the bride and groom. “It was more expensive for them.”

There were no free nights for Daniel Lapin and his bride, Inna Shamis Lapin of Manalapan, N.J., even though they took 45 people to Paradisus La Perla for their wedding in March. Unlike the Kleins, who booked their block of rooms months ahead, the Lapins did not require their guests to do that or to use a specific booking agent. The Lapins’

room was upgraded, and all their guests were given \$250 to spend at the resort. But looking back, Ms. Shamis Lapin said she could have done things differently to get a better deal.

“I would have been more strict with my guests in terms of booking with one travel agent versus booking on their own,” she said, “because it would have led us to enjoy other incentives we did not have access to.”

Randall L. Russell a senior vice president at Couples Resorts in Jamaica, said, “Those who book the farthest in advance get the best deal.” He said 2,000 weddings were held in 2011 at the four Couples resorts there.

Rather than do a lot of negotiating with couples, Mr. Russell’s company developed five wedding packages. The most expensive, at \$4,750, includes a private island ceremony with reception, cake and rehearsal dinner for 40.

But most at the Couples resorts decide to wed as Danielle and Tim Jennings did, an intimate event with the “free” ceremony and post-vows toast at the resort. “The one that is the most popular is the free one,” Mr. Russell said. Since that deal requires booking a weeklong stay, it gives newlyweds plenty of time to decide if their free wedding was worth the price.

The Smaller, Cheaper, Just-for-Us Wedding

By **HELAINÉ OLEN**

August 10, 2012

Ruby Dee Philippa's first wedding took place in 2000. It was elaborate, so much so that she estimated that her in-laws spent several thousand dollars on flowers alone. The marriage, she said, lasted less than a year.

So when the time came to do it again, Ms. Philippa, 47, a former restaurant owner, author of "Ruby's Juke Joint Americana Cookbook" and lead singer in the rockabilly band Ruby Dee and the Snakehandlers, went in the other direction. She and Jorge Harada, 43, a librarian and guitarist for the group, went to a justice of the peace one Friday in April 2011.

And for the reception? The couple gave a barbecue the next day in their backyard in Austin, Tex. Invitations went out via Evite. Guests brought the food, drinks, dishes, grills, pillows and chairs.

"It was a picnic, really," Ms. Philippa said. "No one had to dress up. They could come in shorts or they could put on nice clothes."

More than a decade after the term "bridezilla" entered the lexicon, two years after the wedding of Chelsea Clinton set her parents back by an estimated \$2 million to \$5 million, almost a year after Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries spent a rumored \$10 million to celebrate what turned out to be a mere 10 weeks of marriage, and even as shows like "Say Yes to the Dress" remain popular, a small but growing number of brides and grooms are opting to downsize.

The lower-key wedding, if still a bit unexpected, is having a moment, thanks in no small part to May's surprise backyard wedding of the Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan, with fewer than 100 guests and catering from two local restaurants in Palo Alto, Calif.

Turning to everything from public parks to the living rooms of friends and family, couples are recreating the traditional wedding one ceremony at a time.

Over at the wedding site Offbeatbride.com, the publisher, Ariel M. Stallings, said the number of visitors to her Simple Wedding archive has grown since the Zuckerberg-Chan event from 275 hits a week to more than 600.

The Wedding Report, a market research firm, has been tracking the change, noting that in the last year, couples participating in the company's surveys have increasingly reported a desire for "fun, romantic, simple, casual and unique weddings."

Vendors concur.

"The backyard is the new ballroom," said Amy Kaneko, an events planner in San Francisco.

Stacy Scott, a caterer in Marin County, Calif., added, "I think people are waking up to the insanity that is the wedding market."

The experts say these more-intimate and often lower-cost affairs have been brought about by the intersection of a number of trends.

First is the relentlessly downbeat economy. The average wedding now costs more than \$27,000, according to TheKnot.com and WeddingChannel.com, with costs running significantly higher in regions like the Bay Area and New York City. But homespun celebrations come with substantially lower price tags.

Second is the ages of brides and grooms, now at record highs of 26.5 for women and 28.5 for men. Couples often find themselves coordinating their special day in the midst of other work and family commitments.

"We are busy and we have jobs," said Rosa Brooks, 42, a professor at Georgetown University Law Center, who married Lt. Col. Joseph Mouer, 44, in her backyard in Alexandria, Va., on June 15. The planning took all of two weeks, and included asking the bride's mother, the journalist and social critic Barbara Ehrenreich, to handle the catering, which was done by calling a restaurant, the Lebanese Taverna.

The couple had 14 family members in attendance — 16 if you count Ms. Brooks's hound-lab mix, Zoe, and her father's golden retriever. Play equipment and soccer balls belonging to Ms. Brooks's daughters, Anna, 10, and Clara, 7, are in the background in photos.

"For us, it was like a dinner party, but with a ring and someone to marry you," Ms. Brooks said.

Katie Schneiber, 28, was on vacation in Paris this last April when Russell Hill, 31, her boyfriend of five months, flew over with a surprise proposal. Ms. Schneiber ecstatically said yes, and then recalled that she needed to move to the Washington area within two months, since she was to begin a residency in psychiatry at George Washington University in July.

Instead of planning an elaborate wedding while Ms. Schneiber was in the midst of a grueling work schedule, the couple decided to marry before it began. Family friends from New Canaan, Conn., where she grew up, offered the couple the use of their backyard.

There was no time to order bridesmaid dresses, so Ms. Schneiber instructed the 10 friends she asked to stand with her to wear navy dresses with coral colored shawls she found online at Urban Outfitters for \$18.

Rather than holding one giant event, Ms. Schneiber and Mr. Hill married in a small ceremony in a Mormon temple in New York City on June 2. They then headed to New Canaan, where they had a party for 150 friends; a number of guests (not to mention the bride and groom) changed into bathing suits and jumped into the pool.

The total cost: \$6,000, a sum that did not include a second party Mr. Hill's family gave near their Utah home in July, which included a chili cook-off and square dancing, as a tribute to Mr. Hill's late father, who was an amateur square-dance caller.

All of this points to another trend that those in the business say is influencing the new wedding culture. Millennials want to do it their way, and that preference is affecting the ceremonies of all brides and grooms, no matter their ages.

According to business experts, even at fancier, fussier and more formal weddings, rustic barns are now favored over traditional catering halls, while wildflowers often supplant roses as centerpieces.

"It's just a shift in taste," Ms. Kaneko said.

Some people are so determined to buck the expectation that a wedding is an event that they neglect to inform their guests (à la Zuckerberg and Chan) that the party they have been invited to is going to include a ceremony.

The surprise wedding, planners say, is a way of avoiding everything from drawn-out planning to making sure friends and family do not stress out about gifts, dress codes or other traditional wedding flash points.

"There is a real focus on the guest experience right now, and this is the ultimate for a guest," said Rebecca Dolgin, executive editor of TheKnot.

That was the tack taken by Mickey and Cassie Luckoff. The couple, who married in 2010, surprised the guests who came to their Marin County home for a gathering the Saturday after Thanksgiving by announcing that they were about to witness an exchange of vows.

"I like to do the unexpected," said Ms. Luckoff, 60.

Her husband, 76, added, "The only clue we provided was a silver balloon at the front door."

The new approach also includes no small amount of assist from online crafts sites. Tatyana Lapson, 30, who married her husband Michael, 31, last August in an outdoor ceremony at Bohemian Hall and Beer Garden in Astoria, Queens, was one such bride, buying banners that said "love" on the Web site Etsy to decorate trees.

For her bouquet, she went to the flower district in Manhattan and put it together herself, tying it with a piece of lace. Total wedding cost: less than \$2,500.

And why was the venue chosen?

“That’s a place we like to go to,” Ms. Lapson said. “One night we were having dinner there and we just thought, ‘Let’s hold our wedding here.’ ”

After all, as Ms. Kaneko observed, “No one thinks about their personality and says, ‘Stephanie: hotel ballroom.’ ”

Capturing the Moment, Using Every Angle

By JANE GORDON JULIEN

December 7, 2014

A relative or a rookie may not be the best choice to capture the sights of a wedding day.

“Digital came along, and everybody became a wedding photographer,” said Jason Groupp, the director of the trade group Wedding & Portrait Photographers International and a columnist for Rangefinder magazine. “Is it easier? Yes, it is. But the experience of a wedding photographer — knowing what you’re doing, knowing the traditions, knowing the people — creates wedding photos that last over the years.”

When Hurricane Irene made landfall on the East Coast, the rising and roiling East River threatened to wash out the wedding of Sara and Josh Kalish at Guastavino’s, an event space in Manhattan under the Queensboro Bridge. The rabbi had bailed, the maid of honor couldn’t get in from Chicago, and all told, 60 of the 240 people who had promised the couple they would attend couldn’t. But one person had vowed to be there, no matter what: the wedding photographer.

“Since the Wednesday before the wedding, he had said: ‘Don’t worry. If you’re there, I’m there,’ ” Mrs. Kalish said about her photographer, Brian Dorsey, recounting that night, Aug. 27, 2011.

Mr. Dorsey, who had bought a Land Rover for just such occasions, was humble about the praise. “I am holding their hands through one of the most exciting but trying and confusing days of their lives,” he said. “The art has to be there, but customer service has to be there, too.”

Stories of wedding photographers who are heroes, and others who are horrors, abound. There are the wedding photographers who stopped calling clients back, who appeared at the wedding but were clearly inexperienced, or who were a relative and abandoned photography duties to dance, drink and dine. Enthusiasm is fine, pros say, but dependability, talent and experience are even better.

Wedding photography has changed significantly from 30 years ago, when photographers used medium-format film and there was only one precious negative per shot. Then came 35-millimeter photography, a simpler format. With improvements in

technology and ease of camera use, along with a decrease in prices for cameras, more enthusiasts moved into the business.

But the game changer?

“Digital came along, and everybody became a wedding photographer,” said Jason Group, the director of the trade group Wedding & Portrait Photographers International and a columnist for Rangefinder magazine. “Is it easier? Yes, it is. But the experience of a wedding photographer — knowing what you’re doing, knowing the traditions, knowing the people — creates wedding photos that last over the years.”

Here are some tips to help avoid a variety of issues that could arise (and when your gut tells you something is not right about a photographer, listen to it):

Get a recommendation. When Ann Woodhull of Southold, N.Y., decided to marry in July 2013, she asked friends on Facebook for help. Recommendations came in for Mary Latham, a destination photographer. “I talk up Mary’s work all the time now,” Mrs. Woodhull said. “She was amazing, and she captured moments we’ll always remember.”

You can also ask wedding planners and catering managers, who hear back from couples about various vendors, including photographers. “About 60 to 70 percent of my business is these type of client referrals,” said Brian Phillips of Brian Phillips Photography, based in Boston.

Or ask other photographers. “Referrals, reviews, relationships,” said Ken Hild, of Ken Hild Photography, who recently photographed a wedding in Bay Shore, N.Y., with two other photographers in tow, after receiving a recommendation from another photographer who wasn’t available.

Check a photographer’s name on the Internet to see what comes up. Mr. Group said, “If they’ve done something wrong, somebody is going to be talking about them.” Read all the reviews, not just the most recent.

If you want a documentary-style, photojournalistic approach, visit the website of the Wedding Photojournalist Association. Scores of photojournalists have posted their biographies and contact information. Remember to ask for recommendations, even if the biography is impressive.

Avoid hiring family. “Friends of the family tend to photograph people they know, not because they want to or realize it, but because they will tend toward people they are familiar with,” said Dan Loh, a Pulitzer-winning former Associated Press photographer turned wedding photographer. One photo studio in California, Lin & Jirsa, has a page related to this issue. Read “Hiring Uncle Joe” on the site and forever abandon any thought of asking a relative.

Avoid making a decision based heavily on website images. Scam artists have been

known to either steal or purchase wedding photographs from other photographers for their own websites. If you've found a photographer you like from a source other than word of mouth or a wedding planner or caterer, check the Internet for reviews and ask other photographers.

Pin down pricing. Base wedding packages for a midpriced photographer and a second photographer or an associate may start at \$3,000, but they can go up to \$15,000 for destination or luxury weddings, in-demand photographers, higher-priced technology and other extras. Saving money by choosing unknown Internet-advertised purveyors prompts a caveat-emptor response: You get what you pay for, or not.

Photographers expect a retainer to reserve the day for the couple. Most expect the final payment in the days before, or if agreed upon, the day of the wedding.

Sign a contract before handing over that retainer. Clearly lay out your expectations in the contract. Mr. Loh approaches each wedding he shoots in documentary style, to avoid stopping the clients and having them pose during their wedding. But many couples want specific posed shots. "I discuss with the client what they want captured and how I will capture it," he said. "Sometimes I'm given a list that they've gotten from a how-to book or website, and that's fine. But I ask for those materials several weeks in advance so I can make sure their expectations are met."

How many photographers will be present, and who? Make sure the photographer you specifically intended to hire is one of them.

If you are having a church wedding, contracts often state that the couple is responsible for finding out whether or not your church allows photography on the altar, or even during the ceremony. Many couples have been unpleasantly surprised to discover otherwise.

Typically, photographers maintain the copyright for the photos to enable them to use them for marketing purposes. They then provide discs, flash drives, a proof book or a password for a website where the couple may view the photos, or some combination. "They have everything we have," said Mr. Dorsey, the photographer who didn't let Hurricane Irene stop him. "I think you have a right to own every moment of your day."

Mr. Dorsey embraces the philosophies of the storied photographers Alfred Eisenstaedt, who said, "It is more important to click with people than to click the shutter," and Ansel Adams ("A good photograph is knowing where to stand").

"For me, probably the most important thing for the entire day is making sure the bride and groom are having a good time," Mr. Dorsey said. "Because if they aren't having a good time, I'm not getting the pictures I need to portray the day."

"The other part is the photojournalistic part. There's a lot of psychology that goes on

with where to be when, with knowing when a moment is going to come. Where is the best angle to capture a moment? I think in 3-D the entire day.”

Vying for a Shot of the Wedding

By **HEATHER SCHULTZ**

March 24, 2013

To promote photo sharing at their wedding in Manchester, N.H., last month, Laura Bishop and Walter Carroll placed postcards on the tables with instructions for their guests on how to download an application called WedPics. After the reception, the couple immediately signed onto WedPics and found some 200 photographs.

“We didn’t have to chase anyone down to get pictures from our wedding,” said Mr. Carroll, 27, a sales manager for Sprint. “It was right there on WedPics for us to save right to our phones.”

Hilary Rosenman and Mo Koyfman opted for something older and more traditional, at least in social media terms, at their wedding in Dorset, Vt., last October. They created a hashtag on Instagram, an application that has been around for all of two and a half years.

As photo sharing and other forms of social media have gradually become part of the event, they have also become an opportunity for technology companies, and their investors, to capture a piece of a huge market.

About 67 million people in the United States are between the ages of 18 and 34, making up the so-called millennial generation. They grew up with the Internet and are accustomed to planning and chronicling the most important events of their lives online. That, of course, includes weddings, and with the technology and those who use it becoming more sophisticated, new possibilities are emerging for everyone — from the person holding the smartphone to the app entrepreneur.

Aside from WedPics, other specialized photo-sharing applications include Wedding Party and Wedding Snap. One observer thinks that photo sharing has begun to change the dynamics of the celebration itself.

“The millennial generation is about community and everyone being involved,” said Anne Chertoff, an editor and writer in Brooklyn who often writes about weddings. “It’s not so much about the bride being the star of the day anymore. Guests are encouraged to take photos so the bride and groom can capture everyone’s special memories.”

Justin Miller, a co-founder and the chief executive of WedPics, which has its headquarters in Raleigh, N.C., said he envisioned his application, which became available last August, as a way to capitalize on content-and photo-sharing and apply it to a niche market. With a mobile format similar to Instagram’s, guests can download the WedPics

application and enter a couple's wedding identification number to upload images directly to the couple's album.

Both WedPics and Wedding Party are free. The Wedding Snap application is free for guests, but couples first have to buy a picture package from the company's Web site.

Rebecca Grinnals, the president and founder of Engaging Concepts, a bridal industry consultancy in Celebration, Fla., said her technology clients see the wedding business as a springboard.

Yet Mr. Koyfman, 35, who works for a venture capital firm in Manhattan, said that asking guests to download a new application might be inconvenient, compared with, say, Instagram, which many of them probably already have.

"You want them to do what they're already doing," he said. "You don't want to create a new behavior for them."

So does this wave of innovation, with its seemingly endless electronic picture galleries, threaten to inundate the professional wedding photographer?

The Koyfmans and the Carrolls both hired photographers. And Christian Oth, a wedding photographer in Manhattan, said he did not see the emergence of the new photo applications as a danger to his business but that they could hurt less-established photographers.

"The iPhone has a great camera for more static images, but you still can't record any good action shots with it," Mr. Oth said. "We work with \$8,000 cameras. There's a distinctive quality difference. A photographer's skill goes beyond just operating the camera."

At the ground — or aisle — level, some photographers say that their frames get cluttered with waves of smartphones, point-and-shoot digital cameras and iPads.

"We've photographed many weddings where we can count the iPhones and point-and-shoot cameras sticking out of the aisles," said Trent Cobb, another Manhattan photographer. "Guests will get up during the wedding ceremony themselves."

Heather Waraksa, a photographer in Brooklyn, said that her goal was to "provide images that are capturing people's reactions."

"If they have a device in front of their face," she said, "it doesn't have the same impact or timelessness."

When she was married last fall, Ms. Waraksa said, guests were asked — on her wedding Web site — to turn off their electronic devices during the ceremony, the toast and the cutting of the cake.

Annie Lee, a wedding planner in Manhattan, said that such requests were becoming a bit of a trend in themselves — the unplugged wedding. Ms. Lee added that she

encouraged restricting electronic devices, at least during the processional, and that doing so was a way for couples to restore a measure of sanctity to their ceremony.

The Food Outshines the Bride

By GLENN COLLINS

July 21, 2013

At first glance, the fantasy luxe wedding seems to defy time: the bride in ivory satin narrowed at the waist; the groom in Scottish cashmere from Savile Row; a string quartet sedately fingering Schuman and Poulenc.

But check out the caterer: on high alert and poised to offer gluten-free, peanut-neutral, free-range, kosher, organic, multigrain, nonpesticide, vegan, humanely slaughtered, grass-fed, locavore dishes.

It isn't your grandmother's wedding menu any more. It isn't even your big sister's.

"Weddings are more complex than ever," said Harriette Rose Katz, whose social-event company has presided over hundreds of wedding feasts in the last 35 years. "People want gluten-free, seed-free, egg-free, meat-free, fish-free and even cantaloupe-free and mango-free weddings. Every bride and groom has a guest who is allergic to nuts."

At their black-tie wedding in May for 150 at the Wölffer Estate, a vineyard in Sagaponack, N.Y., Missy Rinfret and Richard Minicucci were scrupulous about incorporating the wishes of allergic guests who had noted on the back of their R.S.V.P.'s red flags like "gluten free," "no soy" and "nut allergy."

"It hadn't crossed our minds that these would be issues," the bride said, "and a lot of other people were diet-conscious — but we had options for all at a formal sit-down dinner."

The comedian Jimmy Kimmel and his bride, Molly McNearney, who were married last weekend at a lavish ceremony in Ojai, Calif., had their event catered by Animal, that Los Angeles palace of meat-centric dude-food, which offered some desserts featuring bacon. Nevertheless, the couple supplied vegetarian options for their 300 guests, including salads, fried artichokes and other vegetable choices that kept vegan celebrity guests like Ellen DeGeneres and her spouse, Portia de Rossi, from dialing for takeout.

While some guests feel entitled to a say in the menu, many couples are increasingly demanding restaurant-quality food "because everyone is a foodie today," said Mary Giuliani, the founder and owner of a Manhattan catering business. "A nice piece of filet, a salad and a baked potato won't dazzle anyone anymore."

Though no one keeps statistics on this culinary escalation, "It's not a fad, but a real change in the way people think about food," said Andrea Correale, the founder and

president of Elegant Affairs, a caterer in Manhattan and Glen Cove, N.Y., that has been involved in hundreds of weddings over the last 18 years. “This trend is going to grow as people become more health-conscious.”

Rachel Kirschbaum, who was married to Anthony Rey in June, said “the food was the entertainment of our show.”

Guests at their “show,” on a rooftop terrace of their building in the financial district, were offered fresh-shaved truffles, heirloom tomatoes, pastrami from Katz’s and Molly’s cupcakes.

“There is more pressure now,” Ms. Kirschbaum said. “You really want to have very good food.” She added that she and Mr. Rey, who are investors in the Voli vodka company, “are major foodies — we watch the Food Network, and we Instagram our food.”

Celebrity chefs are also embracing the new rules. “Wedding menus have moved on,” according to Andrew Carmellini, a chef and an owner of the Lafayette, the Dutch and the Locanda Verde restaurants in Manhattan. In the early 1990s, when he got his culinary start in the catering halls of Cleveland, “The question was: do you want the chicken or do you want the fish?” he said. “Now, you can have both chicken and fish, but they’d better be really delicious.”

If crab cakes, pigs in a blanket, lamb skewers and baby sliders are still popular hors d’oeuvres, caterers often now offer treats like ceviche, vegetable timbales and kale salad-rolls in rice paper, Ms. Giuliani said.

And the primordial plated wedding-banquet service is also being challenged. “Every bride and groom wants wow and dazzle, and just putting food on the table won’t cut it anymore,” said Ms. Giuliani, who recently served mac-and-cheese plates from a miniature working Ferris wheel and had roving servers passing out tastings of paella and ceviche, “from walking stations — strap-on trays like the ones worn by the old cigarette girls.”

Family-style menus featuring passed food is of the moment as well. “There is something about being at table, and passing things to others using your hands — there is a social and psychological benefit to that,” Mr. Carmellini said

Trendy small-plates menus are a convenient option for family-style weddings “where we’ll have six or seven antipasti, a wealth of canapé things, two or three different pastas — all of it passed by hand,” Mr. Carmellini said.

An elegant variant is to offer family-style and small-plate feasts at events where servers also deliver a large-plate main course, Ms. Katz said. Guests on diets, she added,

prefer small plates to “feel that they are controlling what they are eating — it’s almost like a seated buffet.”

Nearly every wedding kicks off with drinks and Ms. Correale said that “wedding guests want cocktails made with fresh juices, and a mixologist is de rigueur.” As for the finale, she said, desserts are often dispensed from sorbet bars featuring fresh natural juices, or from stands offering organic ice cream infused with basil, lavender or green tea.

Menu choices increasingly hew to culinary correctness. On a recent Sunday wedding that inhabited the entire 150-seat space of Lafayette, the couple “requested a locavore menu, and chose local Catskill Mountain trout,” Mr. Carmellini said.

Indeed, Ms. Giuliani said, “at some weddings now, every food item has a name card to identify the farm or fisherman of origin.”

Or, as Ms. Katz put it, “Guests now want food fresh from the garden, and they want to know just where that garden is.”

The vegetarian option (once dismissed as “the veg plate”) “used to be a silent option,” Ms. Correale said. “But now it’s a featured item.”

The evolved wedding menu “is a relatively recent phenomenon, traceable to the rise of foodie culture,” said Bradford Wilcox, a sociologist who is the director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia. For centuries, wedding banquets were an expression of class status, sending a message to the assembled, “symbolically locating a couple within a community,” Dr. Wilcox said. “The couple’s ethnicity was often a driver of the menu, and that is still important for many. But now other concerns are coming to the forefront — often more agrarian, organic and local.”

Beyond that, “many couples want to demonstrate their sophistication about food,” Ms. Giuliani said. “And their menu can tell their story.”

Some brides and grooms are requesting the presence of celebrity chefs, and kitchen stars like Daniel Boulud, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, David Bouley and Laurent Tourondel have lent their expertise to weddings. Therefore “it’s becoming crucial for caterers to align themselves with well-known chefs,” Ms. Giuliani said. She has just started Mario by Mary, a collaborative event-catering program with Mario Batali, “where we execute the meal alongside Mario’s chefs.”

Other well-known chefs say they are selective about weddings. Michael White, the chef and an owner at Marea, Ai Fiori, Costata and other restaurants, said he prepared weddings “only for our very good customers.”

“We take weddings very seriously, and consult with the couple not just to learn their preferences so we can create fantastic food,” he said, “but also to see if guests have allergies, and whether they have other needs.”

And Mr. Carmellini said that he would not “just design a menu, I want to execute the whole process.”

Thanks to this pervasive sophistication-inflation, caterers must build and staff more elaborate kitchens at wedding halls, “instead of cooking off-site” in advance, Ms. Correale said.

That and larger, more skilled catering staffs, as well as the higher cost of top-quality ingredients, have made wedding menus 5 to 10 percent more expensive in recent years, “and 20 percent higher if the wedding is organic,” she added. The cost of haute wedding food alone, therefore, now begins at \$275 per guest, up 15 percent from just a few years ago, she added.

But if a higher degree of difficulty is now a given for wedding caterers, they still can’t miss a beat when guests spring surprise dietary regimes during the menu-planning sessions.

“In a worst-case scenario,” Ms. Katz said, “we just tell them, ‘Bring food. And we’ll prepare it beautifully.’ ”

A Gift? Bring a Dish (With Some Food in It)

By MARIALISA CALTA

September 28, 2014

There is no need for couples to break the bank (or rob one, for that matter) to pay for a wonderful meal for all the guests at their wedding reception.

Some brides and grooms are saving money, and bringing friends and families closer together, by borrowing a page from the church socials of the past and having potluck wedding receptions instead of hiring caterers.

But having such an event come off beautifully, and with style, takes considerable planning — and a lot of communication with all concerned. And no matter how well the potluck is arranged, some guests may be put off by a request to bring food.

When Hayley and Tim Tuller were married this year at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Jacksonville, Fla., they chose a potluck reception because, Ms. Tuller said, paring the guest list of 250 was not an option.

“We really wanted to invite everyone who we invited,” she said, but the couple knew their budget would not stretch far enough to provide a catered meal for such a crowd. “Plus, we wanted it to feel like a homemade family feast. And we both really like food and we wanted the meal to be great.”

With the wedding in early January, they chose a “holiday buffet” theme, and bought turkeys and hams (for \$500) as the main course, and asked guests to bring just about everything else.

“People just blew us away,” she said. One guest brought a huge wheel of Stilton cheese. Another deep-fried a turkey. A friend of the groom baked two multitiered cakes. Ms. Tuller, who asked guests for their recipes in advance, printed them in cookbook form and gave them out as favors.

Ash Metry, editor of Inspiredbride.net, said that the success of a potluck wedding is “all in how you tell it,” and that it is important to communicate “you are doing this to celebrate the warmth and closeness of family and friends, not simply because you don’t want to pay a caterer.”

The wedding of Catherine Twigg and Christopher Gillespie, both 29, illustrates the point.

“The potluck reception reflected the community in which we came together,” said Ms. Twigg, who met her husband at the Resurrection Presbyterian Church in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where the couple married last November. “We wanted to involve our friends and family, and give them a way to participate that wasn’t simply financial.”

A potluck reception can save thousands of dollars. In 2013, TheKnot.com wedding site said the per-plate cost of the average wedding meal was more than \$60, and Anja Winikka, the site director, says prices in places like New York City can easily approach \$200 a plate.

But even a potluck is usually not cost-free. Some couples provide the main course, while others rely on their guests to do so. Some rent tableware and linens, tables and chairs. Others use what is available at the church or hall.

Some couples provide an open bar (the Tullers spent \$4,000 on liquor, bartenders and servers). Others ask guests to bring beverages in addition to, or instead of, a potluck dish.

The Tuller wedding exceeded the couple’s \$10,000 budget by \$3,000, but Ms. Tuller does not regret a penny spent. In fact, she said, she wished she had rented the china and glassware instead of using the church’s, because she and her husband spent the first day of their married life washing dishes.

There was a time when the potluck wedding feast was all but standard.

While researching her 2004 book “All Dressed in White: The Irresistible Rise of the American Wedding,” Carol Wallace pored over letters and diaries from pioneer women in the West that chronicled dishes brought to wedding feasts.

“They had very little, so they all had to contribute to reach the appropriate level of festivity,” she said. The celebrations evolved over time into wedding receptions in parish halls, church basements and community centers. In the mid-20th century, the rising middle class began having what she calls the “aspirational” wedding, appropriating the customs (white bridal dress, sit-down dinner) once reserved for the rich.

In the 1960s and ’70s, some couples opted for the “barefoot in a field” wedding that often involved a potluck reception.

“There was an element of protest, of not wanting to be part of ‘the machine,’ and a little bit of sticking it to your parents,” Ms. Wallace said. Young people today who choose the potluck route seem to do it in the spirit of D.I.Y., aiming for an artisan feel.

Verandah Porche, a poet and a founder of a commune in Guilford, Vt., in the 1960s, celebrated her second marriage to Richard H. Coutant at the commune’s traditional May

Day potluck celebration this year. “Everyone always brings a dish for May Day,” Ms. Porche said.

The difference this year was that the potluck was more organized (guests with first names starting with A through F were asked to bring hors d’oeuvres; G-O, salads; and so on) and Ms. Porche supplied the main course: chicken Marbella. The table included an array of artisanal cheeses, a smoked bluefish, a brisket and several homemade wedding cakes.

Meg Keene, founder and editor in chief of apracticalwedding.com, and author of the 2011 book “A Practical Wedding,” said the keys to a successful potluck reception are having guests who are comfortable with the idea, and having many of them from the local area. “You can’t expect people to fly in holding a casserole on their lap,” she said.

She offers a few guidelines.

- Outline your idea for the potluck in your invitations, and make it clear that participation is optional. “The real etiquette breach occurs if you try to force someone to do something,” Ms. Keene said. “You can’t make your guests all wear pink, or force them to buy you a gift, or tell them they have to bring food.”

- Devise a way to ensure that the potluck meal is well balanced, varied and ample. Assigning types of food by the guest’s initials or asking for recipes in advance can work. Consider asking for a volunteer, or hiring help, to organize the potluck.

- Consider providing the main course (such as baked ham and turkey, or chicken) to ensure there is enough to satisfy even the healthiest appetites.

- Be scrupulous about safety in the preparation and storage of foods.

- Enlist (or hire) help, from serving through cleanup.

- Finally, say goodbye to the registry. There are people who will still want to bring gifts or who will come from out of town and not bring food, she said, and for them it’s appropriate to have a “word of mouth” registry: “The guest calls the mother of the bride and she lets them know what the couple might like or need.”

Ms. Keene emphasized that a potluck reception need not be unstylish.

“The trick is to not let the word ‘potluck’ pigeonhole you,” she said. “Potluck doesn’t have to mean church supper or picnic, though it can, if that’s what you want. It can mean an elegant party, if that’s your style.”

The Tullers, for example, staged their potluck with real china, nice glasses, lovely linens and candlelight. Lights were strung all over the hall, and hand-lettered cards were used for the seating. And, Ms. Tuller said, “We set up a really posh bar with fabulous Champagne and our favorite cocktails.”

But there is a good chance that some guests, or perhaps more precisely, people who

would otherwise be guests, won't be thrilled at the prospect of a potluck wedding.

Stephanie Newman, 30, of Washington, D.C., said that she has cheerfully booked overseas airline tickets to attend weddings, has slogged across soggy fields to witness ceremonies and has sunk a small fortune into Le Creuset gifts. Just don't ask her to bring food. "I think asking people to bring a dish is the opposite of saying 'We love you so much and are so happy you came to our wedding,' " she said. "And as someone who doesn't like to cook, it's a chore. And the temperature of the dishes is always off and you never get your dish back."

Ms. Keene is well aware of the critics, noting the potluck wedding is "right up there with the cash bar in terms of hair-pulling etiquette debates."

But that shouldn't be too much of a deterrent, she said.

"Someone is always going to feel like your wedding is a nuisance," Ms. Keene said, "whether you're having a potluck or a big ballroom wedding."

Yet despite the risk of offending some guests, and all the hard work and contributions from friends and family that they require, some wedding potlucks are all but perfect.

"We had the meal that no amount of money can buy," Ms. Tuller said, "and we treated it in every way like it was that precious."

Extravagant Wedding Cakes Rise Again

By GLENN COLLINS

June 8, 2014

Reports of the demise of the wedding cake have been exaggerated.

True, the recession forced many couples to downsize their weddings, and economize on glammy cakes. And afterward, some affluent couples were hesitant to flaunt big weddings and show-off cakes. Then that cutesy cupcake-wedding craze came along. Not to mention the dessert-tables-without-the-wedding-cake thing.

But now, even in Brooklyn, the super-casual center of the universe of culinary cool, wedding cakes are resurgent. “Almost all our brides are customizing cakes,” said Cheryl Kleinman, a wedding go-to and the owner of Cheryl Kleinman Cakes, a thriving bakery on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. “It’s looking way better than three years ago.”

Ron Ben-Israel Cakes, in Manhattan, just sent a five-foot-tall masterpiece (for 550 people) in a refrigerator truck to Palm Beach, Fla. “There is a return to big,” Mr. Ben-Israel said. “Being generous. Inviting a lot of people.”

Mr. Ben-Israel said it would be a breach of confidence to reveal the cost of the Palm Beach cake, but his minimum order is \$500, and sculptured cakes start at \$1,500. Wedding cakes begin at \$16 a slice. He has created a \$30,000 wedding cake for 800 people more than once.

Sylvia Weinstock, called the Leonardo da Vinci of cakes by Bon Appétit magazine for her detail work, theorized that “maybe people are tired of being worried, and doing all that penny-pinching.” She smiled. “Maybe they’re simply saying, why not?”

That “why not” can be expensive. Ms. Weinstock would not discuss pricing, but said that in Manhattan, “you can get a cocktail for \$18 plus a tip and tax, and what is artistic about getting a shot of vodka with an ice cube and a slice of lemon for \$20? So is \$20 per slice really out of line?”

Despite the fact that the average number of guests at a wedding, nationally, is 84 (compared with 126 in 2008), wedding-cake futures seem promising. “We expect to see an increase in weddings this year and next year, due to the soldiers coming back home and to same-sex marriages in the states that allow them,” said Richard Markel, director of the Association for Wedding Professionals International, a 900-member trade group.

Indeed, about 90 percent of couples offer cake, in some form, at America’s two million weddings a year. That’s a yearly expenditure of \$2 billion, according to Mr.

Markel, so cakes are still a vibrant segment of the \$86 billion bridal industry.

After the 2008 recession, supermarket cakes for under \$200 gained in popularity. But nationally, the average cost of wedding cakes has doubled over the last decade, and now “the average price per slice is about \$7,” Mr. Markel said, citing a low of \$2.50 a slice in smaller areas to \$15 and more in San Francisco and New York.

“A few years ago, it was just, well, you get a wedding cake,” said Mary Giuliani, a high-end caterer in Manhattan. “These days, it’s like, what cake are you wearing? It’s so much more stylish, tied in with couture.”

Laura Pietropinto, a Broadway assistant director who is to marry her fiancé, Justin Restivo, next month at the Metropolitan Club, said her five-tier cake (being made by Mr. Ben-Israel) will incorporate their white-and-pink wedding colors. Each tier will display textures from her gown.

“It’s the symbol of your union and your future together,” she said.

“We never considered not having a cake,” she added, talking about their \$3,000 cake. “It was about tradition.”

Increasingly, “weddings are almost being branded,” said Anna Hightower, a cake designer in Orlando, Fla. “Brides’ colors and themes and monograms are repeated again and again, even in Gobo lights,” she said, referring to the projectors that scatter monogram colors on wedding-hall dance floors. “So the wedding cake can embody everything that is going on in the event, and everything they aspire to.”

Beyond this, image-sharing on Pinterest as well as bake-offs on the Food Network have created a new wedding-cake world of aficionados. No longer can professional cake designers get away with offering a few formulaic designs. “Every bride is now online, and exposed to a whole world of ideas,” said Harriette Rose Katz, a Manhattan-based wedding planner who does 130 events a year.

Textured wedding cakes are on the rise and “following the recession, the amount of detail on dresses is increasing,” Mr. Ben-Israel said, “from lace, to involved textures and bling and really a lot of work. So cakes are reflecting that.” He takes pieces of bridal lace, casts them in silicone, and makes custom molds so the pattern can be applied to the wedding cake.

The ombré cake (pronounced to rhyme with hombre), from a former hair-dye fad displaying shaded color gradients, is still sought-after. “And now we are seeing more subtle differences of color, not as mechanical as the original ombré, which is a year old,” said Mr. Ben-Israel, who creates 300 cakes a year.

Increasingly, couples are demanding precise color. “Many are looking for the new Pantone color of the year, and everyone jumps on that,” Ms. Hightower said of the annual

“it-hue” that the New Jersey-based Pantone Inc. designates for paint, fabrics and manufacturing. This year it is No. 18-3224: “radiant orchid,” which is a pinky-purple.

Given that, “people are asking for lavender-ish embellishments or flowers,” Ms. Kleinman said.

Ms. Hightower said she is “doing a lot of upside-down ruffles, where each layer looks like a petticoat upside down,” she said. “And brides like what I call ‘messy buttercream,’ spatula marks in the icing, so it looks as if Grandma frosted it. It’s a more homemade, organic look.”

In Brooklyn, Ms. Kleinman has had requests for retro cakes and edgy black cakes and “Brooklyn-icon cakes.” But interestingly, she said, “people here are mostly going toward traditional. Translation: pretty.” Popular flourishes are small piped polka dots, chevrons, zigzags, typography configurations, gold leaf and metallic or glitter elements.

Gluten-free, sugar-free, vegan and organic cakes are all being requested, as are square, hexagonal and octagonal tiers. Some brides are insisting on shabby chic, as well as antique or heirloom add-ons. And Ms. Giuliani said that going bare — the naked wedding cake, without exterior frosting — also continues to be popular.

“People seem more and more interested in them,” said John Rusk, the pastry chef at Alice’s Tea Cup in Manhattan, which offers its four-tier, berry-laden naked cakes for \$900. Going bare is an aspect of the rustic cake movement, where country-inspired designers use wildflowers and succulents as garnishes.

Even Christina Tosi’s Momofuku Milk Bar is offering bare cakes (one is six tiers, serves 250 and costs \$975), the better to show off layers of dulce de leche, strawberry-lemon and chocolate malt.

In Brooklyn, Ms. Kleinman is asked for “Brooklyn-icon cakes with the Brooklyn Bridge, the Nets, the Dodgers, Ebingers, with Brooklyn all over the place,” she said. “Others just want a pretty, Brooklyn-themed cake.”

As for cake substitutes, “I just don’t get the cupcake request as much anymore,” Ms. Giuliani said. “Maybe macarons are the new cupcakes.”

Elisabeth Holder-Rabin, the United States co-president of Ladurée, the Manhattan branch of the luxury Parisian bakery, said she is seeing “a macaron invasion.” Ladurée sells pyramids of as many as 370 macarons that can be heart-shaped and gold-or-silver-leafed. Some towers are as tall as 40 inches and cost \$1,270. “Brides are choosing them as wedding cakes,” Mrs. Holder-Rabin said.

Given the complexity of cakes, their hidden architecture is more important than ever. “The tiers must never wobble or lean,” said Michael London, an owner of Mrs. London’s Bakery and Café in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., who trained at Fauchon in Paris.

He remembers successfully correcting a Leaning Tower of Pisa-like drift in his wedding cake for Gov. Hugh Carey's 1981 marriage to Evangeline Gouletas in Albany.

Couples are increasingly insistent on deliciousness, as well. "It used to be at weddings that there was this large decorative cake that tasted terrible and then a whole slew of enjoyable desserts on a buffet," said the celebrity chef Geoffrey Zakarian, who offers wedding cakes focusing on seasonal ingredients, fresh-baked cake and fresh buttercream at his restaurant the Lambs Club. "Now everyone wants the cake to be as wonderful as the food."

With a five-tier square cake to construct and transport for 250 guests to Niagara Falls, where he had his wedding, Mr. Zakarian and his wife, Margaret, asked Ms. Weinstock to create an extravaganza with white buttercream, strawberries and Meyer lemon filling.

Still, the traditional wedding cake is an anachronism to some couples. During their reception last May, the 200 guests of Tara Littman and Travis Reilly could stroll from the wedding hall (the Bell House in brownstone Brooklyn) outside to the Treats Truck, where they could have their fill of pumpkin-swirl cookies, brownies and pecan butterscotch bars.

Their cake was the pedestal for a foot-high sculpture of their 5-year-old dog, Piko, sculptured from Rice Krispies Treats with a thin outer shell of sugar-paste icing. The pedestal, resembling a brown-leather dog bed, was a lemon sheet cake to serve the guests, featuring passion-fruit butter cream, made by Sugar Couture in Brooklyn. "We figured that if we were going to spend for a cake," said Ms. Reilly, an event planner, "we wanted people to remember it."

There are "brides and grooms who don't want wedding cakes at all anymore," said Ms. Katz, the Manhattan-based wedding planner. "They could be younger contemporary couples, or older brides who are dieting."

But Ms. Weinstock, the 84-year-old Manhattan cake designer who still helps deliver her creations, dismisses wedding-cake calorie watchers. "If you want something noncaloric, you just don't eat cake," she said. "It's a wedding! It's a special treat!"

And special treats can be costly, so the bottom line is that "usually, the woman tells her husband the cake costs less," Ms. Weinstock said, "and tells her friends the cake costs more."

In the end, the perseverance of the wedding cake is hardly surprising. "The wedding cake can be a symbol of how important the couple takes the ceremony, and also the relationship as well," said Bradford Wilcox, a sociologist who is the director of the

National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia. “In our secular culture, for some, the wedding cake is possibly the ultimate sacrament now.”

Let Them Eat Cinnamon Buns

By **ERIC V. COPAGE**

June 17, 2012

Kellie Cicconi has always been a picky eater.

Ms. Cicconi, a doctoral student in veterinary biomedicine at Cornell, recalled that as a child her mother put a chart on the refrigerator that said, “Did Kellie eat a good meal?”

“If I did, I’d get a sticker,” said Ms. Cicconi, 27. But even with the lure of the approving star, she subsisted mainly on grilled-cheese sandwiches between the ages of about 7 and 11. So when it came to planning the reception dinner for her wedding June 9 to Josh Hogan, 29, her quirky palate inspired her to forgo one of the day’s most powerful icons: the wedding cake.

“I don’t like wedding food, and I don’t like cake,” Ms. Cicconi said.

Devin Wayne, 31, doesn’t like cake, either. “Especially wedding cake,” she said. “It’s ornate and fancy, and I’m not that fancy of a girl.”

So, like many other couples who are skipping the three-tiered tradition, there was no cake for guests at her wedding May 27 to Christopher Lloyd, 29.

Ariel Meadow Stallings, the founder and publisher of Offbeat Bride, a wedding blog, said, “It’s not an anti-cake movement, it’s more like: If you’re going to spend a fortune to feed your guests at your wedding, you might as well feed them something you’re going to really enjoy, and that they’re going to really enjoy.”

She has featured ceremonies in which candied apples, churros and even schlopp, a Dr. Seuss-inspired parfait, take the place of the cake. Ms. Stallings said the couples’ challenge is making less formal substitutions look special.

Claudia Hanlin, a wedding planner in New York, said for some brides, the wedding cake is the most important part of the dinner, but others, “hate wedding cakes, they say, because ‘Nobody ever eats it.’ ”

Or as Robert Cannon, who will marry Lisa Rau on Aug. 4 in Malibu, Calif., put it, “It gets passed out, and then at the end you find a plate with some old cake and a cigarette butt shoved inside it.”

Knowing that Ms. Cicconi has an aversion to cake, JeanE Bartlett, Mr. Hogan’s aunt, suggested they go with cinnamon buns instead. The idea won the couple’s enthusiastic approval.

“It goes with our breakfast-at-dinner theme,” Ms. Ciconni said. Because breakfast is the couple’s favorite meal, their 7 p.m. wedding supper included Italian omelets, ham, sausages and fruit.

Ms. Wayne and Mr. Lloyd, who live in Nashville, chose an artisanal ice cream from the Pied Piper Creamery, a nearby ice cream parlor, to substitute for cake.

“He introduced me to the ice cream parlor on one of our early dates,” Ms. Wayne said. “And we go there on a regular basis.”

Cupcakes, pies and doughnuts are also popular substitutions for the traditional multitiered wedding cake, as well as sundae bars; cookie and candy stations; and cake, cupcakes or pie in a jar — in which the dessert is baked inside an actual jar.

“We find that the desserts that people really love are substituting for the actual importance of the cake,” said Ms. Hanlin, the New York wedding planner.

Katie Powers, a caterer based in Sausalito, Calif., works at about 30 weddings a year. She said that in the last year and a half, only seven have included a traditional wedding cake. Substitutions have included artisanal ice cream sandwiches and straight-from-the-oven cookies with cold milk from organically fed cows. But strangest of all, Ms. Powers recalled, was a Hostess Twinkie tower with troll dolls on top.

Even Joanne Bruno, the owner of Palermo’s, a bakery in Ridgefield Park, N.J., noted for its elaborate wedding cakes, said that of late about 10 percent of the 100 or so brides they see every week ask about substituting something for the cake, like a pastry or cupcake tower.

Mr. Cannon, 32, and Ms. Rau, 26, have decided to have pie instead of cake for their 250 guests. They will have 54 pies loosely representing colors of the rainbow: red (cherry), orange (pumpkin), yellow (apple), green (Key lime pie), blue (blueberry) and purple (which they suspect will involve mulberries). In order to make the colors visible, Ms. Rau said, they are telling their baker to create a latticework crust so the fillings show through.

While most wedding dinners that don’t use a formal cake are relatively informal themselves, Ms. Hanlin said she had been to a formal wedding that used an ice cream station gussied up “super elegant with silver bowls.”

Ms. Stallings said, “Candy buffets can be really colorful, and really playful, and have a real sense of fun.”

But what about the loss of the cake-slicing ritual?

Tracee Lewis, a friend of Ms. Wayne’s and a guest at her wedding, said that she tried to encourage Ms. Wayne to include a cake.

“I’m old-fashioned and traditional, and I know in my own wedding the cake was an

important psychological and physical presence,” Ms. Lewis said, referring to her seven-tier, seven-flavor cake. But in the end, Ms. Lewis may be a convert. “The ice cream was excellent, and they had four flavors, and people seemed to enjoy it,” she said.

Ms. Wayne said initially her parents were more upset by the fact that there would be no cake-cutting ceremony than by the absence of cake.

Ms. Cicconi compromised with her mother and mother-in-law by having a top layer of the cinnamon buns baked to look like a layer of a cake. “That way there’d be something to cut for the pictures,” she said.

Ms. Powers, the caterer, said that some couples choose a small cake at the reception, “so that they still have that moment.”

But with other choices on the table, they don’t have to eat it.

When The Hokey Pokey' Just Doesn't Cut It

By **LINDA MARX**

September 7, 2014

Even if it's 6 p.m. on a Saturday night, some brides and grooms want a wedding reception that pulsates with that wee-hours-of-the-morning nightclub vibe. Because of that, more couples are eschewing the live band to create high-energy dance extravaganzas and hiring nationally known disc jockeys who regularly headline nightclubs from New York to Las Vegas to Los Angeles.

"Bands can't do Pitbull and Glenn Miller," said Randy Bartlett, of Premier Entertainment and Video, a wedding-entertainment company in Sacramento. "Club D.J.s are the way to go if the couple want a dance scene, because many good ones can have a 50,000-song library."

Ian Grocher, a D.J. from Miami Beach who is known as Irie, said that club vibe is a "generational thing."

"For couples today, most of their memories come from nightclub experiences when they partied with best friends to their favorite D.J.," said Mr. Grocher, 39, whose main gigs are spinning tracks at nightclubs around the country and for corporate-partnership parties or high-profile events (like the World Cup in Brazil and Miami Heat games). "There is no better way to host the most important day of their lives than to recreate that environment and experience."

David Mahoney, 33, and Rachel Mahoney, 27, attended a friend's wedding reception in Santa Barbara, Calif., before they were married. At that reception, Paul Purman, a club and event D.J. known as Politik, was spinning tunes. "I had never seen a wedding where all ages danced together to such fun party music and loved it," said Mr. Mahoney, a vice president of CBRE, a brokerage in Chicago. "We were so impressed, we hired Politik to do our June 28 wedding party this year. We didn't want any traditional reception music or cheesy songs. Nothing old-school, just modern-day fun."

Mr. Purman, 26, who lives in Los Angeles and performs around the country, said he is selective about accepting wedding engagements. Of his 150 to 200 annual events (like spinning for Leonardo DiCaprio's birthday, or for Usher's and Nicole Richie's events), about eight are elaborate weddings.

Mr. Purman and others sometimes use a club's LED lighting system or its intricate laser lights to give guests an instant sense of excitement, as well as spinning a vast library of tunes. "Brides and grooms want a fun party, and the orchestra component is generally outdated," he said. "The trend of couples' hiring club D.J.s for their weddings has exploded in the past two years. They want a cool club atmosphere."

Hiring a name D.J. is not cheap. "I don't think a couple will save money by hiring me," said the Brooklyn-based D.J. Mick Batyske, 36, who uses only his first name professionally. He spins at clubs from Boston to Berlin and has been featured at star-studded events with Beyoncé, Jennifer Lopez, Kanye West and Will Smith.

Couples mentioned in this article would not say what they paid, nor would D.J.s give specific prices, although Mr. Batyske did say that he is paid "low to high five figures," depending on the event.

Indeed, according to Yoni Goldberg, a partner at dGi Management, a New York talent company, top D.J.s can make \$20,000 to \$100,000 per wedding. Other industry estimates range from \$5,000 and \$25,000 for most club D.J.s.

"You can book a major talent with a D.J. these days," Mr. Goldberg said. "Of course, if a couple can hire Bruno Mars or Stevie Wonder to be their wedding band, then go for it. But some of these D.J.s are world-class musicians themselves."

Jacqueline Mailhe-Grantham, who represents Mr. Grocher, a.k.a. Irie, said that he is paid \$30,000 to \$80,000 for a private event.

When Alexander Karnal, 32, and Cassaundra Karnal, 25, were married at the Mandarin Oriental in New York on June 2, 2012, their goal was to give the 180 guests a wonderful party. Since the couple had met in a Las Vegas nightclub, they wanted to recreate the scene for their wedding party with a red carpet, bouncer, faux paparazzi and high-profile D.J.

"Our age group's escapes are nightclubs, an important part of the New York social scene," Mr. Karnal, an investor in Manhattan, said. "And we wanted that for our wedding. So we created a nightclub in the sky on the hotel's 36th floor. We asked a club-style D.J. to take the energy from the room and build it appropriately through the night."

The couple hired Mr. Batyske.

"Mick is a turntablist who knows how to blend songs in key," Mr. Karnal said. "He did a club-style night for us using a short list I gave him that family and friends could associate with good times. He created an awesome high-energy environment, which lasted till 12:30 a.m. He is a true performer who made the night."

Mr. Batyske also worked a destination wedding on Anguilla in the Caribbean for Ben Bourne, 38, and Meghann Bourne, 31, last July. The couple rented a villa and asked for a nightclub feeling to entertain their 175 guests on both Friday and Saturday nights.

“I had a meeting with the couple first when we decided on a mix of Top 40, classic hip-hop and some dance favorites that they liked,” said Mr. Batyske, who spiced up the mix with more songs. “Like my other wedding clients, the couple created the reception that they wanted.”

Mr. Bourne, a health care investor, said that Mr. Batyske set the mood for the entire weekend with his musical moxie, bringing a different energy than a band might have. “He could create familiarity for both young and older guests,” he explained. “He mixed together different styles, eras and genres. Everyone loved it. People still rave about our wedding party.”

Nearly all of the wedding requests for the Chicago D.J. Andrew Wojtowicz, known as Jerzy, come from club performances where the couples have seen him in action. Once hired, he meets with the bride and the groom to discuss what they want for music. He deals with the different ages gathered by offering an educated balance.

“I love it when people get intoxicated and Grandpa gets on the dance floor,” said Mr. Wojtowicz, 30, also a radio personality at Chicago’s B96 and an artist who produces original music. “Elton John and Guns N’ Roses work for both old and new, and Miami Sound Machine gets people dancing in a conga line. A wedding, like a club gig, is all about relating to the audience.”

Greg Andrews, a club D.J. known as Ruckus, is known for fusing hip-hop, rock, reggae, electro, house, soul and funk, and has performed for Marc Anthony, Jay Z and Alicia Keys. He plays for weddings that “don’t feel like weddings and have snap to them.”

He approaches weddings just like a club performance, using his 30,000-song library. “It’s sort of like the mix I create for clubs LIV in Miami Beach and Hakkasan in Las Vegas,” said Mr. Andrews, 30, who lives in Los Angeles and New York. “I like to keep wedding guests dancing, so I studied my parents’ favorite songs and now know what to play for both the 60-to 70-year-olds and the little kids 10 to 12. It takes time to give newlyweds the best night of their lives. But it’s worth it.”

Alexandra Steel Scott, 32, and James Scott, 37, were married on June 14 in Aspen, Colo. Mrs. Scott, an assistant director of middle-school admission at Riverdale Country School in the Bronx, said that they started their reception with a live band but that they knew as it went into the night that they would need a D.J. to keep the younger guests on the dance floor. They hired Jakissa Taylor-Semple, known as Kiss, to provide the up-

tempo club music. Ms. Taylor-Semple, 32, has performed for Naomi Campbell, Pharrell Williams and Matt Damon.

“That reception became a party vibe that went on till 5 a.m., because couples today want more of a dance component than ever before,” Ms. Taylor-Semple said. “Younger people go against the grain. They do shots at the bar and know what a party is!”

And sometimes the party takes the newlyweds from their wedding night into the morning after, without missing a beat.

A Little Getaway After the Big Event

By **CHRISTINA VALHOULI**

October 20, 2013

Unlike many brides, the last thing Kersten Deck wanted to do after her wedding last May was go on a big, fancy honeymoon.

“The whole idea was just so overwhelming,” said Mrs. Deck, 32, of San Diego. “I just had way too much going on with the wedding to be able to plan a honeymoon at the same time. My house was a disaster, and my work was piling up.”

After their wedding, Mrs. Deck, a fund-raiser at Planned Parenthood, and her husband, Christian, 33, a scientist at General Atomics, the aeronautical and nuclear technology company, chose something that has come to be known as a mini-moon. The couple spent two nights at a cottage in Big Sur that they found online for about \$500. Mrs. Deck described the place as being “straight out of ‘The Hobbit.’ ” They plan to go to Croatia and Slovenia in November for their honeymoon.

“We’re big, big planners,” Mrs. Deck said.

“We’re not Sandals or Beaches people,” she said, referring to the popular couples resorts, “so I needed more time to plan. Big Sur still felt like a honeymoon, even though we just traveled a few miles down Highway 1. We just hung out, went hiking and ate leftover wedding food.”

So what, exactly, is a mini-moon? Technically, it’s a short wedding trip for those couples who put off a longer excursion because of work, lack of money or because they married in the wrong season. For example, a couple marrying in August may choose to postpone a Caribbean honeymoon to avoid hurricanes. Others may dream of a ski honeymoon to, say, Whistler, British Columbia, but a June wedding means that has to be put off.

While the popularity of the short wedding trip is difficult to gauge, it does seem to reflect, for some, the mood of the times.

“Mini-moons are consistent with the spirit of economic sobriety that has come over many young adults today,” said W. Bradford Wilcox, the director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia. “Given high levels of unemployment and underemployment, and greater fears about their economic future, many young adults may well be cautious about dropping a lot of money on a big honeymoon.”

David Huether, the senior vice president for research at the U.S. Travel Association in Washington, noted that marrying couples tend to be older than those of a generation ago and often have more demands in their lives.

Chris Pulito, the general manager of the Whiteface Lodge in Lake Placid, N.Y., said he had seen a big increase in couples planning shorter trips after their weddings. “Fifteen years ago, I worked at a hotel in Stowe, and when we had a wedding, we automatically booked a limo for Sunday morning to take the couple to the airport for their honeymoon,” he said. “That doesn’t happen anymore.”

He added that of the 38 destination weddings held at the lodge in the last 12 months, about half the couples opted for a mini-moon, either there or somewhere fairly close like Montreal. When both the brides and grooms work, “it’s just not realistic for them to take two weeks off right after the wedding and fly to Bora Bora,” he said.

Tara Pollak, 29, an online marketer in New York, and her husband, Jonathan, 31, who works in marketing for a retailer that sells outdoors goods, were married around last Thanksgiving, but his job prevented them from taking time off around the holidays. They also wanted to save up for a big trip. But as word spread that they wouldn’t be going on a honeymoon, their friends and family were unpleasantly surprised.

“My mom was like, ‘You can’t not go on honeymoon!’ ” Mrs. Pollak said. The compromise? Three nights in a bed-and-breakfast on the East End of Long Island.

A few months later, the couple went to London for a week.

“Because we delayed the big honeymoon, we could save up for it and it was also cheaper to go in January,” Mrs. Pollak said.

Emily and Matt Abrahamson were married in September 2012 in Geneva, Ill. They took a three night mini-moon in Montreal, as Mr. Abrahamson was in graduate school at the time and could not take more time off.

“A short trip allowed us to indulge and go all out,” said Mrs. Abrahamson, 25, who works at a Lutheran seminary in Chicago. “We were eating bison carpaccio and oysters, and spending time in Scandinavian spas. We couldn’t have kept up that pace for more than a few days.”

Four months later, the Abrahamsons had a two-week honeymoon in Costa Rica.

“It was fun because it felt like the wedding was being extended,” Mrs. Abrahamson said.

But does a delayed honeymoon still count as a honeymoon, or is it another vacation? All the couples interviewed were adamant that the second trip was the real thing. Most couples choose a far-flung place they might never have a chance to visit again.

For some couples, budget is not as much of an issue as planning fatigue and

pressure to make it all perfect. After all, a wedding is only one day while a honeymoon lasts longer.

Ruchi Dungarani, 33, of New York, is a marketing manager for American Express who was married in May 2012. She always knew she would take a mini-moon followed by a second, more-elaborate trip because of the sheer effort involved in planning her 500-guest wedding.

“You really want your honeymoon to be perfect, and have the time to pick the right jewelry and go shopping for the right clothes,” Mrs. Dungarani said. “But I didn’t have time to do this, because I was worrying about seating charts and flowers. Wedding planning is just so stressful.”

After the wedding, Mrs. Dungarani and her husband, Dr. Trushar Dungarani, 33, an internist, took a quick trip to the Amalfi Coast and Sicily. They thought they would go to Bora Bora for their honeymoon, but the long flight put them off. They settled on the Turks and Caicos a few months later.

“Some girls dream of their wedding, but I was always dreaming about my honeymoon,” she said. “I think it’s even more romantic than the wedding because it’s just about the two of you.” And no seating charts in sight.

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