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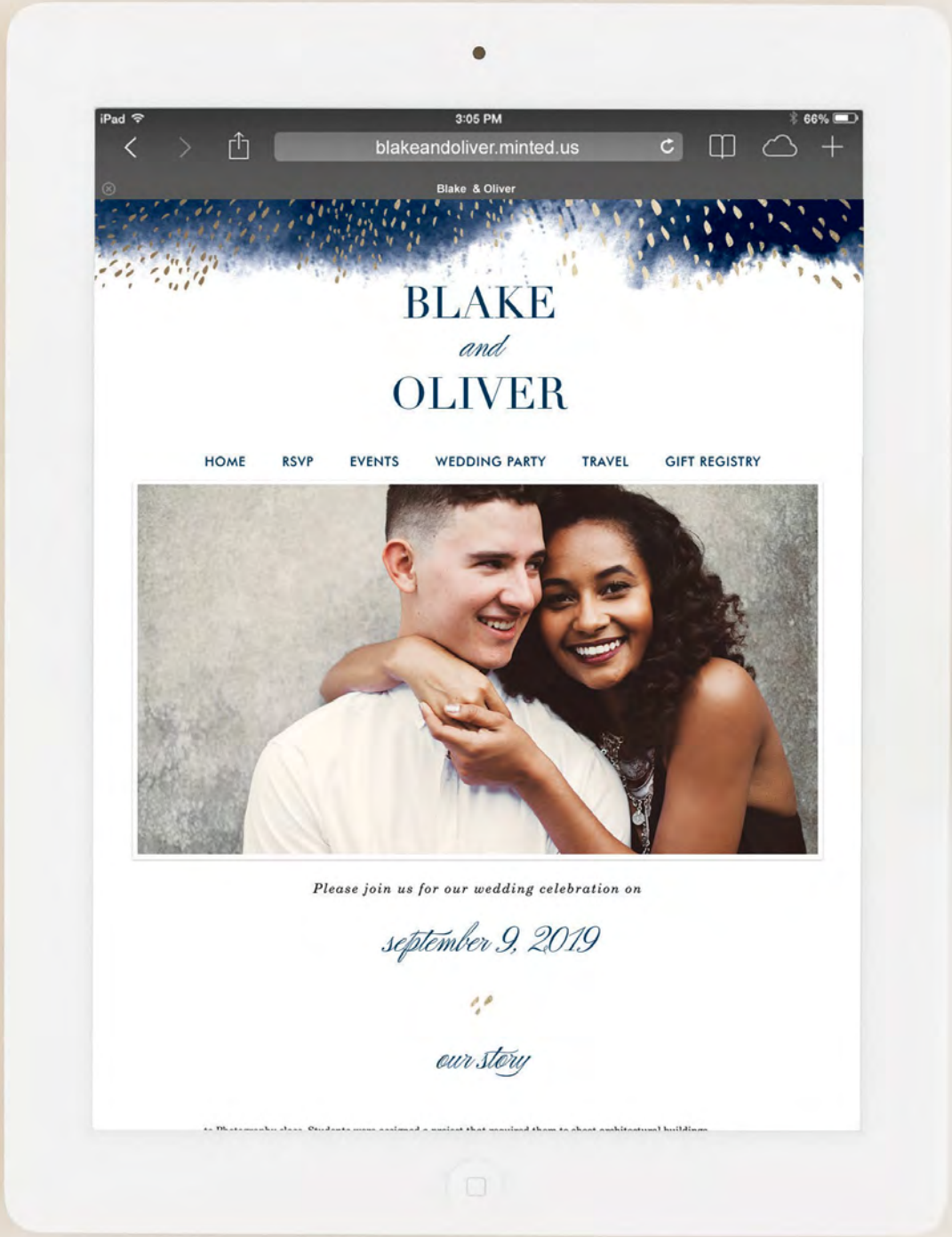
Weddings &
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Celebrate



Brooke Saxon-Spencer
founder + editor

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FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR

Alabaster with garnet centers, clusters of Queen Anne's Lace. My maid of honor and I foraging the field behind the church, nails freshly painted. Glimpses from the day before my wedding. We tucked stems into every flower arrangement we could find and filled galvanized buckets full—just because they were pretty.

Things change. And so do the way we do weddings and celebrations. There is a newfound desire for authenticity-infused events upon which an entire industry has emerged--just to make these moments memorable. I think of these individuals not as the life *of* the party, but rather as the life *behind* the party. This issue seeks to celebrate this newfound form and fancy.

But, whether you're a party goer or a party thrower, there is valuable content for you on these pages—beneficial business tips, an abundance of visual inspiration as well as relevant resources for you to plan, create and host a memorable celebration.

And of course, celebrations aren't just birthdays and weddings, they might be every day—accomplishing small goals in business or finishing a project or just getting out of bed (just keeping it real!). So more than anything, I'd hope this issue serves as a reminder to celebrate the small things. Don't wait for a date on the calendar because the little things matter. Make these moments memorable. Just because.

Cheers,

Brooke Saxon-Spencer

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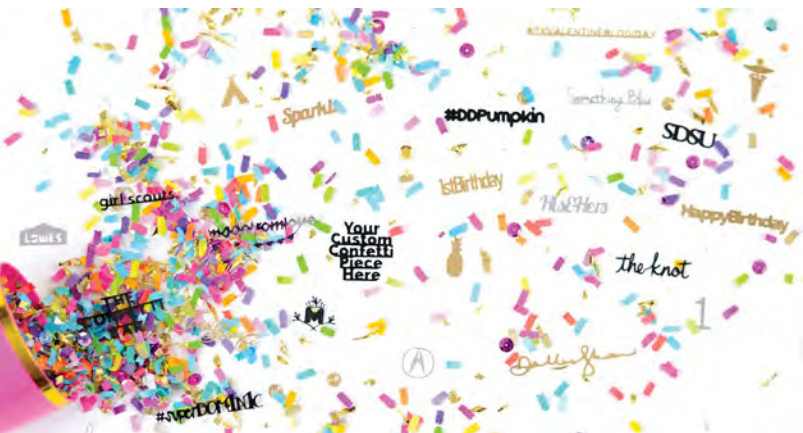


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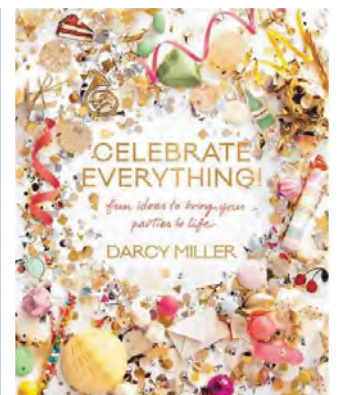


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／ Our Mission

Belong Magazine is designed to celebrate the art and community of blogging, social media and entrepreneurship

In all that we do, our mission is to inspire women to use their passions for a purpose in creating and sharing authentic words, images, ideas and experiences virtually and off-line and to be life-giving and encouraging to others.

It is our desire for women to know that they are enough, their voice matters, and that they have a place.

They belong. YOU BELONG.

“ ”

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Creating a Culture that Celebrates



Bailey T. Hurley

Bailey T. Hurley is a blogger and writer that finds inspiration through her relationships with the Lord, family and friends. Her desire is to mentor women through the written word by speaking capital “T” truth into everyday realities and helping them build relationships rooted in Christ. She currently writes the friendship columnist at Radiant Magazine and partners with a local author to help women build relationships with their neighbors.

I’ve heard it said that job satisfaction comes mostly from the environment that people work in more than the work itself. We know that happy employees produce better work. So, how do you create a work culture that is both productive and satisfied? Make room for celebrations—big or small.

Celebration consistently defeats the spirit of competition in the working world. Giving encouragement, praise and even rewards are all great ways to say you appreciate and notice the good work being done by others. As a result, your staff focuses less on getting ahead and more on collaborating to be a successful team.

Even though I love celebrating others, it’s not always easy. Sometimes I have to give myself a pep talk and remind myself that celebrating others truly changes my attitude, my heart and the relationships around me.

Thankfully, I’ve had the rare pleasure of working in environments that celebrate people really well, so I consider myself a student of celebration work culture. Whether you are working in a huge company, have started your own business or run the household with kiddos, there are plenty of ways YOU can create a culture that celebrates.

CREATE CELEBRATION TRADITIONS

What’s that one office event you look forward to every year? Is it the holiday party or the client meet-and-greet? Or potentially the cookies you make and package up with your kids to take to neighbors?

Decorating the office for college basketball March Madness was one of my favorites. Everyone had to fill out a bracket—whether they understood basketball or not—followed by a dinner and game viewing to cheer on our teams. It was a coveted tradition that everyone looked forward to, and more importantly it created comradery and fun sports rivalry in the office.

It’s important to have fun with the people you work with. These traditions provide an opportunity to know one another better so you can celebrate them better.

CREATE CELEBRATION RHYTHMS

Now that I work from home, date night is one celebration rhythm I’ve incorporated into our family culture. This date night ritual is something we wait for with anticipation and it gives us the relational boost to get through the hectic schedule of the next week.



Now imagine this happening in your workplace. A weekly ritual that motivates, excites and, of course, celebrates the great work you’ve done this week. Perhaps, you work at a gym and every Wednesday staff meeting you bring everyone’s favorite smoothies. Or you are a stay-at-home mom and take the kids to pick out one donut every Friday after they clean their rooms.

The difference between rituals and traditions are that rituals are consistent, practices that should inspire and promote company values. A ritual might be to encourage one person at the start of every meeting because your company wants to promote an encouraging environment. Whereas a tradition, might be attending the same restaurant every year for company dinner.

CREATE A CELEBRATION CALENDAR

Go and spoil your team by purchasing a JUMBO calendar and start taking note of anniversaries, birthdays, kid’s graduations and all the silly and serious national holidays in between.

Create a celebration committee or ask folks to help decorate for special occasions. Taking a break

from your computer and working creatively with your hands and mind make you more productive when you return to your work. Let people be inventive!

Including other people in the creative process demonstrates to them that it’s okay to go out of your way to make a co-worker feel appreciated and included. Let people be accountable for encouragement!

Something my former workplace enjoyed was printing off funny Facebook photos of the honoree and gluing them onto magazine pictures with silly quotes. The honored person felt special and everyone had a great giggle. Let people be goofy!

Tip: keep construction paper, markers, candles, balloons and confetti on hand so people can make homemade cards and banners.

As you create a positive and effective work culture, celebrate what you want to see more of in the office. It’s the surest way to grow relationships in the office that inspire teamwork and ultimately make the collective attitude improve. 🍷

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Common Contract Myths that Could Sink Your Wedding Business



Christina Scalera

Christina Scalera is the attorney and founder behind TheContract.Shop, a contract template store for creative entrepreneurs, wedding professionals, and coaches. When she's not staring at a computer or awkwardly standing on cafe chairs for the perfect overhead latte photo, you can find her in the woods doing things that are sometimes dangerous but always fun, like riding horses, skiing and reluctantly camping.

Let's face it, contracts aren't sexy. If they were clothes, they would be your period panties. They're not pretty, you usually don't need them, but they're there for you in the most essential times. How do you deal with contracts in a way that isn't totally icky and constantly annoying? And dare I say, even a little fun? By educating yourself as a boss lady (or boss dude) business owner so you can set them up and then largely forget about them.

To help you get started, here's some common myths we need to bust before the real work with clients can begin:

1. MYTH: YOU DON'T NEED ONE, YOU'RE PRACTICALLY BFFS WITH YOUR CLIENTS!

The number one question I'm asked is, "Do I need a contract?" Typically, this is followed by a "but" statement... "but we're friends...but I'm just getting started... but I'm not getting paid..." The

reality is anyone who sells services in the wedding industry should use a contract if you care about the relationship involved in the service. I don't care if it's your first wedding and you're being paid nothing to design boutonnieres or it's your 250th wedding and "you've never needed a contract before, so why start now?"

When you're already overwhelmed by the To-Do list of starting a new business — "how do I open a business account, how do I build my own website, how do I find brides?!" — a contract is just one more thing... and you probably have no clue where to start with that so you push it aside for a rainy day (or, worse yet, attempt to create it yourself and give up).

Then there's all the icky feelings around making your contract "official". Once you have a contract, you're transitioning from "I'm going to plan one wedding and see if I like it" side gig into the REAL DEAL business owner. That's a lot of responsibility

to take on and it can feel awkward. Even more awkward though is asking a client to make good on verbal promises. It's much easier to look at a contract and point out how a client agreed to do something (or not do something) than it is to play the, "but you said you would do this!" game.

2. MYTH: YOU'LL HAVE TO PAY THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN LEGAL FEES TO GET A GOOD CONTRACT.

There are plenty of attorneys out there frothing at the mouth to take your money. You can find them tailgating ambulances, in reputable establishments like jail, or on billboards. Then, there are actual business solutions you may be interested in to take care of the legal side of your business, such as a contract template created by an attorney but not necessarily customized for your business.

The truth is that your creative business probably isn't unique enough to require a custom contract (those are the ones that cost big cash money). There's enough wedding pros out there who all want the same protection — like photographers retaining the copyright to their images — that you can buy a legit, peer-reviewed, contract template (creativeatlaw.com/store) in less than 5 minutes and adjust it for your specific needs.

Personally, if I were starting a business, I'd prefer a template over a custom contract anyway. Over the course of ten years as a business owner, it's unlikely you'd encounter the amount of problems and situations I see in a typical month, and all those are written into and accounted for in each template produced.

3. MYTH: CLIENTS DON'T READ THEM ANYWAY. THEY'RE SO HARD TO UNDERSTAND.

Nobody likes legalese, even lawyers. These days, the best contracts are the ones that both parties can understand. (And, yes, you should be able to explain what your contract says if a client asks.) The ultimate goal of a contract is to clearly list the expectations between you and your couple: In exchange for \$X, I'll provide Y services on Z date. If you're still using a contract that has words like "duly executed" and "henceforth corresponding", it may be time for a refresh.

Nobody wants to "umm" and "ahhh" around a client if you can't understand your contract, your client probably can't either. The entire purpose of a contract is to memorialize your agreement, so if you have no clue what you're even agreeing to, it's pointless. Don't be scared to put something into your own words — just because you're not a lawyer doesn't mean you're not smart! You know your business better than anyone, trust your gut when it comes to protecting your interests.



4. MYTH: ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES AREN'T VALID.

Recently my insurance company asked me to fax them back a signature on a mailed document, and I very rudely wrote "PLEASE SEND ELECTRONICALLY" in a sharpie on their garbage request and mailed it back. It's not my proudest moment, but it does illustrate my point: It's 2017. If you are getting written signatures or making your clients jump through hoops to sign your contract, you're killing your client experience. The legal industry is increasingly moving toward electronic records, and digital signatures have been commonplace for years now. The only documents that still need to be signed in person are those really permanent ones, like wills and property deeds. Your agreement to provide calligraphy services for one specific wedding will be A-OK with a digital signature. (Hint: If you're looking for an electronic platform, and no, PDFs don't count, I love HoneyBook.)

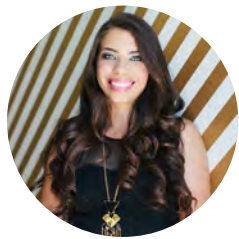
Questions? Comments? Get in touch with Christina at christinascalera.com!

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Why Streamlining and Automation

ARE MORE THAN JUST BUZZ WORDS IN YOUR CREATIVE BUSINESS



Cristina Barragan

I'm Cristina Barragan, Owner and Chief Creative Officer at Posh Peony and I have always had a love and passion for all things floral and design. In 2005, I started teaching elementary education and at the same time, launched my full time floral business. It was a balancing act, to say the least! Over the years, I have built my business from the ground up with no formal training or education. It was all a learning curve that I have been able to streamline over the years. I have been able to grow and scale my business which has allowed me to pursue my love of teaching in the event industry. Today, we are a boutique style studio that provides full service design and educational workshops at a local and international level. Being able to serve my clients well, teach aspiring business owners, and promote community in the event industry is the greatest joy!

You probably have heard the words “streamline” or “automation” here or there in your creative industry. These are definitely huge buzz words going around, and it is often preached as to why we must achieve the “holy grail” of said processes in our business. The truth however, is that many entrepreneurs do not know how to start or why. Let me tell you, implementing systems in my business have been a huge game changer.

The past six years, I have devoted myself to creating various ways to streamline and automate my business to help maximize my time and profits. It all started twelve years ago when I started my elementary teaching career and, at the same time, started my floral and event design business. Before the days of social media, workshops, online courses, or any sort of formal trainings, I was a one-woman show that had to learn everything by trial and error. Working two full-time jobs was not easy to say the least! I had to learn how to balance both my day and night jobs and stay organized on top of it all. Those

first six years led to extreme burnout. I literally lost my sanity, and my health suffered tremendously. That is when I knew that I had to work “smarter” and not “harder”. I took it upon myself to create systems that eased my work load, streamlined my processes, and created the opportunity for me to grow and scale my business.

The advantage that new and seasoned entrepreneurs have today is that there is an abundance of resources available at their fingertips to save time and achieve a high level of systemization in their business. Programs that help with email marketing, bookkeeping, invoicing, contracts, and client experience--they are all out there, and many are free or very affordable. For me, investing in programs that do the work for me while I sleep is priceless. The return on my investment is worth it one hundred times over because I get to finally work “on” my business versus just working “in” it. This is the opportunity for me to save time, lessen my workload, listen to my clients, and serve them well.



“The return on investment is worth it because I finally get to work ‘on’ my business.”

If the focus is only on working in your business and never really stepping out to look in from the outside, your business will never improve or grow.

So how do you get started? Here are a couple suggestions that are easy to implement and get you on the right track.

1 / MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Invest in a program that will allow you to manage your clients, invoicing, take payments, and sign contracts all in one place. My recommendation is HoneyBook. It is a program built for all creatives to deliver a beautiful and streamlined experience for clients. It is easy to use and extremely affordable. When we make it easy for clients to access information and maintain it all in an organized manner, we deliver an unforgettable client experience that is easy to sell.

2 / AUTOMATION

You will want to add automation features to your creative process. A great start is with Honeybook as well. This program offers some automation features that respond to clients with questionnaires or brochures upon an inquiry and also send out reminders for files and payments. One less thing for you to worry about. You will also want to invest in a email marketing program that will allow you to build your list and create email series that nurture your prospective clients from day one of their inquiry to the completion of their project and beyond. These email series' are prepared by you ahead of time and automated to do all the work without you. Instead of taking hours, days, or even weeks to respond or follow up with prospective clients, an email series

can take care of that for you with a simple opt in form trigger that can be installed on your website or social media accounts.

3 / SCHEDULING

Implement a scheduling program that allows clients to book, cancel, and reschedule appointments at any given time. Before in my business, I would spend a lot of time trying to figure out appointments and rearranging cancellations to accommodate my clients. At times, I would lose the opportunity because the process took too long and the client had already moved on. By adding a simple calendar link to your email signature, social media, or website for easy access, this eliminates the guessing game headache all in itself. Imagine never having to spend another minute emailing back and forth to do this! I for one have saved countless hours not having to battle it out and I simply let my clients go through my availability and pick a day that works for them.

There isn't a moment in my day that I don't ask myself, “Am I working harder or smarter?” When you are conscious of your time, how you want to spend it, and what you can do to maximize it, you are always self-monitoring to ensure that you are being as productive as possible. Why reinvent the wheel when there are countless options out there to help you save time and achieve productivity? A streamlined business will allow you to scale your business rapidly, which in turn will lower your costs and increase your profits.

If you want to get started with an email series that will nurture your clients to love and trust you, text the word FREETEMP to the number 44222 to get my FREE Nurture Email Series Templates.

Happy Streamlining! 🌸

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Using Instagram to Market Your Work and Get New Clients



Jordan Brittley

Hey friend! I'm a wife and momma on the daily. I'm passionate about joyful marriages, encouraging words, and small plants. I'm a wedding photographer and I share garden weddings, my life, and what I've learned in business on my blog. Total mom win? My son says, "Bye, friends!" If you only remember one thing from me, I want it to be this: you are so loved.

I sat there with the app open, completely overwhelmed. Should I post a photo from a recent wedding or should I share a photo of my son? Or maybe... oh, yes, definitely this. I should post a photo of the sky. After all, everyone can relate to that, right?

Instagram can feel so mysterious. So here's what I suggest—let's put the fun back in Instagram! Sure, we'll market to our ideal clients and find our people on Instagram. But let's have fun while we do it. Grab your favorite tea, a little biscotti and let's talk about making Instagram feel like a vacation home for your brand.

INTRODUCE THE QUESTION MARK

Ask those questions and don't be shy about it! Whether you're asking what book you should read or asking someone about their story in the comment thread, this is a great way to connect with your audience.

When you're just getting started with this, try out a few rhetorical questions. Maybe you post a photo of the succulents you just picked up from your local nursery and say, "Because who doesn't love these little guys? Now if I can just keep them alive!" It's a low-pressure way of introducing the question mark to your people.

Once you get going, ask simple yes or no questions. Then you can kick it up a notch and ask what book you should read next or where they would love to travel!

CURATE THE FEED

We hear this word a ton and we all know it's for a good reason! Use your feed to tell the visual story of your brand. Incorporate your brand colors and textures. Write like you're just texting a friend.

If someone could reach out and see, feel, smell and hear your brand what would they discover?

PLAN IT OUT

You can use an app like Planoly and Schedugram to plan and schedule your content. Make this process fun by sipping on some tea or coffee and listening to good music while you write your posts.

I'm a momma, so scheduling my content gets pushed to the side from time to time. Who am I kidding? This happens all the time! If you find yourself in a similar situation, give yourself some grace and roll with it from day to day. When you get a chance to schedule out some content, it's definitely worth it!

ASK THEM TO ENGAGE

Guess what? Your people want you to ask them to do something. They have essentially opted in to hear your message and they don't mind if you inspire them with a call to action.

Keep it fun and entertaining by making the call to action about them. If you're asking your people to check out a blog post, include a few highlights from the post so they know what they'll find when they click over (or come back if they don't have time to read the post right now).

I love asking my audience to click over and read a blog post, do something for the people around them, remember that they are loved, download a freebie in my profile or even face a fear.

You are not limited, friend! You are doing incredible things in your life and business. Instagram just gets to be a reflection of that. If you have a personal brand, then show your face in your feed. Let your people get to know you, hear your story and see parts of your life.

See you on insta, friend! I can't wait to see what you'll do with your feed...

All the hearts,
@jordanbrittley

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10 Quick Tips To Make Your Party Shine





Holly Becker

Holly is a journalist, stylist, bestselling author and founder of award-winning, influential design and lifestyle blog, decor8 and popular online workshops, Blogging Your Way. She has contributed as a writer, stylist and columnist to publications in North America, Germany, and the UK including Real Simple, Domino, Sweet Paul and The Boston Globe. She also works with top brands on various lifestyle and decorating campaigns such as Farrow & Ball, Merci, Canon, Oeuf, Minted, Artifact Uprising, Pinterest and Muuto. Originally from Boston, she lives in northern Germany with her husband and little boy.



Leslie Shewring

Leslie recently moved back to her native Vancouver Island, Canada from Los Angeles. Author of the blog acreativemint, she has developed, designed and prepared packaging direction for lots of products sold in many retailers in North America. She is interested in all aspects of design, from collage and watercolors to architecture and photography.



- 1 Every PLAYLIST should have lots of songs that others will know. A playlist without one familiar song can be boring for guests. The second a familiar tune is heard, the party dynamic starts to change.
2 If you have a HOSTESS GIFT, opt for something handmade because that is personal. I love when a hostess gives me a little tin of homemade cookies or a mini loaf of bread or some homemade jam. These personal handmade things make me feel so loved and happy. Plus I love sampling what other people make.
3 Always have a specific thing that you do at the end of your party to tactfully let guests know it's TIME TO LEAVE. I make a quick announcement that everyone can keep chatting and enjoy themselves but I need to start wrapping things up. Then, I'll start cleaning and clearing, turn off the music, start blowing out candles and I turn on the "house lights". By then, others have joined in to help me and some start to leave. It's not awkward this way AND by the time the last guest leaves, you can barely tell I've had a party so I don't have to wake up to a war zone the next day.
4 Keep your GUEST LIST small so that you can have a lovely party and be generous with your special guests. Too many people makes it more and more expensive.
5 START THE PARTY a little later in the evening to avoid the costs of a full sit down meal.
6 Avoid the price tag of supplying a full bar and create one or two SIGNATURE COCKTAILS for the evening.
7 Pick one kind of INEXPENSIVE DECORATION like balloons or streamers or string lights and buy lots of them. For example load the floor with balloons to make a real statement.
8 Buy your SNACKS in bulk or online to get the best price. Crackers, chips, decorations can all be purchased ahead of time at a savings.
9 IF THE PARTY IS SLOWING DOWN have each guest pick their favorite upbeat song and then locate and play them using Spotify, Soundcloud or your Apple music etc.
10 Don't forget friends love to help and pitch in...so don't be afraid to SAY YES when someone asks you if they can pitch in and help!

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Here Comes the Bride

NOW HOW DO YOU GET HER TO STOP AND PAY ATTENTION TO YOU?



Alyssa Gordon

Alyssa Gordon is creative director and founder of Alyssa Joy & Co, a boutique design and branding firm with a special love for helping creative professionals and small businesses express their uniqueness.

When a bride chooses her wedding vendors, she's looking for a love relationship. And as with any other potential love relationship, first impressions matter, and they happen fast. Like 300-500 milliseconds fast. In fact, research shows this is precisely how long it takes for people to make decisions about your trustworthiness, attractiveness, warmth, and your ability to take charge*. So if you approach a potential wedding client with promotional materials that don't appear to meet her taste level, she, like a twitchy finger on Tinder, is going to move on.

YOUR BRAND IS YOUR MATCHMAKER

Your emails, your price sheets, your stationery, business cards— all these things start talking about you before you even meet the bride. The question is, what are they saying? Is it, "Here's a total pro with high standards who really has her act together," or is it something more like, "This person is...um...into DIY projects"?

For better or for worse, your brand tells people a lot about the quality of your work, and even what kind of person you are. I've built my business on designing customized visual brands that speak volumes about my clients and their creativity, style, personality, professionalism and taste level. Like a haute couture wedding gown, a well-crafted brand is made for you exclusively, and it makes you look fabulous in a way that is uniquely your own.

But what about all the talented creatives and small wedding business owners who can't afford their own best look just yet? Shouldn't they still be able to look good?

GOOD LOOKING ISN'T OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE

There are all kinds of reasons why you may not be ready to invest in a custom brand for yourself. In our digital world, there's no reason why you can't make a great impression every time you interact with a client in the meantime. From business cards to CD graphics to price lists to email correspondence templates, there are loads of beautiful turnkey



brand looks out there to choose from. They're professionally designed and they're easy to customize with your own business information.

Because I work with so many photographers, event planners and other creative wedding professionals and because I'm a wedding geek at heart, I created my own series of template packages specifically for wedding-focused vendors. They may not be one-of-a-kind, but I can offer a whole lot of bride-minded style for about the cost of a cake tasting.

Beyond just being flawlessly pretty and stylish, they include professionally written content that makes a vendor sound like the kind of smart, intuitive, solid professional a busy bride needs to be able to count on.

When a bride "vibes" with your brand, not only will she be more likely to hire you, she'll be more likely to love what you do, which will lead to happy memories for her. And a whole lot of happy referral business for you. 🌸

*The full research study is available in the online journal PLoS ONE: <http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0090779>

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Top 3 Tips for Wedding Designers



Keneshia Raymond

Keneshia, also known as Kay, is a Southern California native and a bay area transplant. She is the founder of Enchanted:The Wedding Event and the founder and creative director of Blissful 2 Be and Blissful Creatives, an online education resource for wedding creatives. With over seven years in planning and design experience, she works to collaborate and celebrate vendors. Kay is a speaker and recent author. She works with vendors on how to grow and succeed in the wedding business all while staying authentic during the process.

“Every great design begins with an even better story.” - Lorinda Mama

Wedding design is a job with many misconceptions. Wedding designers not necessarily wedding planners--though they can be both. Wedding designers are the vision behind the beauty seen at a wedding--they are all about the beautiful details.

What is a Wedding Designer? By definition, a Wedding Designer is someone who designs and executes an overall look for an event.

“Event designers have the very unique ability to completely transform a space and are typically not planners.” -Everylastdetail.com

There you have it. An event designer brings in the beauty to a space that couples can only dream of or imagine and make it possible for them to have it in real life. Designing an event is telling a story. It is taking a couple's story and bringing it to life.

ARE YOU A PLANNER OR A DESIGNER OR ARE YOU BOTH?

This is the very part of your business that can really make you or break you. You can spend long nights working on something you don't fancy or you can dig deep and realize that maybe you really only enjoy doing one or the other. This, my friends, will be your Oprah moment. This is where you figure out your niche and how to make your mark in the wedding industry.

Now let's jump back to design and go over the top three tips that I cover in my book on how to perfect your couple's vision when designing their beautiful story which becomes their wedding day.

1 / The design needs to tell a story starting from the ceremony through the cocktail hour reception through the reception and continuing through the send-off (and if there are any other ceremonies in between, such as a tea ceremony).

When you sit down with your couples to first start talking about their wedding, this is the time when you need to really listen to them. Listen to their story and ask them thoughtful questions that will help you to tell their story. They will give their list and pinterest boards which is great for you to get an idea of what they like, the style and the feel for which they are looking. But remember that this is *their story* that you are hand-crafting with their vision in mind.

Take all the information that they give you, go back to your office and sit with it--take it all in before you get to work. Write down some of the keywords the couple provided for the feeling they want their guest to have and the feeling you want them to have. This is your end game; this is what you want them to remember. When you're thinking about all the things you talked about with the couple, consider the things that stood out during that meeting: was it the colors, the family vibe, the entertainment? Write down the things as your “must haves.”



This is when you can start your design process. Crafting a full space from floor to ceiling with lighting, draping ambience and beautiful decor is no easy task. Pull inspiration from outside of pinterest and weddings. Look for inspiration from photos, fabric, and architecture. Use your creative side and dive deep in order to give the couple something that is one-of-a-kind, made for them.

2 / Incorporate aspects of the couple, their journey, their story while bringing the design to life.

This is one of the most important things I learned when I was first starting out; you are telling the couple's story--their journey and their life up until this moment that they are now becoming one. That means this day needs to reflect them from the moment that someone steps into the ceremony; they need to be able to connect to the couple. Yes, we are telling a story; yes, we are making it beautiful. But we are truly just making their story beautiful. We are making their day a walk to remember. These are the pieces you need to make sure not only to highlight but to bring out when telling their story. I always say it's all about telling a juicy story that makes people want more--so tell their story, make it “juicy” and enticing, so as they are walking through this day, you keep them wanting more.

3 / Stay true to your design style; this starts at the booking process.

Lastly, stay true to your design style. We all have our own design style and this makes you who you are as a designer. I believe that if you really embrace

your style and don't veer from what you excel at then you will always produce good work.

When you sit down for your initial meeting and you have the conversation with your client, really let them know who you are. Be confident in your work and don't take on anything you are not comfortable with.

This begins with good branding. When a potential couple looks you up by viewing your website, they should be able to understand who you are, what you specialize in and who your target market client is. If you are giving them everything they need to know via your website and social media, they will not contact you thinking that you specialize in rustic chic when your focus is luxury.

Give your clients a sense of who you are; show them how amazing you are on your website and social pages. If your brand is on point, your images tell the story of what you do. When you have that meeting with your client, you are sealing the deal.

Wedding design is all about beauty. Weddings are all about emotion. Take a moment and pull all of that emotion out of your client and put it into a beautiful space that they will remember for a lifetime.

This wedding industry is big but small; it can be mighty and loud. It is a 300 Billion dollar industry, after all. With that being said, there is a space for all of us. You just have to define your niche. If it is truly designing, you fall in love with it. You will become a beautiful story teller with a new story to tell with every couple you meet. 🌸

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SEO for Wedding Professionals



Feuza Reis

Feuza Reis is an SEO Strategist for Creative Entrepreneurs. She is the founder of the DIY SEO blog [Get Found With Fuse](http://GetFoundWithFuse.com) and is super passionate about helping fellow creatives get found online so they can live their creative epic destiny. She is a photographer, speaker, blogger and mom of two rockin' boys.

When I started my photography business 9 years ago, I was a mom with two small kids and a newly discovered creative passion. I had no idea how to get new clients or how to even market a business, but I didn't let that stop me from following my dream. I always wanted to be a wedding photographer, but I did not get into weddings right away. I remember finding out about wedding industry events run by A.B.C, N.A.C.E and I.S.E.S., but I honestly could not afford the meals or gas to attend. One thing I did know was that I needed to know who was who in my industry and that I had to make connections. I was finally able to attend some of the meetings and network with others in January 2010. I was able to nurture these new relationships via twitter. I was so present in my online engagement that they felt like they knew me and that we were friends. This was my first introduction to the power of social media and online marketing. That summer I volunteered as a photographer for the A.B.C conference and connected with a wonderful planner, Christine Hyder Events, and she began sending clients to me. I was thrilled to work with her! We had very similar taste and viewed events with a similar eye for how things would translate as photographs.

Soon after, I was introduced to SEO, but I was stumped as it seemed technical and overwhelming. Curiosity got the best of me and I signed up for every

webinar, read every article and even volunteered for one of the best SEO conferences just to be near SEO geniuses. I started applying what I thought I understood and I began to see results. All of a sudden, people were emailing me stating they found me on Google, and I knew I was on to something.

So what the heck is SEO and how can you, as a wedding professional, optimize your blog so you are found in your area?

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization, and it basically means there are things you can manually do to your website, blog and even social media in order to help search engines such as Google find you online.

THERE ARE 3 ASPECTS OF SEO:

- Foundation / the minimum requirement of technical SEO that every website and blog should have.
- Maintenance / making SEO part of your workflow and adding blog posts regularly.
- Refinement / keeping up with technology and trends; revisit and tweak your process as needed.

Let's talk about the foundational technical SEO in a practical way so you get found for your wedding or event business.

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The Basics: The foundation of SEO is text. It is vital to compile a list of keywords. Those are words and short phrases that people search for in Google, and it’s how your website can be found in the search results. Keywords can be one word, two words, three or even long-tail keywords, which tend to be posed like a phrase. One mistake wedding professionals make is in thinking their keyword should be: ‘what they do + where they do it.’ For example, Dallas Wedding Planner, NY Wedding Photographer, LA floral designer, Atlanta videographer and so forth. The problem with this is that there are 1000 other

industry professionals doing the exact same thing. You have to be a little more creative and use what I call alternative keywords. So first start with your main keyword list.

ACTION - Start a Google Doc or excel sheet and answer the following: *What services do you offer? What products do you sell? Where do you offer these? What do you want to be found for—what internet searches to you want to be a result for?*

EXAMPLE - *Miami Wedding Photographer*

SERVICES	PRODUCTS OFFERED	WHERE	SEARCHES THAT FIND ME
Wedding Photography	Wedding Albums	Miami	Miami DADE Wedding Photographer
Engagement Photography	Prints	Miami Beach	Miami Wedding Photography
Album design for my clients	Wall Art	South Beach	Miami Engagement Photographers
Editing for my clients		Broward County	Miami Engagement Photography
		Caribbean-Destination	For my top 3 favorite wedding venues in Miami
		Fort Lauderdale	

Now we get into the part where we focus on our ideal clients.

ACTION - Start a new tab or new doc and answer the following: *Who is your ideal client? What is their demographic? What do they value most in their wedding day? What do they need help with? What keeps them up at night? What is the common style or theme among your brides?*

Think about the type of content you can offer on your blog that fits the needs of your ideal audience. What do they need help with? Planning a wedding in Dallas, choosing wedding flowers, locations for engagement photos, best wedding venues in said city? Clients are usually looking for what it is like to get married at the venue first and looking for wedding inspiration. Something I often tell my students to remember is we want to be found before a client knows they need us. In

order to do that, I must create blog posts that will help me bring into use the keywords for which I want to be found online. In turn, the fresh and helpful content will encourage Google to love and trust my website and blog. I want to be a resource to my clients, and my blog is a place I can serve them and help them.

ACTION - Start a library of ideas for future blog posts.

Make it fun. Turn on a timer and write out any blog post title that comes to mind after answering the questions above. Secondly, think of the top 5-8 questions you receive in regard to your business. If you have not blogged about it yet then now is the time to do that. Save this for future blog content, which will help your website be found online.

“Fresh and helpful content will encourage Google to love and trust my website and blog.”

LET’S SET YOU UP RIGHT. FOUNDATIONAL SEO.

Every website platform will have a section where you can change technical SEO in order for your foundation to be set. So you will need to check with your platform help section and find where to tweak Page Title, Page Description and Image SEO section called alt text. I will be showing how to do it via a Wordpress self-hosted platform (dot org not dot com). Squarespace, Wix, and others also have these sections that you can fill out and optimize. For guidance you can check their help sections.

For Wordpress, you will need to install the plugin called YOAST SEO. Go to Plugins > Add New> Search for Yoast SEO. Install and activate the plugin. You will now see a new section in your dashboard called SEO as well as a new box at the end of every blog post called Yoast SEO at the end of every page.

Step 1. Go to Settings > General > Site Title
Site Title will be the Page Title for your overall website main domain. Page Title or Site Title is the text that goes above the URL and the one that appears in bold in search results. This text should have loose keywords and be your main keywords and should not exceed 60 characters. Your business name should not appear here

because it has limited space and you are trying to get found by people who do not know you. Use keywords instead. For example, Miami Wedding Photographer | Broward County Weddings

Tag Lines. These will be the meta description for your website. This should be full sentences and not more than 150 characters. This is the place you can have your business name. For example, Miami wedding photographer, Feuzza Reis offers wedding and engagement photography in Miami, Miami Beach and overall Broward County.

Fill it with your keywords. There is no need to try and jam all keywords in there as you will need to do this process for every page on your website and for every post. Each one needs to be unique.

ACTION - Go to every page on your website and fill out the Site Title and Site Description in the Yoast Box (If you are not in Wordpress, find where you can change it on your platform; usually, it will likely be under the advanced settings tab).

Tip: Make sure you have unique keywords and keep things relevant to what the page is about; engagement photos, about engagement photos, wedding, about weddings, investment or pricing page about wedding (your biz) pricing. You can mix up some local SEO words like different towns and the nicknames that locals call the area too.

IMAGE SEO

The next step is learning all about Image SEO. One advantage wedding and event professionals have is that they have gorgeous images of their amazing work. This allows for visual storytelling, showing off the work and for getting found via Google Images. Beautiful photos make it easier for our content to be shared in places like Instagram and Pinterest. For the the most part, search engines do not see photos or video. What they see is the text surrounding those photos. It is extremely important that you fill out the Image SEO section of the photo file on your website and blog. I cannot emphasize that enough—it’s crucial to getting found online!

There are four main areas where you can optimize photos for Google in Wordpress.

You will see these areas when you upload your photo. Go to Add Media:

1. Title of Image. You should be renaming your image files and they should not be the original camera setting name or the screenshot name, but should have relevant keywords. This is not the most important part of Image SEO so I usually use the main keyword idea of the post with a number extension. For example: Ritz Carlton Wedding Photos 1. I batch rename it using Lightroom or Blogstomp.

2. Caption. I rarely use this area myself, but you might find an occasion where it is handy. A caption field is a place where you can add a title, snippet or source disclosure or even work in an alternative keyword phrase to the photo that will show up on your blog. So, if you wanted to state something about the photo you can, but be aware that whatever text you add there will be seen on the actual post. It also creates a frame type border around the photo. On Squarespace, captions do the same thing, but this area is also the Alt Text. See how to turn that off in the help section of Squarespace.

3. Alt Text. Also known as alt-tag or alt-attribute, the alt text is the most important part of Image SEO, thus this is where you should spend some extra time giving your photos some TLC. This is the area that all search engines look at. The words that you use are what is communicated to Google and how it tells the machine exactly what the image file is about.

This is where you can really describe each photo and share what the topic of the blog post is about or share a description about the photo itself. Every image file should have a unique alt text. If you use the Yoast SEO plugin for Wordpress, one of your photos alt text should contain the Focus Keyword you chose for that blog post.

It is important to note that this is the text that gets picked up when someone pins your photo on Pinterest and that Google sees about the first 16 words here. You can technically write longer descriptive alt text, but not a huge paragraph or your full post.

4. Description. The description field is the area where you'll write a full sentence describing your blog post, your business name and any extra information that is needed. This area is in full sentence format and allows about 150 characters. So, this obviously serves as a longer description and is the text sometimes displayed if you use a thumbnail of the photo. This is not an important area for SEO.

An important tip: The description text you add to your photos becomes relevant to the actual post. If you're a newborn photographer who happens to do a couple's shoot, don't add newborn-related words to that photo description.

Overall, what boggles bloggers is that every single area should be unique for every single photo file to maximize for SEO. So, if I have 4 images in a post, I am filling out 4 unique text areas for each—or in my case actually 3, since I don't use the caption. This can be a challenge, but there are some tips and shortcuts. One tip is to blog fewer image files in a post. Ideally, you don't want to go over 30-40 image files which

could mean more images if you are doing collages or two images in a set by using a fabulous tool like Blogstomp. Blogstomp will also allow you to batch rename your title. There is an SEO blogging feature that allows you to add the alt text right inside the software when you blog with Blogstomp. All you need to do is connect your blog and create a new draft inside of it. It will automatically upload the draft with watermarked and resized image files plus the alt text if you tweak it.

More about text. I see many creatives have gorgeous websites with lots of photos and a promo video, but they have very little text. That's like having a naked website in the eyes of Google. Google dislikes thin content and they may not take your website or blog seriously. Let's put some clothes on so we can establish a long-term relationship with Google.

ACTION - Go through all of your website pages and check if you have location based text stating the cities you want to rank for in Google. Also, check to see if you can add more text on pages such as about, contact and info pages. You may also want to add a FAQ page or blog the FAQs as was stated in the library of content ideas section.

Last but not least, GET REVIEWS! If you want to get found locally for your business you need to be listed online in a few places:

Google Business listings can not be ignored for any professional business that desires to be found in their local market. This applies to professionals who have a brick and mortar business and those who service their business from their home. The good news is that Google has an option where you don't need to show your full address if you work from home: just click the option that you service clients at their location, or you can choose by mile radius from your zip code. If you aren't sure if you're listed in Google Business, just visit maps.google.com and search for your business name. If it comes up and prompts you to manage the location, then click it so you can edit your listing (this listing is actually connected with a Google Plus page).

If you can't find your business in maps.google.com, then go to www.google.com/business and sign up. Go through the account details and make sure you fill out information about your business and add the link to your site. You can add photos and add keywords to your bio. Once you sign up, Google will send you a postcard to verify your listing. Once you are verified, it's the right time to ask your clients for reviews. You need at least 5 reviews on a Google Business listing for it to

really assist you in moving your local ranking up. So ask your clients for reviews! You can send them the direct Gplus biz link, or tell them to find you on maps.google.com.

Other listing opportunities and your NAP (Name, Address and Phone Number). Your NAP is very important for Google and needs to be consistent. So you will want to fix any old listings, as your business name has to be consistent across the board. The best way to start listing in other online directories (which can be great for SEO) is to visit www.moz.com/local and check your business listing. Moz will give you a grade showing you where you are currently listed and will give you some suggestions. Most of the time you have to actually create new accounts in some of these online places, like Yellow Pages, Localeze, Yelp, Wedding Wire, etc. or claim the listings if they were auto created. Make sure you don't have duplicate listings, and that the information is updated. There is no need for the paid listings unless you plan to further advertise on these platforms.

Now that you have learned how to set up the foundation for your website's SEO, learned how to do IMAGE SEO for blogging and your photo

galleries, it is time to commit to creating more meaningful content for your blog. Taking the answers you have created about your ideal clients and the blog post title, commit to some dates and write out your posts. If you feel that writing is your weakness, I recommend you do two things. First, interview your clients and get them writing for you. Ask them for advice they have in planning an event like theirs: why did they host it at the venue they did and what was their favorite part of the day or event? Secondly, get the free version or paid version of Grammarly. I have the free one and I love how it has a browser extension allows me to fix grammar on posts, in my emails and even in social media captions.

Overall, I have given you a big introduction to how to get start getting found online for your wedding or event business, now it is time to take action. I have also created this checklist for you so you can do these in steps instead of feeling overwhelmed. SEO is a work in progress and Google rankings change everyday, but now you have the foundation—you know how to create better content for your audience and you know how to optimize your photos so you are found online. 🌸



Get the worksheet here: www.getfoundwithfuse.com/belong-magazine

How Podcasting Can Uplevel Your Wedding Business



Kinsey Roberts

Kinsey Roberts is the host of *She Creates Business*, a Podcast for Wedding Pros and Published by Creatives. She's obsessed with all things podcasting and frequently writes about the topic at kinseyroberts.com where she supports other creative women in starting their own shows via her course, *Podcasting for Creatives*. When she's not behind the mic, you'll find Kinsey running Vista View Events, the wedding venue she co-owns with her sister-in-law, or playing with her cute family on their Colorado ranch. She'll likely have coffee or a book close by.

In September 2016, after two years of dreaming, I finally hit publish on my first three podcast episodes for *She Creates Business*, a Podcast for Wedding Pros. I had about 25 Instagram followers, zero people on my email list and no "influencer" friends to help me drum up interest in the show. All I had was my obsession with all things podcasting, marketing experience from my career and a deep desire to continue the conversations I'd started with other amazing women at the Creative at Heart Conference a few months prior.

In less than 6 weeks I came up with a name, conducted my first ten interviews with other wedding pros, set up a website (it was horrible) and Googled my way through launching a podcast. It was imperfect, crazy and absolutely the best thing I've ever done. Fast forward to today and I'm nine months into my podcasting journey. I've interviewed almost 100 incredible women around the world, have tens of thousands of listeners, launched another podcast, created a course and there's no sign of slowing down. Why am I telling you this? It's not

to brag to you and say "look, look!" I'm telling you this because I want you to see just a sliver of what is possible when you commit to podcasting.

If you're reading this and thinking "that all sounds great, but I'm not ready to commit to hosting a podcast!" Girl, I hear you and that's totally OKAY. Hosting a podcast is amazing but I won't lie, it's a commitment! So, the question is, how can you leverage the power of podcasting if you're not going to invest the time it takes to create your own show? The answer: by becoming a guest expert on other people's podcasts.

Becoming a regularly featured guest expert on podcasts can uplevel your wedding or creative business quickly and effectively. Sounds fun, right? I can't wait for you to start pitching podcasts as a guest, but before you start emailing every wedding-related podcast you can find, let's chat about your why. Why do you want to be interviewed as a guest expert on podcasts? Why should the host say yes to your pitch to come on their show? Once we've established your why, we'll move into the how.

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“You’re conducting a form of public speaking every time you interact with a client.”

WHY YOU SHOULD BECOME A PODCAST GUEST

- To improve your speaking skills. Being a guest on podcasts is a low-pressure way to dip your toe into the world of public speaking. You do not have a live audience (typically) and podcasts are a great training ground for honing or improving your speaking message or the message you want to be known for in the industry. Public speaking isn’t just for large crowds; remember that you’re conducting a form of public speaking every time you interact with a client, give a tour or address local vendor friends at industry events.
- To grow your personal and professional networks. Becoming a guest on industry-related podcasts allows you an efficient and effective way to network with industry peers. Not only will you interact with the host, you’ll also interact with the listeners. Growing your network can lead to collaboration, new friendships and opportunities. I would encourage you to grow your network beyond the wedding industry as well. You can find a podcast on just about any topic so don’t be afraid to be interviewed about a topic that you’re passionate about that may not directly relate to your wedding business.
- To gain credibility in your local market. Even if the podcast is not a local podcast, you can still use your interview to gain credibility in your local market. You can give your couples access to the audio files if the information is relevant, you can link to your interviews in your professional email signature you can also use your podcast interview portfolio to apply for local speaking opportunities to teach or educate fellow vendors.

- To deliver your content in a new medium. If you already run a blog or YouTube channel, becoming a podcast guest is an easy way to get in front of a new audience that you can educate and inspire with your message. A fringe benefit of this is actually using your podcast interview as a blog post on your own site the day it is published. Hooray for easy content on your editorial calendar!
- To test if you even like podcasting. You know I had to throw this in right? Of course I’d love to see you start your own podcast. As a guest, you have the opportunity to test if you even like delivering content in the format before investing time and energy into your own show. You get the benefits of podcasting, without all of the background work that goes into producing an episode. It’s a win-win!

Now that you’re convinced of the ways podcasting can benefit your wedding business, let’s talk about the best practices of pitching podcast hosts. Before we get started, let me just preface this by saying these are just ideas and thoughts from my personal experience. As I always tell my podcast listeners, it’s so important for you to take what I’m offering, process it through your own lens and see if it fits in with your business and values.

WHERE TO FIND PODCASTS YOU CAN PITCH

- Pitch your casual connections or people in your network. I know this isn’t groundbreaking but I’d be remiss if I didn’t include it in this list. As part of the wedding and creative communities, it is likely that you know someone (who knows someone) that has a podcast or is starting a podcast. Reach out to these people first to become a guest on their shows because they know you and love you. As you begin your first podcast pitches, these early wins can give you the confidence to continue. I still recommend pitching your casual connections in a professional way to be respectful of their audience, but they’re your connection, so do what feels right.
- Keep an eye out in Facebook Groups for hosts putting out open calls for podcast guests. This happens often in some of my favorite groups, and is an effective way to find your first guest spots. I recommend replying to the host’s comment in the Facebook Group that you’re interested and will follow up via email--and then actually follow up! Don’t wait for them to give you their email address. Be proactive and find their website and/or email address and send them your pitch. Keep reading to find out more about what your pitch should include.

- Finally, you’re ready to cold pitch podcasts that are a good fit for your expertise and message. I recommend doing a search for specific terms that fit with your industry in iTunes and continuing your research from there to the host’s website, social profiles and more. If you find a podcast that looks promising click the “related” button in iTunes to bring up more podcasts that are similar to the one you like. Other podcast players like Stitcher Radio and Google Play have similar search functions.

HOW TO PITCH YOURSELF TO BE A PODCAST GUEST

- If you’re not already following or listening to the podcast (this isn’t a requirement) start doing this for a short period before you pitch the host. This gives you an opportunity to get to know the show’s format, how the host likes to interview and most importantly, the recent topics that past guests have shared on the podcast. It is important you know recent topics that have been covered so you can pitch something unique or at the very least, a new angle on an already covered topic.
- Personalize your pitch with relevant stories or information as it relates to the host, their podcast or their business. I hope it goes without saying there is a person on the other side of your pitch email. I believe in creating a genuine and kind rapport with the host in your pitch email. Relationships are imperative to a successful business, and podcasts are no different.
- Use the host’s requested method of accepting guest pitches. For example, I have a form on my website for guest recommendations/pitches and I love it when people use it because it streamlines my communication. If you do a bit of research you’ll likely find your host has a pitch form on their website that you can fill out. If you send a Facebook message or Instagram DM your message could easily get lost. Particularly if you’re pitching a host with a large following, they may not even consistently check those messages.
- This is a big one! Create a Podcast One Sheet that you send along with all of your pitch emails. What is a Podcast One Sheet? I’m so glad you asked! A Podcast One Sheet is basically your personal media kit that tells the host all the reasons they should say “Yes!” to having you on their show. Your one sheet should include: your name, your third person bio, contact information, topics you can discuss, example questions they can ask during your interview and social stats. You can see an example of a Podcast One Sheet on the next page or go to: bit.ly/belongpodcast for a better look.
- After you’ve provided the podcast listeners with an incredible amount of value, the host will likely ask you where their listeners can find you online. At this time, most guests will list all of their social handles, their website and sometimes their email address. I really want to encourage you to send the listeners to one place when you’re asked this question. If it’s possible for you, I’d love to see you create a landing page specifically for podcast listeners that has a valuable content upgrade they can opt-in to receive. This does a couple of things: first, by not listing ten different places to find you, it is more likely the listener will take action and come to your landing page. Second, by sending listeners to one page you can quantify if spending time being interviewed is actually benefitting your business by tracking the data of visits to the page versus opt-ins being completed on the page.

My final thought for you when it comes to pitching podcasters to be a guest on their show is to not get discouraged and keep going. Even if someone says “no” or “not right now” to your pitch, that doesn’t mean you should give up. It’s just not a good time right at that moment. Most importantly, your value is not tied up in how many podcasts you can be interviewed on; you’re so much more than that. Good luck and happy pitching! 🍀



7 Things Every Venue Must Have



Liselle Chisenhale-Marsh

Liselle is a Director of Gaynes Park, an award winning, privately owned English barn wedding venue. Surrounded by ancient woodland, farm and parkland, Gaynes Park is set magnificently on top of rolling hills overlooking the distant London skyline. Liselle is Australian and has three children with her English husband, Guy, whose family has owned the Gaynes Park estate since the 1700s. She continues to be inspired very much by the environment of her Sydney childhood, light, space and the ocean. A collector of objects and plants that she finds on her travels, she lovingly finds a home for them at the beautiful venue and gardens at Gaynes Park, creating more gorgeous photo backdrops for their wedding couples. More than just a job, Liselle's work is suffused with 'meraki', whereby she leaves a little of her essence and love in all that she creates, and in doing so she gives couples who choose Gaynes Park a beautiful place to marry that is imbued with beauty, style, harmony and peace.

While it is wonderful to have the perfect wedding day, the current slogan, "your day, your way," leaves me feeling a little worried. You don't want to start married life in unnecessary debt, adding financial burden and strain to your relationship. So, check what does and does not come with the venue as additional costs—including extra taxes as those can add up very quickly and blow a hole in the best planned budget. Assuming the venue falls within the set budget, the seven essential things a perfect wedding venue should have are as follows:

1. SETTING. Whether the venue is an historic house, an urban venue, a town hall or rustic barn, you want the surroundings to be beautiful. The setting should be a striking backdrop for not only the wedding ceremony and celebrations, but also for photos—whether taken in rain or sun, by day or night.

An attractive entrance will always set the tone as guests arrive and a long wedding aisle gives ample opportunity to delight in the wonderful bridal walk. It also gives the photographer more than one chance to get the iconic bridal entrance shot.

Before you pay your deposit, have a good look around. Make sure you stand in the venue space(s).

Close your eyes for a few moments and observe if you intuitively like the feel of the space around you. Notice whether it feels calm and consider if you can imagine yourself making one of the most important and cherished memories of your life with your nearest and dearest alongside you in that space.

2. EXCLUSIVITY. For me, exclusivity is crucial. I like knowing that for the entire time the venue is booked, it is only available for the current day's wedding couple to create their story for their dream day. I am strict about not wanting to have a crossover between weddings. After our venue has been thoroughly cleaned, I like there to be a window of time where all the spaces can be allowed to breathe—then they feel fresh, new and ready to welcome the new day and new couple to be married.

I hear from brides and guests the stories about venues which hold more than one wedding per day where guests wander into the wrong weddings. They end up in photos or having drinks at someone else's wedding (and on their bar bill as well) without even realizing as they might not know other guests.

If the venue is not exclusive, ask whether others at the venue are allowed to wander through your booked wedding areas.

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3. FLOW. The flow of the day is so important because a wedding day can feel disjointed if the spaces don't flow with the order of the day. When the spaces flow, the guests will easily move together to the various areas used during your wedding celebration. For example, in the evening, the wedding guests can be separated when a bar and dance area are in a different space or separate room. I have heard of weddings where the guys are at the bar in one room and the gals on the dance floor elsewhere or vice versa, but sadly they are not partying together! Plus, it is lovely for the older guests to be able to watch all the dancing and celebrations and enjoy chatting to each other while being close to all the activities.

If there are not separate areas and options for the various stages of the wedding day, you should know how transitions will function and flow. For example, sometimes the wedding ceremony, drink reception, sit down meal and the evening party all take place in one space—iron out the details with your venue so you have seamless change to turn the space around as the celebration evolves.

4. FACILITIES. Clean, well maintained, natural and/or good ambient lighting and attractive facilities are a must. However, convenient and attractive washrooms for the less-abled and elderly guests are, for me, just as important. For the less-abled guests, the sheer effort of walking a few steps can be their energy quota for the day and they may have quite literally moved heaven and earth to just live to make it to your wedding so be sure and take their needs into account.

If you do have a less-abled parent, check how the aisle will function for parents in wheelchairs “walking” their daughters up the aisle. We have a long garden aisle at Gaynes Park and we have had some parents who have come out of their hospice to make sure they are there to share the very special day. Depending on how unwell they are, the parent will either be wheeled the entire aisle length or meet their daughter halfway up the aisle to walk the remaining steps together.

Also, don't forget to see how generous the washrooms are and if they are big enough to fit the bride and her bridesmaids in one cubicle! Last, but not least, make sure there is ample car parking for your guests.

5. FLEXIBILITY. Have a good look around the venue buildings and gardens to make sure they look good undecorated without having to spend a chunk of the budget hiding features that you don't like. Otherwise, make sure if you do want to hide or decorate the venue to a theme or style that the venue will give permission to do so. Most venue owners will understandably not permit nails, water or fire to prevent damaging the buildings, but good venues

will let trusted suppliers use their magic tricks to create the look without the damage! The best venues will have a well researched list of handpicked, recommended suppliers whom they respect for their work, reliability and their professionalism.

Another top tip is to make sure the venue is flexible, giving unrestricted access to the wedding garden or venue areas for all guests to enjoy. It is especially important not only to be able to take photos immediately after the wedding ceremony, but also to be able to go back and take photos later in the day to capture a beautiful sunset, moonlit and starry sky shots or for a second chance to take some photos when the rain stops.

6. BRIDAL HONEYMOON SUITE AND ACCOMMODATION. On site or local accommodation in which the wedding party can prepare and get ready before the ceremony and for guests to stay in after the wedding is rapidly becoming a must for couples. It helps if the accommodation is spacious and stylishly decorated as more often than not the photographer and videographer will use it as the backdrop to their many getting ready images that are taken.

7. CATERING AND EVENTS/VENUE TEAM.

Make sure the venue has an excellent in-house caterer or a very good list of recommended caterers they regularly work with. The food should not only be outstanding, well presented and reliable, but the service from the staff must be helpful, friendly and approachable—providing assistance for any and all questions. It is essential to have a dedicated event manager or team who will work with you and become familiar with your requests and style and who can reassure you when you may feel overwhelmed.

A tasting event as part of your catering package is very helpful to give you a taste of the various food and drink options available. It will also give you a feel for the atmosphere of the venue when it has been decorated and is full of people.

A wedding celebration held in a stunning venue that ticks all the 7 must haves is truly wonderful. However, when it comes to the wedding day, my absolute favorite weddings are the ones where the couples let go of any stress about getting the details absolutely perfect and just relish and cherish every moment. Don't worry if the color match of the cake or flowers isn't quite right, just enjoy the day. Soak up all the love that the day is centered around. For me, that is true love and every ceremony that I watch is a gift that never fails to move me and makes me want to watch wedding after wedding after wedding. The day goes by in a flash and then you'll be wishing you could do it all over again. ☺



Don't Forget the Details

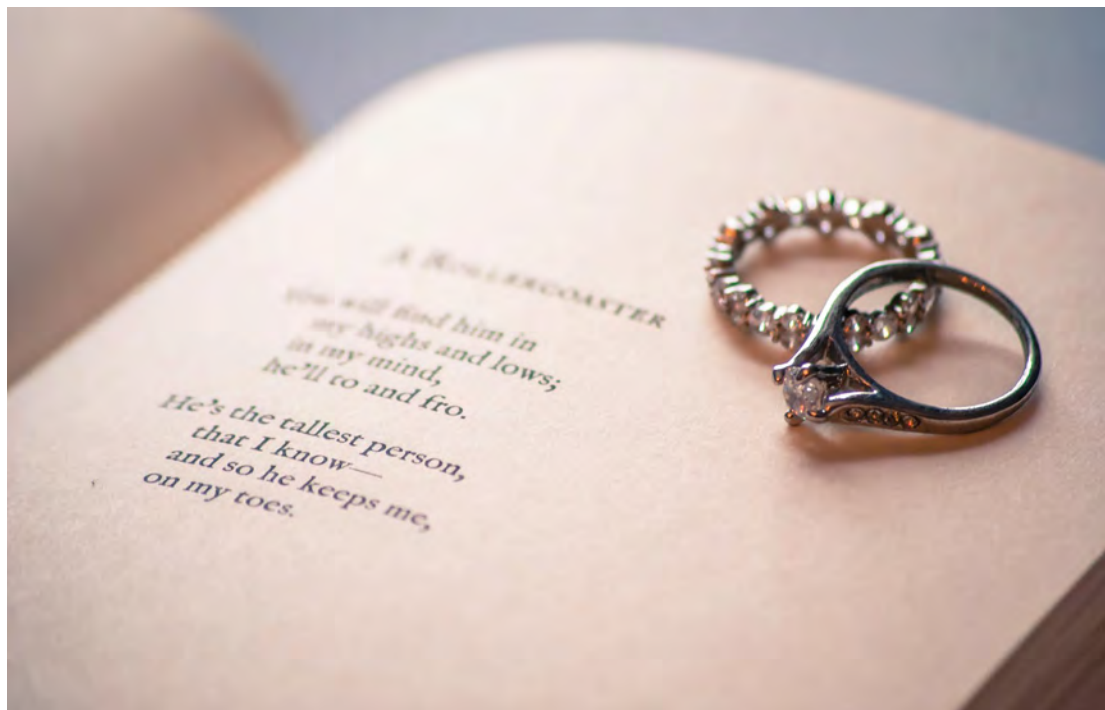
WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY



Emily Caulfield

Emily Caulfield is a photographer, a graphic designer, blogger, taco enthusiast, and creative professional. Her creative journey was introduced when she received her first Polaroid Barbie Pink Instant 600 Film Camera at 4 years old from her parents.

Emily's career started at the age of 17 when she started as a photo lab assistant and web designer at a local business in her hometown in Northport, NY. Since, she's been introduced to many other experiences in the creative industry such as assisting wedding photographers, advertising and marketing, and web designing. Currently, she is a full time student at Suffolk County Community College studying for her AAS in Graphic Design. When she's not in school, she's a full-time graphic designer for a local small business and part-time marketing intern, all while freelancing on the side and blogging along the way. Emily hopes to inspire young people and to prove that they can have anything as long as they work toward it, and that being young and doing what you love isn't unattainable.



A picture isn't only worth a thousand words. A picture is worth a lifetime of memories. On the big day, you're going to need a lot of pictures. Whether you're hiring a photographer or you are a photographer, consider these ideas of things to capture to remember forever, or if you're looking to snap a few amateur photos, these key reminders will help inspire anyone behind the camera. You don't need a fancy camera to capture these moments—any smartphone will do the job.

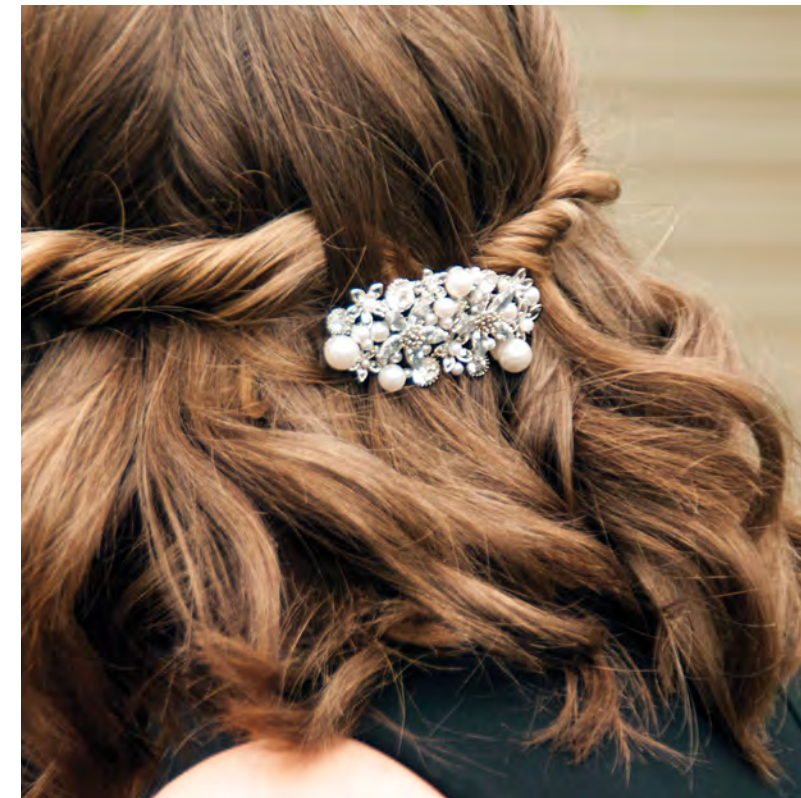
1. KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR. Wedding photographers have a lot to capture starting the second the first hair clip goes in. Obviously, there are going to be photos with family and friends, but what about the other stuff? The details are my favorite part of the puzzle that is wedding photography. Being the puzzle it is, I've created this checklist. Using this list will remind you, or your photographer, to capture what's needed before the day is done. There are spaces included to add a few of your own ideas. The list is there to inspire help perfect the special day.

CHECK LIST:

- The Dress Details
- Hair Accessories
- The Rings
- Shoes
- The Invitation Bundle
- Groom's Accessories
- Everything Floral (bouquet, boutonniere, etc.)
- The Venue / Landscape
- Decor
- Guestbook
- Reception Decor (table decor)
- The Cake
- The Favors

2. TIPS, TRICKS & HACKS. Leave disposable cameras on each of the tables at an event, and let your family and friends to do the rest. This is a really fun way to get everyone together and allows your party to be creative. Everyone loves playing photographer every once in awhile. My favorite part about this is getting the photos taken that night developed. You're one person! So catching every moment is going to be hard to do. Thankfully, with this idea in play, it'll be hard to miss a beat. As a result, the night can be relived through everyone's photos which can be hilarious but most of all really cool.

Bad lighting is one of the worst situations you can be in and if you don't have the necessary equipment, it can be aggravating. For small subjects you can use the flashlight on your smartphone to add more light. Any flashlight can work in this case, and the more the merrier! Just be careful when doing this



because it can add harsh shadows and awkward light glares.

3. DO-IT-YOURSELF. I probably have the most fun photographing the rings. Engagement rings are always gorgeous so of course they're always going to photograph well. Try it yourself by placing the rings in focus next to the date or the newlywed's names on the wedding invitation. It captures several details in one photo which truly makes all the difference. You can also try placing the rings in the bouquet, in a book next to a favorite reading or quote, or even next to something handwritten.

Another creative and fun thing to do is using the surroundings in photographs. Obviously you want to photograph as much of the wedding as possible, so why not incorporate as much as possible? While at a beach wedding, I take a quick photograph of the wedding schedule and invitations on top of the beach sand. Super simple and easy to capture. If there's no beach sand to utilize, print out some wood or marble patterns. Most flat lay images you see online aren't actually photographed on a marble counter or wood table. You can print your own patterns and use them as your own background.

Happy creating and stay inspired! 🌀

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6 Ways to Curate Wedding Day Design



Eliana Baucicault

With nine years in event production under her belt, Eliana creates unforgettable celebrations while bringing a fresh perspective to the industry. Eliana's background in project management ensures that events go seamlessly while her eye for design creates memories that guests aren't soon to forget. Eliana takes the visions of her clients and magnificently amplifies them into extraordinarily unique experiences. She prides herself on connecting with her clients on a personal level and maintaining relationships long after their special event. Eliana's achievements have been spotted in publications such as The Knot, Munaluchi, Southern Bride, Inside Weddings, Essence Magazine and a host of others. She resides in Atlanta, GA with her husband, her teenage son, and 4 adorable Yorkshire Terriers.

As a wedding and event designer, I am often asked, "How much do the florals cost?" It is important to know the difference between an event designer and a wedding day florist. An event designer not only takes the look of the reception into consideration, but creates an overall brand for the wedding day experience. Everything from stationery and web design to florals and linens falls under the vision of the event designer.

Here are some tips when thinking about event design:


STYLE - Inquire as to aspects of your client's home-things that they see and touch in everyday life. What style are they consistently drawn to when visiting home or specialty stores? Bring the details that they seem to enjoy most into the event design. The event should be an extension of the clients as people. Remember, that it's not about pleasing every guest, but about creating an event that your clients will enjoy. If the bride or groom has a favorite scent, think about incorporating it into the event as guests walk into the room. Is there a pattern in the bride's closet that she cannot seem to get enough of? Bring this through in smaller elements such as a print on the stationery or napkin design. This will ensure that 20 years from now, there will be no question where the theme or color scheme came from.

CONSISTENCY - The easiest way to not have a cookie cutter event is to make sure that all of the elements selected are consistent. The fonts and colors used on the save the dates should be the same as those on the website and all other stationery materials that the guests view or receive. This will show that every detail leading up to the big day was careful thought out.

GUEST COUNT - This is the number one contributor to your event design budget. The number of guests count for much more than just food and beverage costs. Each additional person equates to an additional invite, chair, and cake serving (did we mention that the look of your cake should be part of your design plans?). Also as the numbers increase, you will need additional linens and centerpieces.

EDIT - Not everything on pinterest needs to end up in the space for the big day. Break down the elements by style to quickly see that some can be used for events leading up to the big day such as showers, luncheons or even the rehearsal dinner.

COLOR - Don't be afraid of a little color. If the space has neutral walls, color can come through in the floral or lighting designs. Adding colored draping not only helps soften the room but brings in color if you are afraid to use color in the actual table design. Even if the colors are white and gold, make sure the gold pops in all the right places such as flatware, chargers, stemware, stationery and so on.

TEXTURE - This is an area often forgotten. Don't forget that event design comes from using the five senses; touch, sight (gorgeous couple and overall event room design), smell (florals or ideas as mentioned above), hearing (entertainment) and taste (food selection). So how do you add touch to the mix? Think about the linen selections: will guests want to rub their fingers on the linens as they sit down? These are the small details that guests will notice when done right. 

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5 Tips to Create Stunning Wedding Florals with Ease



Julie Abrera

Beaumont House Design is a floral design studio specializing in weddings and events. Tucked away in Berryville, VA, about an hour west of Washington DC, Beaumont House is where wild beauty meets sophistication. With the Blue Ridge Mountains & Shenandoah Valley just beyond the garden gate, most days you will find me either in the cutting garden or walking in the nearby fields with the studio dogs looking for foraged blooms. My love of flowers is hard wired in my DNA, starting with my great grandparents who were Iowa farmers, and I don't think it's a coincidence I was born on the first day of spring.

THE VASE SHOULD PLAY A STARRING ROLE

When I think about creating an arrangement, I often look to the vase for inspiration. Over the years, I have amassed a collection of vintage vases – some from my mother, others picked up for a song at the thrift store. The vase is an integral part of the flower story, supporting the blooms and letting them shine.

Often, vases from my own collection will be part of the tablescape on a King's table. I found this blue and gold pitcher at a local antique store a few years ago. I knew right away that this was the vase to tell the story of the exquisite bunch of yellow & orange single petal ranunculus. It's size, shape and color would elevate the delicate blooms and allow them to sparkle on the table. With a delightful tangle of greens, eremurus and star of Bethlehem, the ranunculus steal the show.

I love that many of my fabulous vases have a better social life than I do and they play an important part of telling the love story of Beaumont House couples on their wedding day.

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LOCAL & IN SEASON FLOWERS ALWAYS LOOK GREAT TOGETHER

If I could, I would rely exclusively on Mother Nature to tell time. Each season brings its own blooms, making design decisions easy. I know that spring brings flowering branches and daffodils and high summer marks the beginning of the zinnias and dahlias. Sourcing locally grown flowers has always been a priority for me. With a wonderful network of local farmers and my own cutting garden, I can offer brides flowers they may have never seen or haven't seen since they were a child.

This spring I have been crushing on the softest purple heather from the garden, combined with hellebore and daffodils. Together they make for the loveliest boutonnieres for an early spring wedding. I know these flowers will only be available for a few weeks and I can't wait to change up the palette with the arrival of summer.

FORAGED AND FOUND - CELEBRATE THE UNEXPECTED

My ideal day would start and end outside. At Beaumont House, I am surrounded by fields and woods filled with interesting blooms. I spend a lot of time looking for flower treasures. One of my greatest finds was last summer when the roadside medians were filled with a carpet of delicate purple flowers. At dusk, with the studio dogs acting as lookout, I grabbed my clippers and tall boots and went wading into the brush, filling up a bucket with the blooms. They did beautifully as a cut flower and are now a summer mainstay in my arrangements. For this reason, I always have a bucket and pair of clippers in the car. I also tend to stalk the neighborhood the night before trash pickup. I've scored cherry blossom branches for forcing, cast off ornamental grass and vintage boards that are perfect backdrops for photo shoots. I stick firmly by the motto: "one woman's trash is another woman's treasure."



EMBRACE THE POWER OF ONE

I feel the jury is still out on design rules. Some adhere to the rule of threes, and others have no hard and fast rules they subscribe to. The power of one can tell a great flower story. Often when I am putting together a tablescape, I'll focus on one design element. This could be one variety or color of flower or using one type of vase.

Here I was inspired to explore a pink palette with the vintage, coral, feed bin table, lipstick-pink, locally-grown tulips and a pale pink runner. I often find sticking to one element will result in design choices I never would have thought of. It helps me edit and in many cases, tell a great color story.

DESIGN FOR EACH COUPLE

I love working with couples in the early part of the design process. We spend a lot of time talking about what kind of experience they want for themselves as well as their guests throughout the celebration. Transforming spaces with flowers to tell love stories must always be done with care. While I have a certain design style, I always want the flowers to be a true reflection of the couple. Hearing how people will move through the ceremony and reception space, looking at their Pinterest board, looking at the invitation suite and walking through venue are so important. Getting to know the couple is always time well spent so I can infuse their personality in the floral design.

With one of my couples in mind, I put this place setting together for their rustic luncheon celebration held in 19th century flour mill. Knowing they have a fondness for farm tables, vintage china & crystal and the color blue, I combined lustreware and blue willow plates with hobnail and pressed glass. The delicate blooms add sparkle to the table and are low enough to encourage conversation across the table. 🌸



Creating a Memorable Celebration



Darcy Miller

Author, illustrator, professional memory-keeper and self-professed confetti addict, when it comes to parties, there isn't much that Darcy Miller won't celebrate. Over the course of more than twenty years as the editorial director of *Martha Stewart Weddings*, and now as editor-at-large, Darcy has become a leading celebrations expert. She is the author and illustrator of *CELEBRATE EVERYTHING!* (William Morrow, 2016), her second book, in which she shares her tips, inspirations and favorite parties. She is also the author of *OUR WEDDING SCRAPBOOK* (William Morrow, 2004). Known for her ingenuity, creativity, and distinctive drawings, Darcy is committed to making life a celebration and is known for throwing a party you'll never forget—and creative ways to document it so that you'll remember it forever. Darcy believes in finding a reason to celebrate all of life's moments, from the everyday to your biggest day. Though she's worked on parties in every size, style and budget, her favorite fêtes are the ones she's hosted for her husband and three daughters at home in New York City.

After years and years of planning lots of parties, people always ask me what makes a successful celebration. Here are some of my top tips to get you started. Whether you're just having some friends over for a Cinco de Mayo fiesta or throwing an all out 40th birthday bash, you can do as much or as little as you want. And most importantly, don't forget that parties are about celebrating with friends and people you love, no matter what color the tablecloth is. People will only see what's there, not what's missing (i.e. what you ran out of time and budget to do!)

PICK A UNIQUE THEME. A theme is where can really wow your guests! In *Celebrate Everything!*, I have a huge list of different theme ideas to get started. Whether your theme is as simple as your favorite color, or something more elaborate like *J'taime Paris*, complete with a crepe bar and party berets, a theme can help make your event distinctive. Maybe you or the person you're celebrating loves to sew—just let that be your theme and “weave” it into everything from the crafts to the décor and even to the food and favors (you could make a giant “spool” cake or DIY pincushion favors that double as card holders!)



PHOTO BY DONNA NEWMAN

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PHOTO BY JAKA VINSEK

“It’s often the thoughtful small details that take your party to the next level. People appreciate and notice the thought and effort.”

MAKE IT PERSONAL. The best parties are the ones that are personal to the person or event that you’re celebrating. The first thing I do when I’m planning any party is to ask myself questions about the guest (or guests) of honor. I feature a checklist in my book of things to ask. What is their favorite movie? Does he or she collect anything? Take your answers and include those personal details in your celebrating. For the friend who always wears bright red lipstick, have your guests all come sporting red lips! You can also never go wrong adding photos to anything. Print some black and white images and punch them out to make confetti or print photos on custom cocktail napkins. Your guest of honor will definitely remember the details and attention you put into their special day. The checklist may inspire the whole theme, or just a few details.

DECOR. This is where the party visually comes to life! In small ways, from a garland in a doorway to filling a room with candles, décor is the environment your guests live in. It’s fun for guests to see the creative ways you have accessorized a space. You can use flowers, balloons, or even mood lighting to transform a space for a celebration.



PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE JENKS LEWIS

IT’S ALL IN THE DETAILS. It’s often the thoughtful small details that take your party to the next level. People appreciate and notice the thought and effort you’ve put into the planning. When I have a dinner party, I always like to surprise my guests with the details. For a swim themed party, the blue frosted donuts doubled as a “pool” in my dining room. A place card can also be a favor! You can write guests name on a chocolate bar wrapper, or on a small stake in a succulent. Why not set up a fun champagne bar and have guests make their own champagne cocktails? An interactive party game can bring your guests together. Have everyone write something unexpected about themselves on a card, collect and read them aloud, then try to guess which guest they belong to. You might be surprised who won prom queen in high school. Filling the night with these details can make a party no one will forget.

MAKE A TOAST. Toasts are one of my favorite parts of any celebration. Even the simplest toast is meaningful. It’s the chance to remind everyone who or what we are all celebrating. A toast spoken from the heart always does the trick. It can be as simple as expressing your feelings, or as elaborate or creative as a rap, a song, or even a dance. One of my favorite

toast memories is when my sister actually sang to my husband and me at our wedding! To take the pressure off guests at a dinner party, I like to set up toast prompts at place settings, something like: “my favorite memory of _____ is...” or “the first day I met _____ was...” Everyone now has something fun to say.

MEMORIES/DOCUMENTATION. You want to live in the moment at the party, but don’t forget to document all the fun! Always take photos, whether you or a friend is taking them or you hire a professional. There are so many ways to make photo-taking interactive, too. DIY photo booths are fun and easy to set up, all you need is a backdrop and some props. If you have an instant camera, you can even turn the photos into favors--just make sure your guests leave a copy for you, too! For candid, my friend and photographer, Donna Newman, always tells me to listen to where the fun is in the room—that’s where you’ll find the best photos! Videos are just as important. Hearing your loved ones voice, or watching them dance is a memory you don’t want to forget. Lastly, don’t forget save the little mementos to put in either a scrapbook or scrapbox—the candle on the first birthday cake or your wedding invitation—so the party can live on in your memory long after it’s over. 🎉

Celebrate

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THE ART OF CELEBRATIONS

Perfecting the Party



Courtney Whitmore

Courtney Whitmore left her full time job as a career counselor to launch Pizzazzerie.com in 2010 to share entertaining inspiration and ideas with her readers. Now a published cookbook author, she utilizes her talent in entertaining and food styling to share daily party inspiration with her readers. Her latest book, *Pizzazzerie: Entertain in Style* releases in fall of 2017.

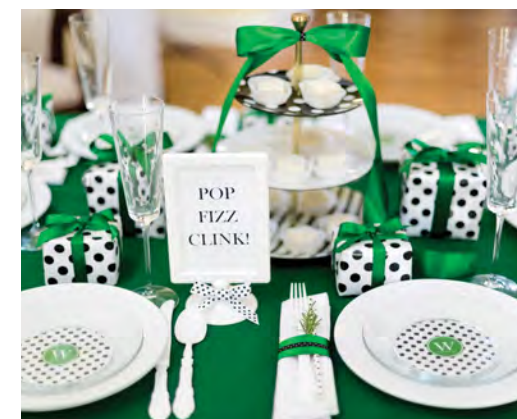
I've been a tabletop stylist for over seven years so I know a thing or two about prepping for a party! It may seem overwhelming at first to get everything prepared, but I've broken it down into five things that make a party. You can certainly find a lot of ways to embellish a party, but these are my must-do's for every special celebration.

COLOR SCHEMES. Having an overall color palette to your party gives it cohesiveness, especially if it's not all condensed to one room. Even if you use a plethora of colors, keeping it coordinated is key. Perhaps you use an orange tablecloth with a multitude of flower colors but you tie in the orange with favor tags and ribbon. I try to have one or two colors to help guide me when preparing for a party.

TABLESCAPES. I absolutely adore setting a gorgeous tablescape for every party. Even if you are serving your food "mix and mingle" style, you can still give your table some dedicated design flair by coordinating cake stands and appetizer plates into a thoughtful presentation.

FLOWERS. Gorgeous blooms help give every party a festive feeling so even if it's simple succulents or pink peonies, something "living" always gives a party a polished touch.

SIGNATURE DRINK. Signature drinks aren't just for weddings anymore. They're popping up



everywhere from baby showers to game nights. Pick a cocktail (or mocktail) on theme and set it up bar style so guests can make their own! Add in cute cocktail napkins and drink stirrers, of course!

FAVORS. Last, but not least, favors! Gone are the days of kitschy favors that end up tossed out. I'm talking about something thoughtful that fits with your celebration. Whether it's a hand decorated cookie, a sweet bottle of homemade jam, or even a snapshot from an instant camera taken that evening, I always like my guests to leave with a little something in hand. 🍷

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The Art of Invitations



Dionne Christiansen

Dionne Christiansen is the owner of Nib and Pixel, a Houston-based calligraphy and graphic design studio. She has been teaching calligraphy since 2013 and has a double bachelors degree in Graphic Design and Marketing. When she isn't teaching or creating for her clients, Dionne likes going on foodie adventures with her husband and two kids, collecting vintage plates and throwing dinner parties for friends and family.

My husband and I got married in 2008, on a crisp autumn evening in Pasadena, California. The six months after I said yes to his heartfelt proposal were spent planning the biggest party of my life.

All during the wedding we got kudos on how beautiful things were, how delicious the cake was, how stunning my dress was—the usual compliments a bride likes to hear. However, it wasn't until we got back from our honeymoon that we received my favorite compliment of all. It was from one of my husband's friends, "On the way home from your wedding, my date told me that after seeing all the details, she felt like she had known you guys her whole life. Starting from your invites, right through to the end of the night." We had known his date exactly zero hours and zero minutes before the wedding. Best. Compliment. Ever.

One of my favorite parts of any party I have thrown (my wedding included) is designing the perfect invitation to send the word out that a celebration is coming. I am a custom stationer and calligrapher, but I've been creating my own invitations since I was a little girl, long before I even knew you could be paid for such a fun pursuit. I am, and always have been, a snail-mailer—even for the smallest of gatherings. There is something special and incredibly exciting about receiving an invitation in the mail. The tangibility of it makes the occasion seem more special and actually makes the guest feel more valued. A quick email can take literally just seconds, whereas an invitation sent out the old-fashioned way takes a lot more time and effort. Curating/designing, printing, stuffing, addressing and mailing are things that are becoming less common, but this also means that they are becoming

more appreciated. In the case of a wedding, I'm sure you've all heard that wedding invitations set the tone for what the wedding will be like—the first opportunity to show guests what to expect at the biggest party of your life. I like to keep this point in mind for any occasion that I am inviting guests to join. Got a wedding to plan? Hosting a party soon? Whatever the event, let the invitation tell your story, something with quirks just as unique as yours.

Let's take a look into the art of making a memorable invitation.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Personal doesn't necessarily mean expensive. I will take meaningful and heartfelt over glamorous and opulent any day. Let me paint you a true-story picture.

My mother is the definition of a Pinterest mama, but without the Pinterest part. I grew up in the 80s and 90s with a DIY-loving mother who was far ahead of her time. Back then it was seen as quaint to be crafty, so even though her beautiful string-and-nail Christmas tree was amazing, the ten-year-old me sometimes wished I just had a store-bought plastic tree, like everyone else. The first time I remember realizing how creative and detailed my mother is, was when I saw one of her and Dad's wedding invitations packed in a box somewhere. It was that dusty 80s pink with hazy roses and baby's breath, but it had this textured overlay with beautiful calligraphy on it. Upon closer inspection, I could see that the calligraphy wasn't printed on there, or hand-written, but each letter was painstakingly stuck down onto the paper. My parents didn't know where to

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“Whether your party is going to be a destination wedding in Bali, or an intimate dinner in your backyard under the stars, your invitation should communicate the same spirit of your celebration that will unfold at the event.”

print the look that they wanted on their invitations, and didn't know anything about graphic design, so they bought some old-school letter transfer sheets. Then together, they carefully rubbed the back of the letter sheets to transfer these ornate characters onto the page. EACH. INDIVIDUAL. LETTER. For ALL their invitations. Not only was the invitation beautiful (albeit in a romantic 80s pink, but trust me, in the 80s it would have been an awesome invite), it was something they poured their hearts and effort into—making it all the more special.

You can also make your invitation personal by the wording you choose. Don't only take into consideration if the event is formal or casual, but speak with your own voice. I love wedding invitations where couples don't follow the standard templates. My husband and I had fun with the verbiage for our wedding invitations. Our invitation consisted of a series of engraved cards on leather-like paper, but we each spoke with our own voice. On one side, I invited people in my way, and on the flip side, Brian invited them in his way. An example from one of the cards had on one side:

DIONNE: “You have made a significant impact on our lives and we thank the Lord for how you’ve contributed to who we are in your own special way. We can’t contain our excitement in inviting you to come celebrate with us not only the end of the long-distance part of our relationship, but our wedding day.”

And then other side said:

BRIAN: “We want you at this wedding.”

The language we chose perfectly illustrated how I tend to be more flowery and descriptive when I speak, whereas my husband cuts right to the chase with as few words as possible. Our guests got a kick out of reading each card and said they could imagine our voices as they read the invitation. Don't underestimate how strong a role words can play in personalizing your invitation.

MAKE AN ENTRANCE

We all have that friend—the one that comes bursting into the room, squealing with a flurry of excitement and an expression on her face that means she has exciting news to tell you. She hasn't even told you her news, but just by looking at her, you (and the whole room) know she is pumped about something. Why not consider making your invitation “that friend”? Are you taking your guests on a wild, exotic adventure? Will your guests be transported to a whimsical, midsummer night's dream? Maybe even to a seaside afternoon in a wash of brilliant pastel? Whether your party is going to be a destination wedding in Bali, or an intimate dinner in your backyard under the stars, your invitation should communicate the same spirit of your celebration that will unfold at the event. Before your guests even read the words on the page, the rest of the invitation components should hint at what is coming. Here is where the style of your occasion will shine through, based on the colors you choose, the size and shape you decide on, and even the thickness of the paper can make an impression.

A great way to engage and excite your guests as they open their invitation envelopes is to appeal their senses. Sight, touch, taste, smell and sound. An invitation doesn't just have to be visual. What is the texture of the paper like? Is it even paper? Perhaps it's stamped onto metal. Etched into wood. Calligraphy on handmade cotton paper. There are so many ways to engage the sense of touch.

Taste is another sense that you can incorporate into invitations. I have had clients request their save-the-date announcements be hand-calligraphied onto macaroons. What a delicious and lovely invitation to receive in the mail! I have also incorporated taste into personal invitations. I am an Australian-native, and moved to the USA in 2002. Before I left, I threw one last party before heading off to

explore the world. It was a costume party. Guests received fortune cookies (taste and touch... check!), and inside the fortune cookies were colored strips of paper with the details printed on them (sight... check!). People had to dress in a costume that was the same color as the paper in their fortune cookie. So the party was a menagerie of five colors: green, blue, yellow, red and purple. As the host, I was dressed as Cruella De Ville in all her black and white glory.

Sound and smell are probably the most difficult to incorporate, but if you think back to your childhood they make for popular birthday cards. I have clear memories of musical birthday cards I received and even ones with a “scratch and sniff” feature. A few years ago clients of mine got married in Italy and their boxed invitations included sprigs of Rosemary, so when guests opened their invitations, they were immediately transported to the little town in Italy where the wedding would take place.

MAKE AN EFFORT

I often tease my husband because he takes SUCH A LONG TIME to make a decision when purchasing anything. He researched cars for a year before buying our first family car. He studied phone models for months before finally deciding to upgrade his phone. He is a very careful shopper. I have come to learn that this is a good thing, especially when it's something important. The same goes with wedding invitations. Don't just copy the first one you like from a wedding blog. Explore for a while. Look into materials and printing methods. Before having my own stationery business, I was a graphic designer at a beautiful print shop in Los Angeles. I learned all about letterpress, spot printing, digital printing, engraving, embossing, debossing, die-cutting, laser-cutting, foil-stamping, thermography, duplexing, gilding, edge-painting—I am out of breath just listing them out! There is a plethora of magical printing processes and techniques to explore. The definitions and explanations of each of these are for another day, but if you are interested, please look them up online. They each bring a different level and set a different mood for your invitation.

MAKE IT RIGHT

Here is the part where I get all teacher-y. All of the above points are important, but none of it will matter if you don't remember the basics of what an invitation is for. It is to convey a message. Don't bombard your invitation with beautiful watercolor flowers and then have the invitation details all squished in the bottom corner in a tiny font because it looks wistful and demure. Form follows function, my friends. Don't have your calligrapher go overboard on your envelope flourishing, so



much that half the envelopes get returned to you because the Post Office couldn't understand the address. It sure looks pretty, but if it doesn't get to its destination then it's useless. Take into consideration fonts, scale and balance and always remember that the information is the most important thing to communicate.

Now that I have shared with you my take on what makes a great invitation, I am going to sit down with a nice latte (drinking lattes are also a necessary factor in creating a great invitation—I forgot to mention that earlier), and wait until I get a lovely invitation in the mail from you. When I open it, I bet I will feel like I have known you my whole life. ☺

Shaking It Up

WITH MINT + MIRTH

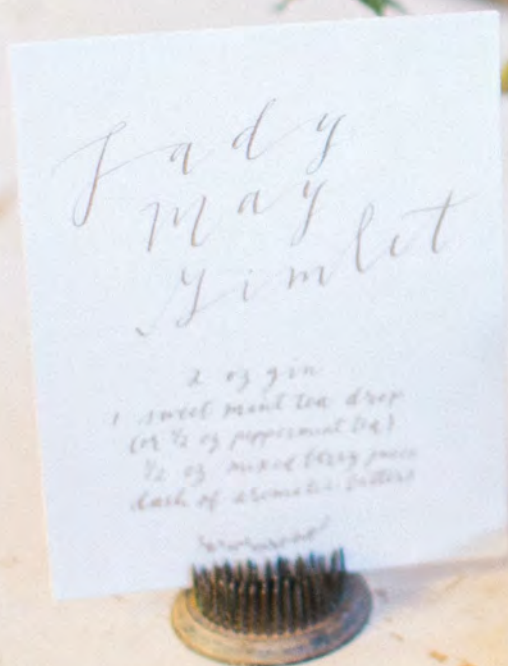


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Joni Whitworth

My name is Joni, and I'm a mixologist and the co-founder of Mint & Mirth, Traveling Bartenders for the World's Best Parties. My wife and I make modern and classic cocktails featuring locally-made spirits, seasonal garnishes and homemade syrups. We were recently named "Oregon's Best Cocktail Caterer". Today I'd love to share some favorites sips as well as some thoughts on queering the wedding industry—inspired by my personal experiences.

Two years ago, at eight o'clock on a Thursday night, I was standing in the bathroom stall of a bridal show...on the phone...crying my eyes out.

"I can take the hot pink feather boas. I can take the ring bearer's 'last chance to run' sign and the rhinestone tote bags all labeled "BRIDE", but it's our third show of the pre-wedding season, and I can't take one more mention of the his-and-her honeymoon package!" I sobbed.

I'm not sure why this particular his-and-her themed giveaway broke me and made me call for help—I should have been used to it, right? Wedding giveaways and packages are marketed to the majority, and the majority is one him and one her. I should have learned to shrug it off by then, that little chest pain I got whenever a judgmental mother-in-law maliciously side-eyed my butch partner. I should have known that bridal shows, which are supposed to be an opportunity to connect with potential wedding bakeries, florists and planners are geared toward one specific person and that person is not me. I was hoping that people of any sexuality or gender presentation could come get insight on the wedding services they needed help with, but the fitness studio that promised to make you "hot enough to be worthy of your man" pushed me over the edge. That night, I thought about closing Mint & Mirth.

Let me take you back to the beginning, for a little context. When my partner and I started our wedding business, we mapped out a simple business plan: we'll serve classy, fresh, well-made drinks...delicious garnishes...have cute signage...and we'll ONLY bartend at gay weddings!

How naive we were then, two beers in and brimming with idealism. We forgot that a small fraction of weddings are queer, and that gay marriage was still illegal in our state. Our target market wasn't exactly huge. Eventually, our services list grew to include weddings of any kind, but between black tuxedos and white dresses there wasn't much space for pink pagan vegan disabled bears and otters. The first few months of business were hard—not just on us as a company, but on our spirits. It was hard when a leering groomsman slapped our queer employee's butt and asked if she and I were "going home to scissor after this". It was hard when a DJ asked me, "I bet you want to hear that gay Macklemore song, huh?"

In the beginning, every wedding was a reminder of the privileges we didn't have. We'd been together for six years and we served at the wedding of two people who had only known each other for six weeks. The wedding industry is the territory of heterosexuals, in a country that doesn't hesitate to remind us we are second-class citizens.

However, the wedding industry can also be the world of allies. As our business grew, I found strength and friendship in other LGBTQ-friendly companies and active allies. Through these networks I found our ten amazing bartenders, many of whom identify as gay, bisexual, genderqueer, pansexual or other. Our heterosexual clients began to include ceremony readings and moments of silence for those who couldn't marry.

We saw motion in the media as well. Wedding vendors often collaborate on styled wedding inspiration photo shoots for magazines and blogs and these mock weddings are a great way to showcase the work of the talented vendors involved. When I noticed that these articles rarely featured gay, lesbian or transgender couples, I organized a beautiful winter wedding shoot with real-life committed couple, Adam and Andrew. When the popular wedding inspiration blog "Style Me Pretty" wrote to me and told me they don't publish gay weddings,

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cocktail recipes

PERSIMMON MARGARITA

1 1/2 oz. tequila
1 oz. persimmon syrup (see above)
1/2 oz. triple sec
1/4 oz. fresh lime juice
Jacobsen Sea Salt's Matcha salt for rim (optional)

Shake with ice and strain, garnish with rosemary.

LADY MAY GIMLET

2 oz Aria Portland Dry Gin or other dry gin
1 sweet mint Tea Drop (or 1/2 oz peppermint tea)
1/2 oz mixed berry juice
dash of aromatic bitters

Combine all ingredients in a shaker over ice, shake well, then strain over ice and garnish with citrus.



PHOTO BY BRITTANY LAUREN



PHOTO BY BRITTANY LAUREN

vendors and allies offered me support and space to strike back.

Adam and Andrew's gorgeous portraits were showcased on a different wedding blog with thousands of viewers, giving testament to the validity and intimacy of their love and bringing new business to the Pacific Northwest vendors who supported marriage equality. Since then, Style Me Pretty's leadership team has evolved, and they now publish queer content regularly.

Through my experiences in our industry, I've come to understand that we have a responsibility to exist. People tell me that being gay isn't relevant to wedding bartending, but I think it is. We're young, small business owners. We're queer girls making a name for ourselves. We helped overturn Measure 36 and can now get married in my home state. Other queer companies like Red's Creations (florals), Gina Marie Campbell's (makeup and hair services) and Duchess Clothiers (suits) show that our excellence defines us alongside our identities. Blogs like Offbeat Bride and A Bicycle Built for Two give a voice to our stories, showing that gayness exists in many forms and formats. This growing network of queer-owned and queer-friendly businesses is shifting the wedding industry paradigm. We bring our queerness to summer weddings in fields, glam weddings in museums and earth goddess weddings in Forest

Park. We show up on time and do our jobs well. We manifest our differences without stealing the show. To other LGBTQ small business owners, we have a responsibility to be here. Every client you talk to with a gracious smile will remember you—that you weren't a freak, that you weren't miserable, that you weren't unworthy of love by a "normal" person. If our customer service is impeccable, it's our strongest weapon.

We have a responsibility to reject thinly-veiled criticisms by shining our brightest. We have a responsibility to dance the night away in reception halls. Once I realized this, I entered a new realm of creative freedom and expression, and the business boomed.

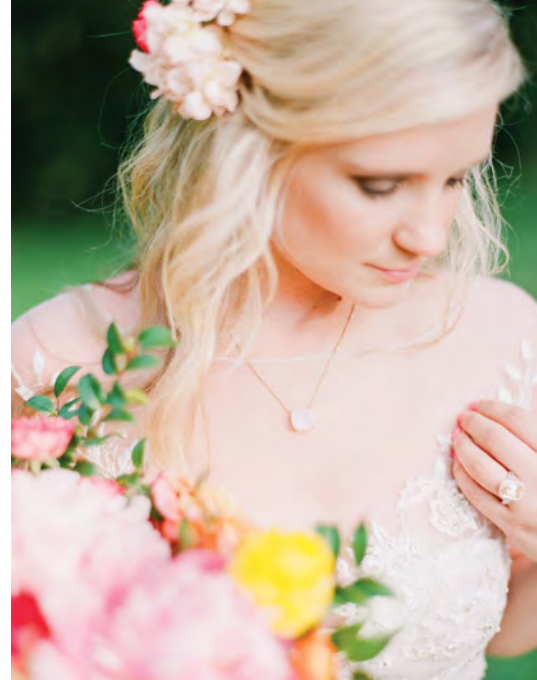
I went back to the bridal show that night two years ago, because I had a mission in my heart, to speak to the coordinators about the injustices I saw. Now I regularly consult with vendors who'd like to promote their businesses in more inclusive ways.

The media likes to tell stories about and on behalf of LGBTQ people, which often creates conflict. By existing as friends and fellow business owners, we can begin to tell our own stories to shape the content we see in our community. I believe that by doing so, we can co-create a society without hatred, without distrust, where good people can be free and prosper. 🍋



PHOTO BY MARIA LAMB

Wedding Inspiration / JORDAN BRITTLLEY • @JORDANBRITTLLEY



PHOTOGRAPHY
JORDAN BRITTLLEY
BRIDAL HAIR DESIGN
BRIANNE WRIGHT OF DIAMONDS AND DOS
INVITATION SUITE
TABOR MADE

PLANNING
ALLI OF EVENTS BY SOCIAL GRACES
MAKEUP
KAREN JOHNSON

FLORAL DESIGN
CHARITY BENNITT OF HE LOVES ME FLOWERS
DRESS
ELLA WEISS

Real Wedding / FEUZA REIS • @FEUZA



Moroccan BoHo / SARAH ATKINSON



Hello, I'm Sarah Atkinson with Moments Defined Photography. I have been in the industry for over 10 years. I specialize in wedding and portrait photography. My style is colorful, relaxed and captures life. In addition to photography, I love to share happiness to others by baking cookies. I adore theatre and singing and I'm known to break off into song quite often. I am blessed to be a mom to 5 children living in sunny Arizona.

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EVENT PLANNER / DECORATOR
JENNIFER CLUFF, SIMPLE MEANS EVENTS
MOROCCAN BACKDROP/ALTAR
DIXIE LANDRUM AND MEGAN REUTHER WITH ALTAR GRACE
HAIR AND MAKEUP
BREANNA THOMAS

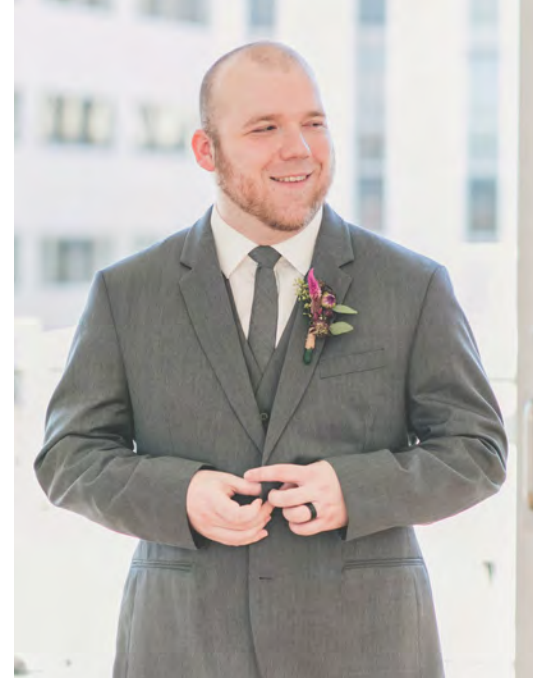
BRIDAL GOWN
SUZANNE'S BRIDAL BOUTIQUE
CAKE
THE GREAT GADSBY BAKERY
STUNNING LOCATION
LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK

FLORALS
VICKIE WITH FLORALISH
FURNITURE
PRIM RENTALS
MODELS
GERALD AND BREANNA THOMAS





Modern Merlot / KENESHIA RAYMOND • @BLISSFULCREATIVES



DESIGN/COORDINATION
HONEYBEE MINE EVENTS, KELSEA MERCHANT
GOWN
GILDED BRIDAL, SUSAN LANGFORD
MAKEUP
FRONT ROW COSMETICS, MELISSA SMALL
JEWELRY
DIAMONDS DIRECT

PHOTOGRAPHY
IMAGES BY AMBER ROBINSON
TUX
THE BLACK TUX
STATIONERY
CAMEL + BIRDIE, CATRINA BALLARD
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JESS + MARK AUSTIN

CAKE
SUGAR EUPHORIA, RANDI SMITH
HAIR
WEDDING HAIR BY LIZ, LIZ PAMIAS
RENTALS
THE PRETTIEST PIECES, CAROLINE CASH
FLORALS
SPECIALTIES FLORALS AND EVENTS, SUSAN HILL



Real Wedding / NOREEN NOONER



Noreen Nooner is a nationally published photographer based out of Pleasant View Tennessee. She loves and craves light and believes that photography is not just capturing the perfect image it's capturing the perfect moment.

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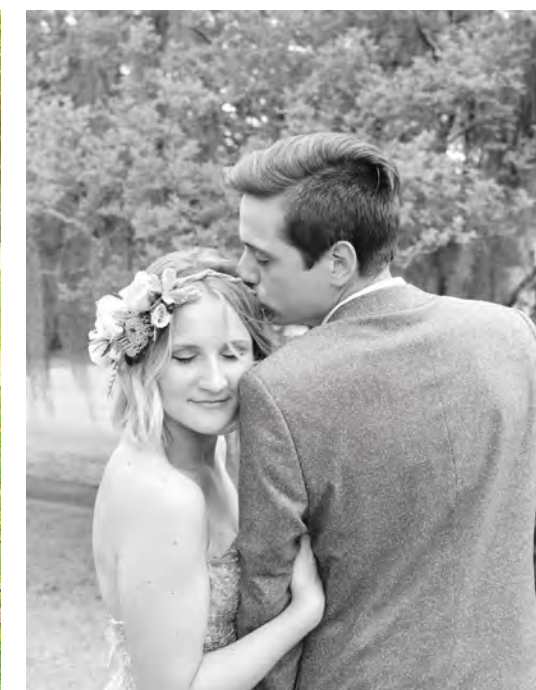
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TOTAL PACKAGE EVENTS
EVENT LOCATION
WILMA RUDOLPH EVENT CENTER

MAKEUP
STORY WOODS
CAKE
PUFFY MUFFIN
FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS
SMITH TRAHERN

FLORAL DESIGN
TECHNIQUES EVENT RENTALS AND FLORAL DESIGN
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CAKE
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JEWELRY
ASH HOFFMAN

FLOWERS
BEACH BLOSSOMS

MAKE UP
BEAUTY AND BURLAP

DRESS
SARAH 7

The inspiration was the Magnolia leaves at this home which is her grandparents home and where her parents got married. This was an anniversary shoot.

Weekend Retreat



Jordan Brittley

Hey friend! I'm a wife and momma on the daily. I'm passionate about joyful marriages, encouraging words, and small plants. I'm a wedding photographer and I share garden weddings, my life, and what I've learned in business on my blog. Total mom win? My son says, "Bye, friends!" If you only remember one thing from me, I want it to be this: you are so loved.

You are not alone.

This is a message that I need more of in my life, friend! I work from home next to tiny little succulents as a blogger and wedding photographer. I'm a stay-at-home-momma and second cups of coffee are a naptime-must.

We creative entrepreneurs love serving our people—whether we're posting on social media, writing a blog post or discovering a new way to do this entrepreneurial life. We can't help it... We love our people.

So let's rest up and fuel up so we can love these people well! Let me ask you, what inspires you? What brings you to life?

Let's do more of those things today. Let's sit outside and work. Go for a walk. Grab a dessert coffee and celebrate a job well done. Let's create habits of filling up so we can pour out and love well.

During this creative retreat, we let our schedules and our to-do lists fall to the side so that we could just spend time together. We shared our stories and our fears. We encouraged each other and ate brownie brittle and popcorn. We had more coffee than you should ever drink in a day.

We weren't created to do this entrepreneur life by ourselves. We were created to enjoy friendships, go outside and celebrate. We were created to live full lives.

I'm cheering you on, friend! Let's do more full life.

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Oh So Inspired



Sometimes it's not finding inspiration, but rather cultivating it from what already exists. In 2014, Oh So Inspired started when Nancy Liu Chin of Nancy Liu Chin Designs and Kelly McLeskey-Dolata of A Savvy Event got together to share how each were able to reignite a passion for their work. For Kelly, it meant remembering that her goal was to provide her clients with a unique event—each one a stand-out because of her care and creativity. Nancy needed to challenge herself again—delving deeper to create original designs that might perhaps serve as motivation for others. For these women, the inspiration necessary to take their work and business to the next level sparked a desire to bring a different kind of learning. [🔗](#)

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Camp Wed

WRITTEN BY **CARRIE ANTON**



Carrie Anton

Carrie Anton is a professional writer and editor, creating content on a variety of topics, including weddings, health, fitness, and outdoor living. She's been published in *Women's Health*, *Oxygen*, *Draft*, *Tailgater Monthly*, and many more. You can also find her regularly contributing online at *The Knot*, *Reebok*, *Beachbody*, *HowHeAsked.com*, and *SlendHer.com*. Having previously worked on staff for Mattel's American Girl, and still continuing to freelance write for the organization, Carrie has authored multiple non-fiction advice and activity books for girls ages 8-12 and edited more than 40 titles.



Andrea VandeBerg and Sarah Sarbacker

Cherry Blossom Events is an award-winning creative event planning company founded in 2009 by Andrea VandeBerg and Sarah Sarbacker. Andrea and Sarah specialize in producing weddings and events that reflect the unique style and personalities of our clients. They artfully craft magical moments within flawlessly-executed events, and tailor creative design and comprehensive event management for each client. Sarah and Andrea believe understanding and identifying the needs of each client and every event are the key elements to creating beautiful experiences.

From finding the perfect venue, to gathering the perfect collection of vendors, they enjoy every step of the process. Andrea and Sarah create a dynamic partnership that allows them to assist clients with events ranging from the intimate and personal to corporate functions for thousands of guests. They are based in Madison, Wisconsin and work throughout the upper Midwest and beyond.

Mosquito bites, poison ivy rashes, sunburns and homesickness are just a few of the things you'd associate with summer camp. Least of all would be floral design workshops, expert-provided small-business advice, decadent farm-to-table meals beneath a canopy of trees, twinkling lights and starry night skies and a DJ led dance party where campers could cut a rug—or more like a few blades of grass. But such was the case for creative and wedding professional campers in attendance at the second-annual Camp Wed.

This one-of-a-kind retreat is the brainchild of Andrea VandeBerg and Sarah Sarbacker, co-owners of Madison, Wisconsin-based Cherry Blossom Events, who first set out to offer respite for vendors following the busy summer wedding season as well as creative inspiration and small business tips and tricks to entrepreneurs of all kinds.

FRIENDS FOREVER. There seems to be a special bond that forms at summer camp. While that tends to occur after spending weeks of time together, with more than 30 percent of campers being repeat attendees, Camp Wed proves it only takes three days to happen. Many hugs and excited squeals came as campers from were reunited, ready to not only be

creatively inspired by the speakers and workshops in store, but also catch up with peers about work and personal life.

Andrea and Sarah, along with very helpful event assistants Emily McCann and Hanni Gould, created a welcoming feel upon checking in the first day—warmly greeting campers, sharing itineraries for the day and handing out perfectly themed backpack swag bags filled with goodies such as a chic glass water bottle, a Turkish towel to accommodate the coming outdoor yoga session, gourmet popcorn, a campfire-scented candle and many locally-sourced items.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE. Despite the name Camp Wed, you didn't need to be a wedding photographer, event planner, florist, or other industry vendor to take away something special from this retreat. Budding photographers looking to take on family and senior class portraits or social media users looking to up their Instagram game walked away with amazing tips from destination wedding photographer Lexia Frank of Lexia Frank Photography. Those with creative careers or who simply love DIY as a hobby were touched by photographer, educator and artist Jenna Kutcher's welcome speech focusing on how to stay inspired

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to keep on creating. For any entrepreneur or even someone looking to get a promotion, valuable “closing the deal” tips came from the always entertaining Ali Phillips of Engaging Events by Ali.

When campers weren’t using their left brains, their right brains got crafty trying their artistic hand at basic watercolor skills following the guidance of Saffron Avenue’s Angela Mondloch to paint beautiful foliage. And the greenery trend continued with a fun workshop led by floral-design artist Amy Osaba of Amy Osaba Design. Guests blended foraged leaves and wildflowers with beautiful blooms provided to create statement floral arrangements and lovely olive-leaf based crowns, the latter a common accessory worn the final night of camp.

ALL GLAMPED UP. If you’re loving the idea of a creativity-based retreat but are turned off by the idea of camping, don’t be. Set aside visions of sleeping on the ground with a pesky rock poking into your ribs, rustic pit toilets straight out of a horror movie and showerless days spent covered in grit stuck to residual bug spray and sunscreen. Situated on a sprawling lake surrounded by mature trees, Camp Wandawega in Elkhorn, Wisconsin, offers an experience more 1950s vintage chic than really rustic roughin’ it.

Comfy beds are nestled within cottages, cabins, and a group bunkhouse, all of which have electricity and the latter including indoor plumbed bathroom and showers. If you want to get a bit more one with nature, “glamp” it up in a tent, teepee or newly added

A-frame glass hut with secluded views overlooking the lake. Each offer cozy mattresses to rest on after an exciting day canoeing the lake, taking a ride on the rope swing, chatting with a friend in a hammock or touring the grounds filled with rich history and decor (not to mention a few spooky ghost stories).

HUNGRY FOR MORE. Equally less rustic were the locally-sourced and made snacks and meals guests were served. Mornings began with indulgent pastries and sweet treats that paired perfectly with signature cups of coffee brewed as if meant to touch one’s soul. Lunches were held beachside, with gourmet tacos on day one and classic sandwiches, side salad and chips on day two. Granola bars and evening cocktails hours held over campers, each highly anticipating multi-course meals sure to make any foodie drool.

And of course no camping experience would be complete without s’mores around the campfire where guests got to know one another, talk a little shop and share a few much needed laughs.

Ask any camper there and you’re sure to hear Cherry Blossom Events went above and beyond in creating an awe-inspiring environment where peers could learn, connect, grow and unwind. Like many before them who had to say goodbye after fun-filled days away from home, Camp Wed goes left with heavy hearts that the event was done, but with a pep in their step and a renewed sense of purpose of what the futures held for their businesses and budding new friendships. [🔗](#)







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artist

Sarah Barrett

Owner of Sarah B. Calligraphy

Sarah Barrett is the owner and creator behind Sarah B. Calligraphy where she empowers love with lettered details. Beautifully unique calligraphy and invitations for weddings and other special occasions are her specialty. Sarah also designs branding for creative entrepreneurs and loves bringing her clients' visions to life.

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often have
small
beginnings



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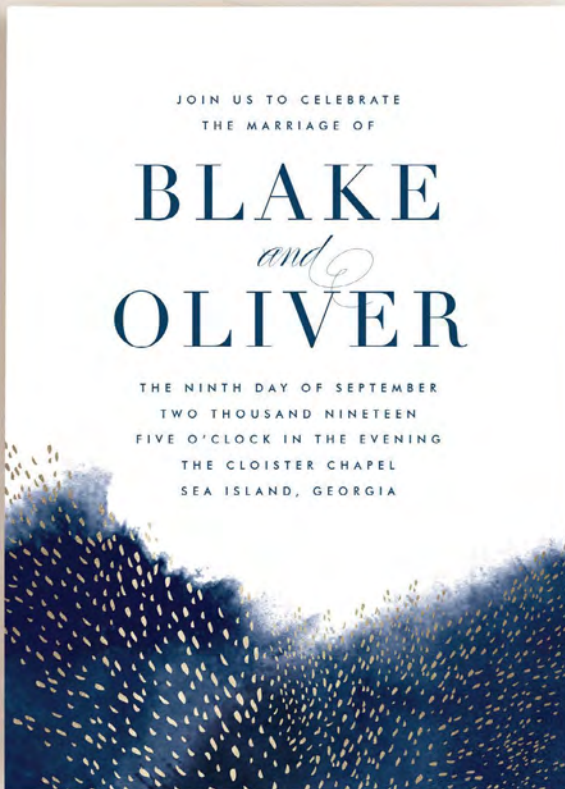
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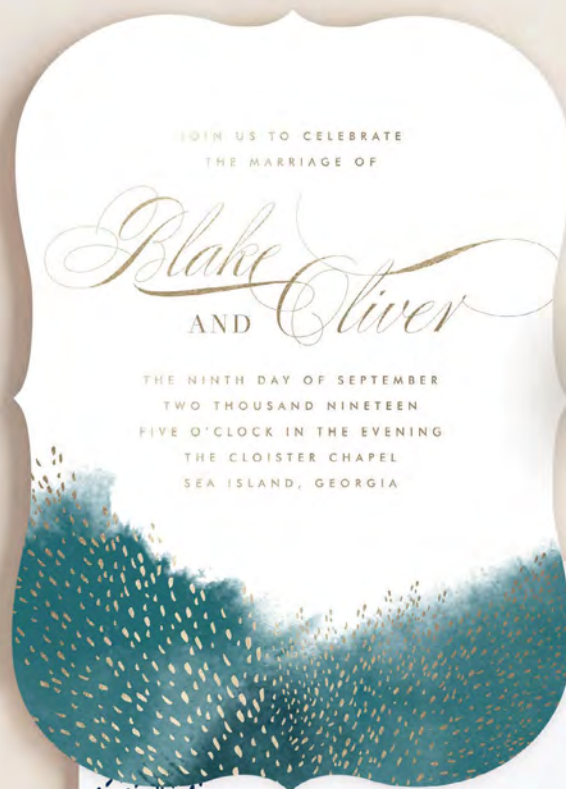


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