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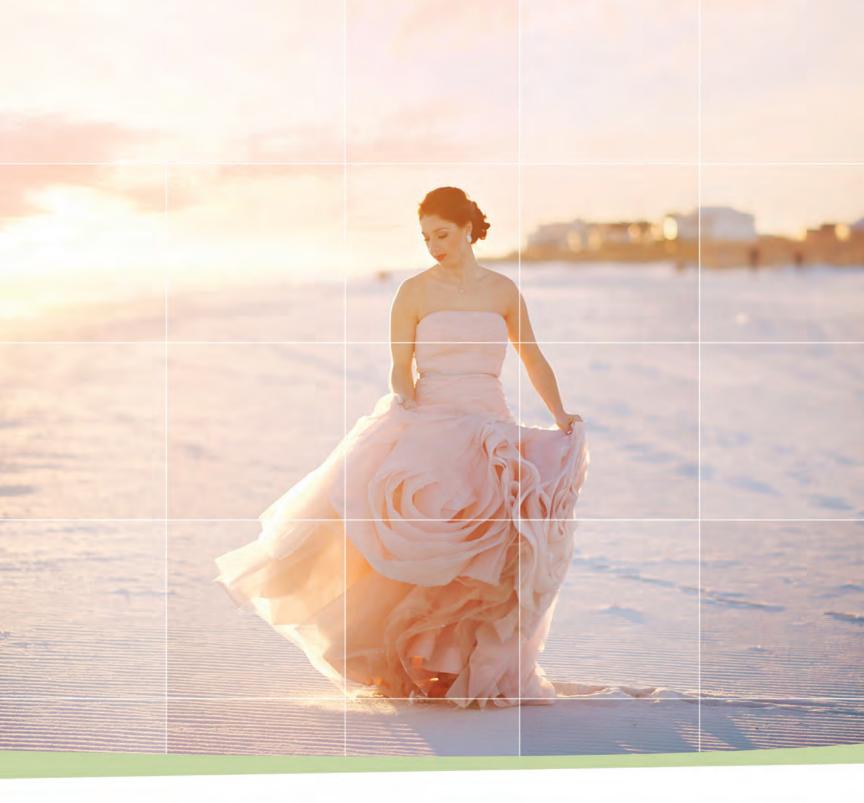


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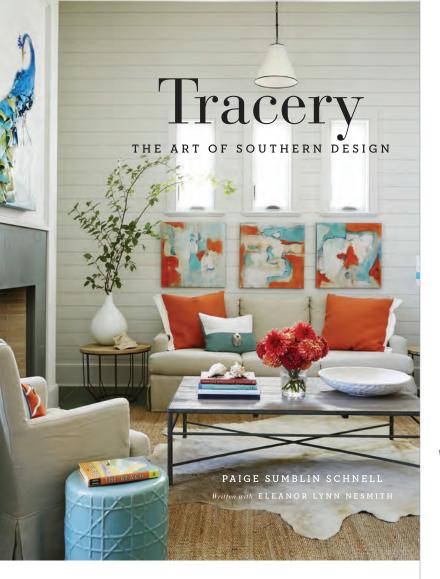
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On the Cover:



Proving that elegance never goes out of style, Lauren Cottrell Staggs looks stunning yet demure in a knockout gown by Berta Bridal accented by crystal teardrop earrings and an exquisite diamond engagement ring that certainly packs a *wow* factor. Lauren also appeared on the cover of *VIEs* All-American Summer Issue in May/June 2012 and was featured as a model inside it along with her boyfriend, Josh Staggs. The pair were engaged in 2013 and became husband and wife on November 1, 2014. Please join us in wishing Lauren and Josh—and all the other beautiful couples featured in this Wedding Issue—congratulations and best wishes for their futures together!

PHOTO BY ROMONA ROBBINS
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Published by:



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The JOY of Life



Photo by Aranka Israni

Joy. This small word ushers in the huge, heartfelt sentiment we wish to convey in our annual Wedding Issue. It's a wonder to fall in love and begin a courtship. So many hopes for the future. So many dreams finally coming true. It's definitely one of the biggest moments in life. This issue is special to me in so many ways that my heart could burst with happiness; I know several of the newlyweds personally and am so happy for them all. Given that our mantra is "Stories with Heart and Soul," we are extremely pleased to showcase these lovely couples as they begin their lives together. I wish them all blessings of goodness, kindness, and much love to carry them through the journey of life. Thank you for sharing your love stories with us!

Lauren Cottrell Wed Josh Staggs

This beautiful couple pledged their love at a stunning ceremony on the Gulf Green in Alys Beach on a slightly chilly Saturday last November. The picturesque setting was upstaged only by the dazzling bride and groom. Our cover girl, Lauren, is the first person to grace the cover of *VIE* twice (she was also on the All-American

Summer Issue in May/June 2012), and we are honored to have her and Josh share their love story and wedding details within these pages. The incomparable photographer Romona Robbins and *VIE* art director Tracey Thomas orchestrated the photo shoot for our cover, with Lauren channeling Old Hollywood glamour and playing her part flawlessly.

Darby Kellum Wed Will Kilpatrick

What can be said about Darby that hasn't been said a thousand times? She's beautiful inside and out! We had the pleasure of working with Darby when she was on staff at *VIE*, and this classic beauty also gained *VIE* cover girl status. Italian photographer Carlo Pieroni captured her regal beauty for the Food and Fashion Issue in March/April 2013.

Ainsley Rogers Wed Brad Hightower

A natural beauty with lots of personality and intelligence, Ainsley also worked for *VIE*, where she wrote, styled photo shoots, and presided over public relations and social marketing. Her wedding was beautiful, as you'll find when you peruse the article, but it's the sheer, almost palpable joy that stands out in the photos.

Devan Allegri Wed Jacob Watkins

This striking young couple makes being in love look fun and easy. The beautiful bride and groom were wed in their charming hometown of Fairhope, Alabama, and their quintessential Southern wedding practically begs to be the setting of a movie. Devan is a talented graphic designer at *VIE*, and we're delighted to experience their love story as told by the groom. Well done, Jacob!

Kristin Dettle Wed Sean Humphrey

I met Kristin when she was a young girl and I worked for her parents, Jim and Kim Dettle. They are good people and good parents. Kristin's all grown up now, and I am so happy to have known this family for nearly twenty years. Eden Gardens State Park played backdrop to this beautiful wedding ceremony, and Kristin's beauty and joy draws you in as she shares her wedding story with us.

Delve into even more wedding stories in this issue—like those of Stephanie and Christopher Campbell and Kevin and Angela Korman—each is unique and delightful. A lot of love and creativity was poured into all of these weddings, and we are honored to share them with our readers.

Last, but not least, and in the joyful spirit of creativity, we have "A Faux Wedding." With an all-star cast and the gorgeous East of Eden Retreat and Spa as the setting for this specially styled photo shoot, the story shows just how fun a wedding can be—even when it's not real!

To Life!

—Lisa Marie



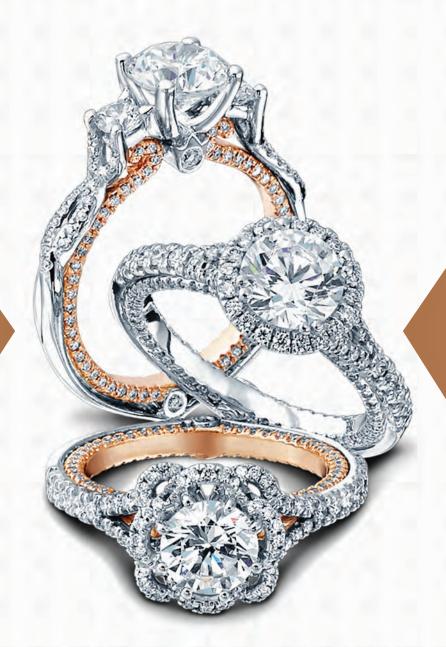
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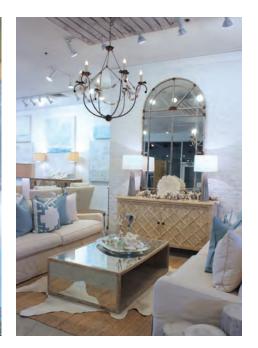
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-THE UNMARRIED COUPLE -

By JORDAN STAGGS and ANNE HUNTER
Photography by ROMONA ROBBINS
Styled by ALLYSON LONGSHORE
Thair and makeys by LISA ROBINSON



East of Eden Retreat and Spa, located in Northwest Florida's historic Point Washington State Forest, is a hidden oasis. East of Eden appears to be a modern home with a serene backyard, yet it has the amenities of a state-of-the-art spa and a quirky "yoga dome" studio. Guest rooms include a vintage Airstream trailer, completely renovated with modern finishes and even a claw-foot tub.

he owners of the retreat, Dr. Eric Scheufler and Eve Emelianova, have been together for three years and they built this dreamy getaway for locals and visitors alike. Both Eve

and Eric have been divorced before, and as Eve puts it, "We always said if we ever got married again, it would be to each other and it would be here at East of Eden—but we are never getting married." While the jury is still out on whether they will walk down the aisle, the concept of a faux wedding and honeymoon for this beautiful pair began to form in the mind of VIE's publisher, Lisa Burwell, and soon "The Unmarried Couple" was born.

New York City celebrity stylist Allyson Longshore styled the newlyweds for their "big day." Allyson grew up in Alabama and spent many summers sunning on the crystalline white beaches of the Emerald Coast, so she was the perfect choice to bring "urban beach chic" to East of Eden. This fashion maven started her own company, STYLESTUDIO, last year and she's quickly becoming one of NYC's most in-demand

fashion talents for celebrity styling, personal shopping, and her "closet therapy" service. Closet therapy entails Allyson personally going through clients' wardrobes—cleaning out old pieces and bringing in new—to help them refresh their personal styles. She also helps pull together new looks from things they already own. Allyson's true talent lies in pinpointing a client's personality and taste, and then creating a look to match.

Alaïa dress; Wendy Mignot earrings; Oscar de la Renta shoes

























"When a person feels good about the way they look, it projects in all aspects of their life. It brings out an air of positivity and confidence that people relate to and really connect with. Fashion is a conversation starter, an icebreaker, and the ultimate form of self-expression.





For Allyson, creating a bohemian-New Urban

wedding style for Eve was a natural fit. "The beach always brought a sense of calm to my ever-changing and evolving young life."

"I decided to become a stylist because I love the art of making people feel beautiful," Allyson says. "When a person feels good about the way they look, it projects in all aspects of their life. It brings out an air of positivity and confidence that people relate to and really connect with. Fashion is a conversation starter, an icebreaker, and the ultimate form of self-expression. Everyone knows who they want to be, but it's not always easy to project that through fashion; that's where I come in and work my magic. It is so fulfilling and I wouldn't change what I do for the world. Also, being a stylist is a very hands-on experience and I learn so much about people and their different lifestyles. I love connecting in that way."

Fresh out of college, Allyson began her career in fashion at Jeffrey boutique in Atlanta. "They carried a mix of Rick Owens, Comme des Garçons, Dries Van Noten, Proenza Schouler, and all of the edgiest labels that I was following at the time," she says. "After three months of soaking myself into the construction and vibe of the designers, I was promoted to readyto-wear stylist."



Allyson spent three years at Jeffrey learning the tricks of the trade and honing her skills as a stylist before she was recruited by one of the world's biggest fashion houses-Valentinoto become a ready-to-wear specialist in their new boutique in Atlanta. The position included making many trips to New York City for markets, client appointments, and meetings. "I was always inspired the minute my plane would land in NYC," Allyson says. "Seeing the fashion industry from

an insider's view in the fashion capital of the US and working with Valentino was really major. That was when I made the decision to push towards making my move to New York to further my career. My goal was to continue working hard, save up for my shoebox apartment in the city, and make my dream a reality."

Around the time she was planning her big move, Allyson was contacted by yet another global fashion brand, Chanel, for a position based in Atlanta that allowed significant travel to the Big Apple as a brand ambassador. She graciously accepted. "It was the perfect transition for me at that time and I seized the opportunity," Allyson says. "My time there included buying and representing the brand and the Chanel lifestyle. It wasn't too long after working for Chanel that I made a personal decision to launch STYLESTUDIO and to follow my dream to NYC."

Having worked for some of the biggest names in fashion and having styled celebrities such as Olivia Palermo, Allyson still says the beach communities of South Walton, Florida, are her favorite places to find her Zen. "I work in a very materialistic industry that is full of glitz and glamour on a daily basis, and I balance that by knowing I have my getaway place along the beaches of South Walton," she says. "It is the ultimate balance for me and such an easy place to travel to. It's there that I free my mind from the chaos that is New York City."

Norma Kamali swimwear; Chloé sunglasses; hat by Gaëlle Le Goff





For the photo shoot at East of Eden, Allyson pulled luxurious pieces from such New York fashion houses as Oscar de la Renta, Alaïa, Roland Mouret, Chloé, and Norma Kamali. Local South Walton—designer accessories included a collection of Wendy Mignot pearls, Haute Hats by French—Ecuadorian designer Gaëlle Le Goff, and a dramatic canary-yellow chemise from Sirens at the Beach lingerie and swimwear boutique. Eve's looks throughout the day were carefully curated and perfected by Allyson along with hair and makeup artist Lisa Robinson. Photographer Romona Robbins captured each scene and brought the shoot to life with her expert eye. Chef Nikhil Abuvala and Candace Abuvala of Roux 30a provided wildflowers and a gorgeous cake to top off the "backyard wedding" look.

"I said 'Maybe' on the lush grounds of the beautiful retreat that Eric and I created together," Eve says. "My wedding style for our facetious day was a laid-back, rustic elegance splashed with romantic and classic touches. Allyson brought so many designs in for me to wear—it was every girl's dream."

For Allyson, creating a bohemian—New Urban wedding style for Eve was a natural fit. "The beach always brought a sense of calm to my ever-changing and evolving young life," she says. "As a little girl, I always felt inspired the minute my toes would hit the sand. I loved the Southern hospitality, the natural beauty, and the peacefulness that the beaches provided. I always loved the art of dressing and the process of getting glammed up. Mixing colors, fabrics, bohemian styles, and urban styles is the ultimate way to create an iconic personal look, and you can't get more iconic than Eve."







East of Eden's ethereal beauty was captured on a slightly overcast day, with the sun occasionally peeking through the trees and dappling the grounds with patches of light. The vintage Airstream trailer made the perfect backdrop for the couple's faux nuptials, as did the property's beautiful pool area and Eric's collection of vintage cars, including the 1968 Lehmann-Peterson Lincoln Continental Limousine. "My dream car," says Longshore. "And my dream wedding," adds Eve as Eric speeds down the dirt path that leads to East of Eden on his vintage motorcycle.

East of Eden will soon add another amenity to its choice offerings—a gambrel-style barn.

Eric and Eve will host weddings, corporate retreats, community events, and other special events inside their bohemian-luxe barn beginning this fall. The revival of the barn wedding is one of many recent trends carefully curated by the "hipster" generation. "I love the nostalgia," Eric says. "It was the most common style of barn that I saw in Ohio growing up. I like the sense of community and the feeling of a family business that I found in Midwest." Eric's plans for the barn at Eden also include two loft apartments for retreat guests.

With the addition of the barn, East of Eden Retreat and Spa is bound to become a sought-after destination for those looking for a rustic yet magical fairy-tale wedding venue. Even for those who aren't tying the knot, it's a charming and unique place to visit, experience the East of Eden lifestyle, and maybe even pretend to have a honeymoon of their own!





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STEPHANIE and CHRISTOPHER CAMPBELL

By Stephanie Baker—Sister of the Groom
Photography by Dawn Chapman Whitty





Christopher and Stephanie have known each other practically their whole lives, but they both had to branch out and learn some life lessons before finding their way back home again. On the weekend they reconnected, Christopher drove Stephanie out to the property where his new home was going to be built. The foundation had literally just been poured.



The house is Christopher's dream home—not necessarily because of the beautiful details in the architecture or the custom wood and stone elements, but because outside his front door he has two stocked ponds for fishing and acres of timberland filled with turkey, deer, and dove for hunting. An avid outdoorsman, Christopher has traveled many times to hunt in other regions but recognizes that he was born in paradise.

Stephanie is a fashion designer (she's the founder of Southern Fashion House, whose popular Southern labels include Judith March, DejaVu, Jacque and Janis, and Missy Robertson) and you can see some of that outdoor inspiration in Stephanie's popular T-shirt designs such as "Love me like you love deer season" and "You and me goin' fishin' in the dark." Although Stephanie is surrounded by fashion





and always wearing some great jewelry, her wardrobe at home almost always includes her Sorel hunting boots, and she is ready to leave her project at a moment's notice to chase dogs or climb in the fishing boat with Christopher or her son, Fox.

When Christopher proposed, it was under the guise of asking Stephanie to go fishing with him. In one of the ponds, there is a small island where he had put up a hammock and nailed up a piece of wood carved with Scripture. The pair paddled out there before he dropped to his knee to propose.

The home is a symbol of their relationship in many ways; it was a long time in the making, beautiful, painful at times, and unexpected in many ways. They both describe their home and land as their sanctuary. Stephanie says that she can feel the stress leaving her when she pulls through the gates. There was no place more perfect for their vows.

The home is a symbol of their relationship in many ways; it was a long time in the making, beautiful, painful at times, and unexpected in many ways.

Of course, it stormed like crazy during the days leading up to the ceremony, but the couple was surrounded by close family and friends and decided the rest didn't matter much. With outdoor weddings, you always have to have backup plans, and we scrambled in three days to rearrange what took three whole months to plan. There wasn't much room in the tent to establish a ceremony site separate from the dining and dancing areas, so we angled back the farm tables to create an aisle and set the large family dining table as the altar. Stephanie and Christopher exchanged vows surrounded by their guests, and the sun peeked through just in time for the vintage B-52 bomber to fly over and signal to everyone that a celebration would soon be under way.

From the beginning, Stephanie said she wanted the reception to feel like a Southern family reunion: fun and cozy, with good food (no stuffed mushrooms!), good music, and a relaxed atmosphere. We achieved that by serving three hundred guests family-style. After the vows, caterers began setting large bowls and platters of mashed potatoes, fresh peas, grilled ribs, chicken, and mac 'n' cheese on the farm tables. A station of camp stew and chicken 'n' dumplings was also available. The father of the bride had personally grilled the chicken, and the father of the groom had made the camp stew. Guests actually got to sit and eat, and there was a spirit of family as people passed the peas around the table.

During a preceremony "music and small talk" hour, guests were welcomed into a lounge area complete with chandeliers, a cappuccino bar, and a local band playing a mix of timeless country and Southern songwriter favorites hand-selected by the bride.

After dinner, the show band made its way onstage, and the dance floor was packed for the rest of the night. At 9:00 p.m. (keeping in mind this was a Sunday), Crowe's Chicken—a well-known local chicken finger establishment









and a favorite of the bride and groom—was served, complete with the special sauce.

The wedding had traditional elements, but every corner had a detail that was completely customized for the couple, from the outdoor restrooms decked out in vintage Louis Vuitton and antlers to the wedding cake, which was the bride's vision of a cake dress complete with flowers, antlers, and vintage costume jewelry. In lieu of a traditional guestbook, guests hopped into a photo booth and then autographed their pictures in a compiled album. It was so much fun seeing the funny pictures and sweet messages the next morning.

Stephanie and Christopher used a family crest as the custom logo for all the printed decorations (letterpress invitations and programs, dinner linens, cocktail napkins, etc.). The crest incorporated a buck, a doe, and a fox (symbolizing the bride's son). Fox walked his mama down the aisle (well, actually he dragged her) along with his grandfather, and he had his own private kids' area called "Fox's Den" with games and sweet treats to entertain his friends and cousins during the reception.

The couple, with dog children in tow and amid downpours of metallic confetti bursting from push-pops, climbed into the father of the groom's 1959 Chevy. In the midst of all the details, luxury, and creative decor, the wedding truly had a sweet, small, and simple spirit brimming with Southern hospitality. Everyone commented afterward how they could feel the love of the couple and of the families coming together in that moment of "I do."







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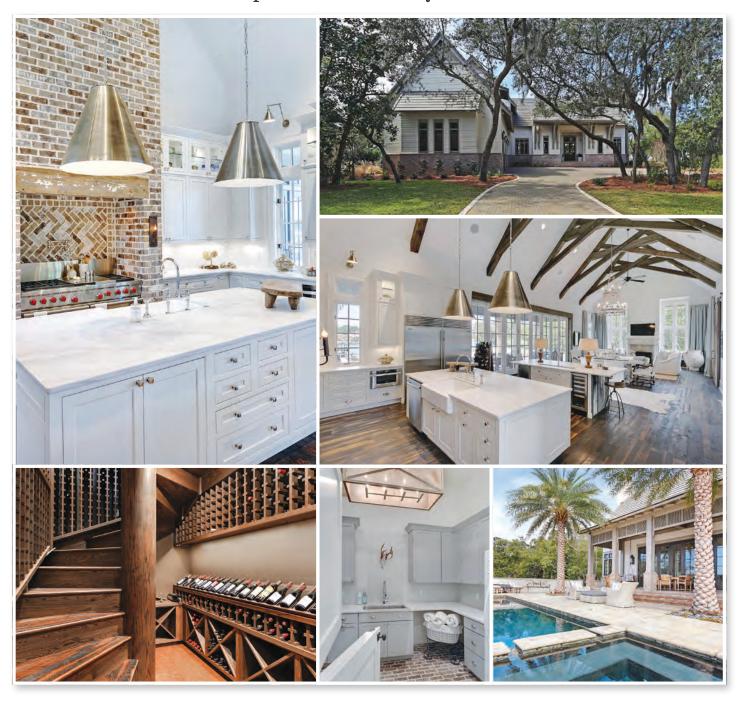
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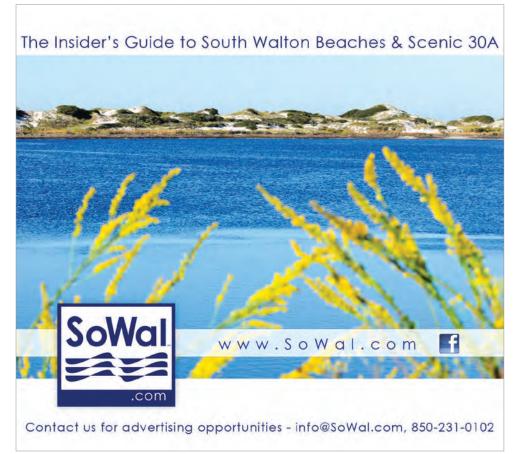




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Snapper and Tuna stats: http://oceana.org/en/news-media/publications/reports/oceana-study-reveals-seafood-fraud-nationwide Imported seafood stat: http://www.fishwatch.gov/farmed_seafood/outside_the_us.htm Tilapia/pig feces: http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-10-11/asian-seafood-raised-on-pig-feces-approved-for-u-s-consumers.html

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ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

LAUREN S TOSH

BY JORDAN STAGGS PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARAH LYN PHOTOGRAPHY

The Florida sunshine was bright on the afternoon of November 1, 2014, when the family and friends of Lauren Gail Cottrell and Joshua William Staggs gathered on the Gulf Green in Alys Beach near Scenic Highway 30-A. As the waves of the Gulf of Mexico lapped against the white-sand beach below, Lauren and Josh said their vows. "It was just amazing having our closest friends and our whole families all in one place," Lauren says. "We couldn't have imagined a more perfect day for our wedding. It was full of love, and that's all we ever wanted."

auren, who grew up in Niceville, Florida, and Josh, who is from Florence, Alabama, both graduated from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. They met there while Lauren was finishing her degree in marketing. Their first meeting was on Cinco de Mayo, and the pair became a couple later that year and then moved back to Lauren's hometown, where both pursued careers in real estate. Throughout their time together, they have always supported each other and worked to achieve their goals, both as a couple and individually. This included becoming successful in the Destin, Scenic Highway 30-A, and Panama City Beach real estate communities. They now work together at Scenic Sotheby's International Realty in the new 30Avenue office near Rosemary Beach and reside in their home in the Beach Highlands community on 30-A.

YOU HAD ME AT "ROLL TIDE"

In Atlanta, the night before the first Alabama football game of the season in 2013, Josh proposed, Lauren said "Yes," and they spent the weekend celebrating with friends and family during and after the game. Both avid fans of the Crimson Tide, Josh and Lauren have spent many weekends traveling back to Tuscaloosa and across the country to watch the team play whenever they can. It was only natural, of course, that their wedding day took place during a bye week for the Tide, who went on that season to become the 2014 SEC Champions.

BUILDING A FAIRY-TALE WEDDING

"The planning leading up to our wedding was a process!" Josh says. Lauren adds, "We worked together on the plans and had a lot of fun doing it. All of our vendors and planners were amazing and helped us bring it all together. Our friends and families were there with us every step of the way." Lauren's friends and family threw a beautiful bridal shower at the Churchill Oaks clubhouse in Santa Rosa Beach, and some of the couple's coworkers and friends even threw a "Stock the Bar" party at La Paz in Destin, which is one of their favorite restaurants.

Avis Glenister of the 30a Wedding Co. was brought on as part of the team to help bring the couple's vision to life. "I had such a great time getting to know Josh and Lauren," she says. "It was important to me to make sure we could incorporate all the elements they really wanted in their day. A majority of my weddings are destination couples, so it was so nice to be able to do a wedding for locals that I knew I would run into again."

The pair had their hearts set on Alys Beach for the ceremony. They rented several homes in the chic coastal community for their wedding party to stay in, as many of them traveled to the area for the occasion.

In lieu of a rehearsal dinner, Lauren and Josh hosted a rehearsal brunch at Alys Beach's Caliza Pool the day before the wedding. "We wanted our out-of-town guests to have the chance to spend the rest of their day enjoying the beach and the place we are so lucky to call home." says Josh. "Alys Beach really did an incredible

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job catering to all of our needs that weekend. Thursday night before the rehearsal, we had a cookout in the Summer Kitchen there for our wedding party to get to know each other, eat, and watch some football as guests came and went throughout the night."

ONCE UPON A DREAM

The wedding day brought with it some cool fall wind, but the smiles on Lauren's and Josh's faces warmed the hearts of all their nearly two hundred guests as they became husband and wife. Lauren's gown by Berta Bridal was stunning against the backdrop of the azure























Gulf. Her bridesmaids' navy full-length dresses were elegant yet simple, and the bright white and green bouquets were crisp and clean. The men all looked dapper in classic tuxedos.

Lauren was given away by her father, Charlie Cottrell, while the groom's father, Charlie Meyer, stood as best man. "Walking down the aisle with my dad was one of my favorite moments," Lauren says. "He has told me ever since that it was his favorite moment, too. Of course, seeing Josh for the first time that day as I was coming down the aisle was a moment I will certainly never forget!"

The beautifully touching ceremony performed by Kevin Tillman surely left a few people in need of handkerchiefs, including the bride and groom. The love was evident as Josh and Lauren joined hands and said "I do." Afterward, the newlyweds, their parents, grandparents, wedding party, and even more family seized the opportunity for gorgeous sunset photos taken by Sarah Lyn Photography.

"We are so fortunate to have so many wonderful family members and friends that were able to travel and share the weekend with us," Josh and Lauren agree. "Our families have been the pillars to our success, and none of this would be possible without the love and support they have given us throughout our lives. We are truly blessed beyond words to have such an incredible support system and can't thank them enough!"

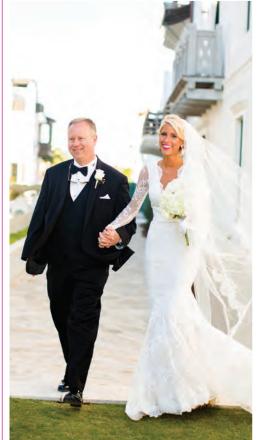
AFTER "I DO"

"Lauren and Josh chose a gorgeous location for their ceremony and opted for a fun, laid-back venue for their reception," says Avis. The reception dinner was held at the Ocean Club at the entrance of Tops'l Beach Resort near Sandestin, which offered an elegant space with plenty of room for all the wedding guests, great food, and a spacious dance floor. "It was also a perk that they were able to host an after-party for their friends in the same location. The night was a blast, and it was an honor to be a part of it!"

Acoustic cover band Three Bean Soup followed up their performance from the wedding ceremony with a cocktail hour ensemble while guests made their way from Alys Beach. After that, the Emerald Gold Band really kicked off the evening as the couple shared their first dance, as well as dances with their parents, before the wedding party and guests joined in. It was truly a celebration of Josh and Lauren and the beginning of their journey as husband and wife.











THE BEAUTIFULLY TOUCHING
CEREMONY PERFORMED BY KEVIN TILLMAN
SURELY LEFT A FEW PEOPLE IN NEED OF
HANDKERCHIEFS, INCLUDING
THE BRIDE AND GROOM.





















"I really loved our reception," says Josh. "Lauren's dad gave a terrific speech, and my grandfather, 'Daddy Ken' Staggs, said a special prayer that really touched our hearts as we started our life as a married couple. The Ocean Club was the perfect combination of elements: classy venue, great food and service, fun atmosphere, and outstanding band and dance floor. They had enough space so that everyone could settle in, eat, relax, and have a good time."

DJ Vladi turned up the volume for the after-party, and the dance floor didn't empty until it was finally time for the grand send-off—the end to a perfect night that echoed the infectious, fun-loving personalities of the newlyweds. The love of the couple, their families, and their guests was bright on that day and throughout the night, and it continues to shine as they spend their first year together.

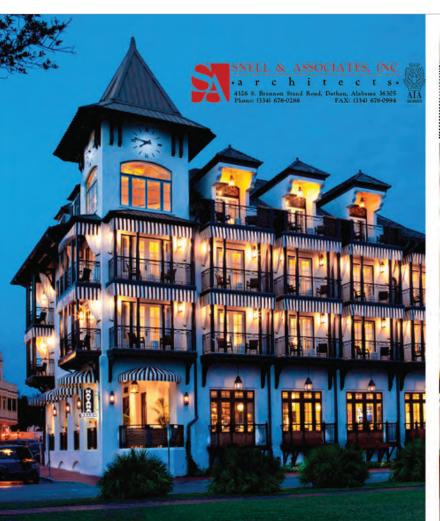
To celebrate (and to relax after such an exciting wedding day), Josh and Lauren spent their honeymoon at Seven Stars Resort on Grace Bay in the Turks and Caicos Islands, where they lounged at the pool and on the beaches, enjoyed sunset boat cruises, snorkeled, rode horses on the beach, went kayaking, and met several new friends along the way. "We loved it," Lauren says. "We were treated like royalty there. We've been on a few 'honeymoons' since then—to Breckenridge, Colorado, twice and to Hope Town on Elbow Cay in the Bahamas. It still gives us wonderful joy when we get back to 30-A from any vacation. It's such an incredible place to call home and we look forward to our future and starting our own family here. The reason we both love our careers in real estate is getting to meet new people and sharing our home with them. It's amazing how many of our customers we now call dear friends and we look forward to that trend continuing for years to come."



SPECIAL THANKS

- · PHOTOGRAPHY: Sarah Lyn Photography
- ENGAGEMENT PHOTOGRAPHY: Sarah Lyn Photography and Little Miss Creative Studio
- VIDEOGRAPHY: Gilmore Pictures
- · WEDDING PLANNER: The 30a Wedding Co.
- OFFICIANT: Kevin Tillman
- MUSIC: Three Bean Soup, the Emerald Gold Band, and DJ Vladi
- REHEARSAL AND CEREMONY: Alys Beach
- · RECEPTION: The Ocean Club
- HAIRSTYLIST: Brooke Miller
- MAKEUP: Kensey Robertson
- BRIDAL GOWN: Berta Bridal at Finery in Huntsville, Alabama
- · TRANSPORTATION: Sunshine Shuttle

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OUR LOVE STORY

Will is from Albany, Georgia, and I am from Tupelo, Mississippi. We actually met at a wedding on 30-A, an area along a scenic highway on Florida's Gulf Coast. We met at Bud & Alley's restaurant and went on our first official date at the Red Bar, both very popular destinations in the area. So, naturally, we had to get married at the beach! Will's parents live in Seagrove Beach, and my family vacationed on 30-A when I was growing up, so that made it even more special.

VIE played a huge role in our meeting. I had written an article about Will's sister and her nonprofit organization, Girl Talk. Before meeting her for the interview, I spoke with her via Facebook so I'd know who to look for. I saw a picture of her brother and thought he was pretty cute. Actually, I added him on

Facebook before I even met him. I had had a couple glasses of wine at Crush Wine Bar (when it was still in Seaside) and just felt bold. How embarrassing is that? Don't worry—it came up at the rehearsal dinner *and* during the ceremony.

We got engaged on July 4, 2014, at Lake Bruin in Louisiana. Will had placed his GoPro camera in the flowers behind us, so it's all on video. It's funny to watch because I just did *not* see it coming. It's really hard to surprise me, but he definitely pulled it off! We go to Lake Bruin every year for the Fourth and spend the weekend with my aunt, uncle, and cousins, so it was such a treat to have my family there! Then, right after he popped the question, his whole family walked in the door. We had a ball celebrating! It was all very "us" and really perfect.















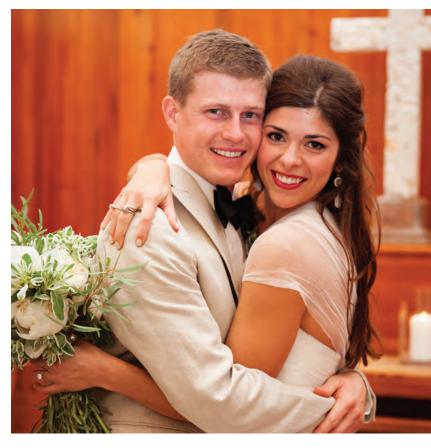
OUR VENUE - SEASIDE CHAPEL

We go to church at Seaside Chapel when we're in town, so the choice of venue was definitely a no-brainer for us. When I was little, I always saw myself getting married there, and after I lived on 30-A for a while, I was certain! It's really special to Will, too, because his sister Haley got married there in 2010. The visions we had for our wedding were always right in line; we always wanted the exact same things. The reception was nearby at the Seaside Lyceum, which was perfect.

OUR WEDDING PLANS

Heather Archdeacon-Williams from Defining Moments by Heather is the greatest and made planning our wedding such a joy. Will left most of the planning to me, but he totally took on the rehearsal dinner; it was at the Red Bar! I knew almost exactly what I wanted, so it was all fairly easy. All of our vendors made it so much fun, too. Marja at Florals by the Sea, Christine at Great Southern Café, and Jackie Ward (our photographer) were all just amazing.

My goal was to keep everything fun and relaxed. I think the care you take in planning a wedding is reflected in the event itself, and I didn't want to lose sight of what was going on. It was about us getting married and spending our lives together, not about every detail being absolutely perfect.







OUR WEDDING DAY

I didn't have a true theme—it was just very "beachy." The wedding colors were white and green. My flowers were mostly green—lots of palms and tropical-type flowers. My bouquet did have peonies, too. The guys had a sprig of rosemary for their boutonnieres, which I loved. Everything was just very laid-back! It was very cool to see it all come together that day.

As far as favorite things go, I know it's probably self-centered to say, but I really, really loved my dress. I wish I could wear it at least once a year. Or once a week! The whole weekend was very special to us. We had about two hundred of our favorite people in our favorite place, and it was surreal. It was overwhelming in the greatest way.

OUR HONEYMOON

We went to Saint John in the Virgin Islands and had the most wonderful time going on adventures and eating really delicious food. It was a dream!



SPECIAL THANKS

- · Photography—Jackie Ward, Jacqueline Ward Images
- Wedding Planner—Heather Archdeacon-Williams,
 Defining Moments by Heather
- Flowers—Marja, Florals by the Sea
- · Catering—Christine, Great Southern Café
- · Cake—Jessica, Sweet for Sirten

- · Video—Jon Gilmore, Gilmore Pictures
- · Hairstyling—Mindy Norris
- Makeup—Jamie Gummere
- Bridal Shop—Ivory & White in Birmingham, Alabama
- Decor and Design—Heidi, Frill Seekers



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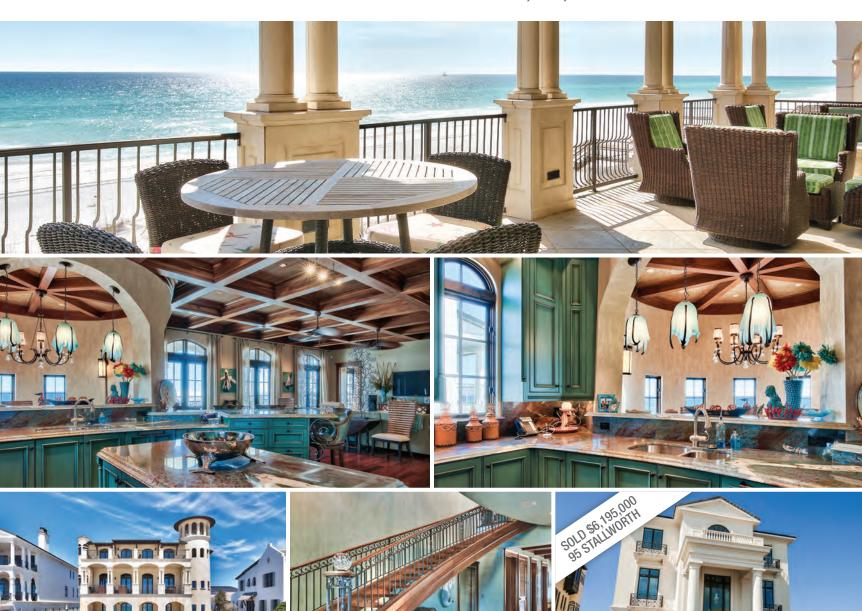
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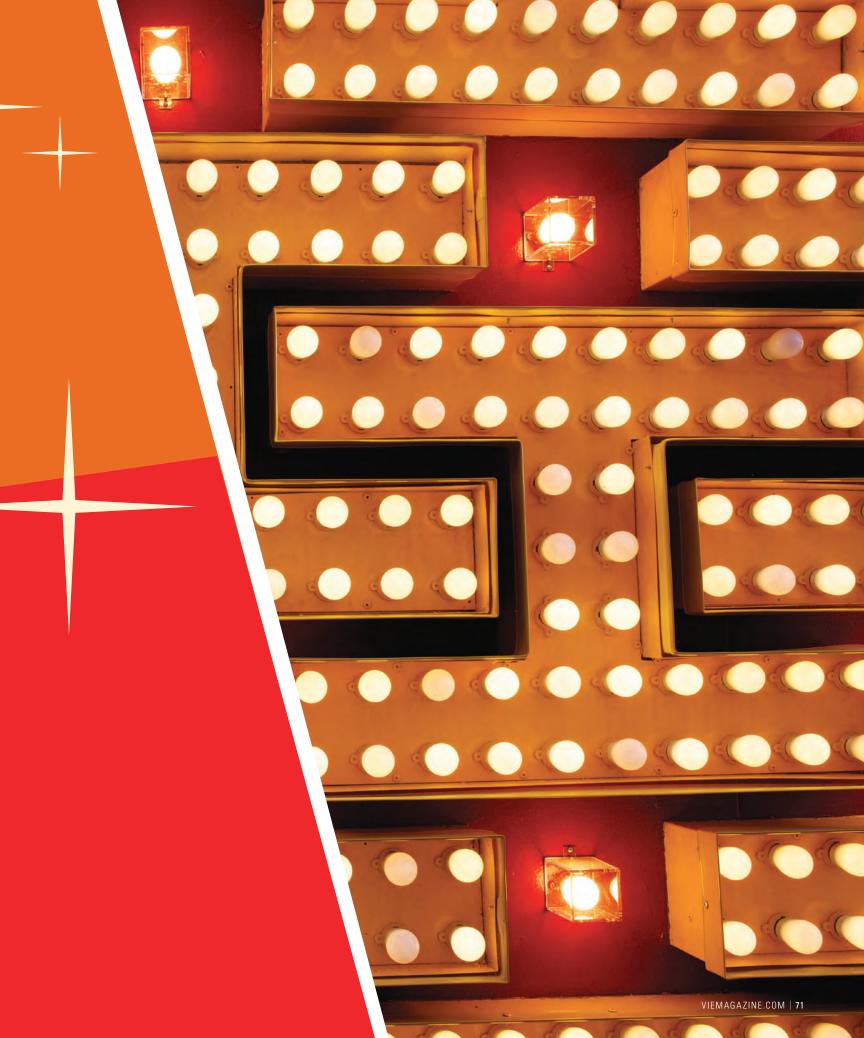
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SAY GOOD-BYE TO THE LITTLE WHITE CHAPEL

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Our Love Story ~

JENNIFER

I was raised by two incredibly talented and strong-willed parents, Larry and Sue Bevington, but you could say that being the youngest of three and the only girl helped mold me into who I am. My dad and my brothers, John and Dan, were the men in my life, and that was all I needed. All my life, even leading up to the day I said "I do," I was extremely independent. I remember my mother saying, "Your happiness is a direct effect of your own individual talents and desires, and you should never rely on the approval or love of another individual to make you feel whole. You and you alone are responsible for your happiness."

You could say my life shifted the day I met Jimmy.

We met while attending Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green in 2005—ten years ago! In that era, Facebook was the newest craze and only available to college students, not every moment of every day was documented on social media, and fraternities and sororities were the best means of meeting new friends (whom I consider to be soul mates in their own right). I'm from the town of Frankfort, Kentucky, which I considered to be the smallest of the small towns. Jimmy is from Princeton, Kentucky, an even tinier place, where life is simple and the people are good. We were both excited to live life, see the world, and experience everything.

I was entering my second year at WKU that fall, and my girlfriends and I were excited to meet the incoming group of students—especially the cute boys! Jimmy rushed the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity, and I was an Alpha Delta Pi sorority member. I had noticed a cute new blue-eyed freshman in photos with some mutual friends on Facebook, but it wasn't until Halloween (Jimmy's birthday) that we officially locked eyes. I still kid him that I am the best gift he's ever received. Walking toward each other, we didn't even really speak; we just smiled a sort of a coy, "I know you" smile, and something clicked. I had never had that "love at first sight" feeling. Many college sweethearts didn't stay together; we are fortunate to have survived the road—all the highs and lows.





It had started to snow, and we were right next to Rolex Stadium when he got down on one knee and proposed.



Everyone always asks, "How did he pop the question?" I had been out of town for work in Erie, Pennsylvania, and that week, Erie got slammed with about a foot of snow. I said to a friend, "I wish I could be Dorothy and click my heels three times and be in Lexington!" I landed at Blue Grass Airport on December 12, 2013—late, per my usual luck with flying. The following night, Jimmy suggested seeing the Christmas lights display at the Kentucky Horse Park. It had been a tradition in my family when I was younger, and it was a sweet gesture from him; however, this was the last thing I wanted to do, as I was exhausted from the week. After some heavy persuasion and suggestions that it would help take my mind off of work and make me more excited about Christmas, I agreed.

Jimmy already had a plan. When he mentioned getting out to walk around—even though there were signs that said "Do NOT get out of your vehicle"— I thought he was losing his mind. Of course, after more heavy persuasion, I agreed. Who doesn't love a little rebellion every now and again? It had started to snow, and we were right next to Rolex Stadium (which was all lit up per Jimmy's coordination) when he got down on one knee and proposed. I was in shock. I think he had to shove the ring on my finger but, of course, I said yes! Friday the thirteenth, typically considered unlucky, will forever be lucky in our eyes.

Our Venue - « Rosemary Beach, Florida

Jimmy and I both have a deep love for the beach. The warm sun, the cool sand beneath our toes, and the sound of the ocean waves make us feel alive. Life slows down a bit there, and you can breathe in a little deeper, laugh a little harder, and smile a little

more. We knew we wanted to get married on the beach with our closest friends and family present. To us, they are everything. Step one was choosing the locale. Taking into consideration the cost of a beach trip and making it easy for our guests to reach the wedding, we chose the Florida Panhandle.

Step two was probably the most difficult—choosing the venue for an event that I had been dreaming of my entire life. I scoured wedding magazines for destinations that fit the bill, and when I thought I had found the one, I hopped into a car with my two closest girlfriends since grade school (Lindsey Kimbleton and Kristina Thompson) and embarked on a ten-hour trip to make sure. You know the saying that you have to kiss a lot of frogs to find your Prince Charming? Well, the venue I thought was the one was not, but five minutes down the road we found Rosemary Beach. It was love at first "site."

Our Wedding Plans &

Anyone who knows me well will tell you that I'm a bit of a perfectionist. During the ten-hour drive to visit venues, I asked, "Do y'all think I should interview wedding planners while we are down here?" I received a resounding "YES!" I knew I had found my match in Jennifer Fisher of It's A Shore Thing Wedding and Event Planning. We met at Amavida Coffee and Tea in Rosemary Beach. She had color-coded binders, timelines, budget spreadsheets, a virtual planning website, and, above all, passion.

Hiring a wedding planner was the best decision. She kept me sane through every step of the planning process. Don't get me wrong—it was still stressful! I'll never forget the day she had Carol Hayes, the violinist we hired to perform during the ceremony,















call me to play a selection of songs. Of course, I had to have an audience to help me make the decision, so my mom, my sister-in-law, and my best friends were there to listen to every classical wedding song—on speakerphone.

I look back and laugh at how I stressed over every detail; Jimmy and I would have silly arguments over the color of the tie he was going to wear on the day of the wedding, what our first song would be, and whether the guys would wear boutonnieres. I can say with complete honesty that if your relationship can survive planning a wedding, it can survive the heaviest of storms! We still had a lot of fun envisioning how the start of the rest of our lives would all come together.

Our Wedding Day «



Our wedding day was perfect for us. Jimmy and I said our good-byes the evening before; no first look the day of the wedding, no peeking, no handholding-nothing. Lindsey and Kristina spent the night with me, laughing, crying, stressing, and packing. They left me the next morning to get ready (they were two of my bridesmaids, of course), so I had time to be alone and to reflect on the day that was to come, on how thankful I was to have found Jimmy, on my independence, and on how that was going to change as I became a wife. I was at peace. I'm typically a crier; I cry at movies, commercials, and birthday cards. The wind shifts direction, and I weep. But, on this day, I was calm. I was excited and nervous, but I was ready.

The only person who could derail my sense of ease was my father. That afternoon, when we hopped in the golf cart that was taking the two of us to the beach, I asked him to change the subject and talk about the weather, the beautiful cottages, my nieces and nephews—anything but what I knew he wanted to say: how proud he was of me, how much he loved me, and how I would always be his little girl. Do I regret asking him to change the subject? A little. However, I know in my heart everything that wasn't said.

When we arrived at Western Beach, it was like arriving at a ball. None of the wedding guests could see me yet, but other people were smiling, and little girls were waving at me. It was surreal. My dad held me steady as I took in the view from the top of the steps. The entire beach stood still. It was a beautiful day, and a busy one on the beach—this was something I









had always feared, as I wanted our day to be private. However, the image of all those people standing and watching is a moment I will never forget. Then there was Jimmy.

Not having a first look was one of the best decisions we made. We locked eyes from the time I was at the top of those steps with my dad and every step along the way—there is no other feeling like that. We may not have had many pictures together before the ceremony, but seeing each other for the first time on our wedding day is a moment we will both treasure forever.

Our decor was simple and relaxed. A shoe valet set the mood for the guests as they arrived to the ceremony; they were invited to join us barefoot on the beach. At the reception at Rosemary Beach Town Hall, guests were greeted with music from an extremely talented singer and guitarist, Chris Alvarado. Our colors were cool blues and greens and natural driftwood, mercury glass, white hydrangeas, blush roses, and twinkling lights were used throughout the hall and outside. We loved the cupcakes and signature cocktails. Although the overall feeling was relaxed, there was an air of elegance. All the little touches added up: the brooch on my bouquet, the linen sofas and the mirrored tables, and the "Mr." and "Mrs." pillows placed on the lawn furniture outside. A caricature artist was present to draw our guests as mementos for them to take home.

One of my favorite moments was walking up Main Street in Rosemary Beach after the ceremony. I could hear strains of music from our guitarist and our friends and family laughing and enjoying themselves. I saw the first twinkle of the café lights strung outside the reception hall and knew that everything had fallen into place. That was when the tears fell.

We could feel the love and warmth from all of our loved ones as they cheered us on during our grand entrance. My dad stood with my mom as he delivered a welcome speech; that's when he got to say many of the things I had asked him to keep quiet about earlier that afternoon. It set the tone for the rest of the evening. Our hearts were full as we spent the reception cutting cakes, throwing bouquets, tossing garters, and dancing the night away.

Special Thanks

Photography and Videography - Pure 7 Studios

Flowers and Design - Florals by the Sea

Music - Carol Hayes, violin; Chris Alvarado, guitar; Brent LeMaster / Beachside DJ

Wedding Planner - Jennifer Fisher / It's a Shore Thing

Officiant - Pastor Michael Young / Chapel at the Beach

Wedding Cake and Cupcakes - Smallcakes: A Cupcakery

Catering - Townsend Catering

Hairstylist - Jasmin Martha

Makeup - Yvette Nation / MAC Cosmetics Destin

Rehearsal Bonfire - SeaOats Beach Service

Caricatures - Cartoons by Deano

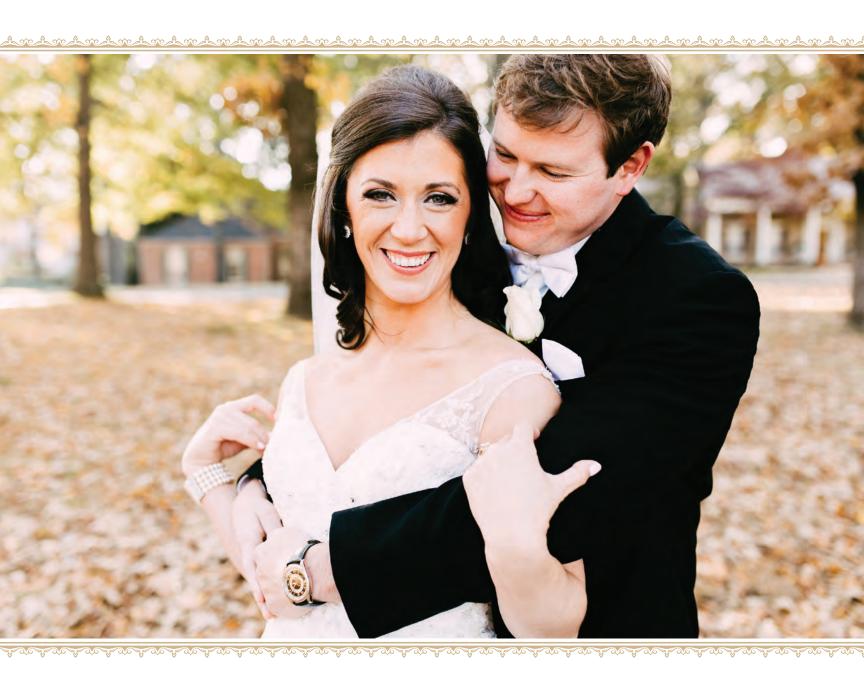


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AINSLEY & BRAD November 15, 2014

Our Love Story

Brad is from Memphis, and I'm from a small town in Mississippi. We both attended Ole Miss and were in the same graduating class (2010); he was a Sigma Chi and I was a Chi Omega. We'd attended swaps, parties, and date parties together with each other's friends, but we'd never met each other. We'd heard of each other throughout our four years at Ole Miss but were both in other relationships during our time at school, so the stars just never aligned.

I was living in Florida in 2012 and had gone home to Mississippi for the holidays. One of my best guy friends was throwing a New Year's Eve party at his lodge, which we frequented on weekends back in college, and my girlfriends talked me into delaying my trip back to Florida for a day to go with them. Turns out, that friend was one of Brad's very best friends as well, and he got talked into the same thing. Our friends didn't intend for us to go to meet one another—it just sort of all fell together perfectly.

Our relationship was somewhat of a whirlwind from there—we were exclusive not long afterward and dated long distance (Florida to Memphis) for about six months until I moved to Nashville for a while. Then in December of 2013, I was offered my dream job at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where I work now, and I moved to Memphis.

Just a few months later, on Good Friday (April 18, 2014), Brad knocked my socks off when I got home from work (and a manicure—a big thanks to my old roommate for talking me into getting one with her!). I walked into a house filled with candles and roses and him on one knee! I don't think I even let him finish the question before I said yes! We made calls to our family and best friends before we went to "meet his parents for dinner"—which actually turned out to be a surprise cocktail party he had planned. He had invited both our families, all our best friends from out of town, and all our Memphis friends. Our loved ones had gathered together just to celebrate our engagement with us. It was such an overwhelming night—I was there with all the people we love most *and* my forever beau had just popped the big question!

Our Denue – Emmanuel United Methodist Church, Memphis

Brad and I had originally wanted a beach wedding, but we knew we wanted a short engagement more. That meant we'd be marrying in the fall, and a destination wedding wouldn't be conducive to football season for us or our loved ones—the true test of an SEC fan! So, we picked a free weekend for the Rebels in November and decided to marry in Memphis, where we were starting our lives together.

Our ceremony venue was an easy choice—we got married in the church Brad had attended growing up. But we looked at a ton of reception venues— I am extremely particular—and we saw everything from art galleries to music halls before we finally visited the Tower Center. The Tower Center ballroom is on the thirty-third floor of Clark Tower, one of the tallest buildings in Memphis. Three of the four walls of the ballroom are floor-to-ceiling windows. We met the wedding planner there for happy hour, and with the lights of the Memphis skyline twinkling as the sun set, we realized it was the perfect setting for our celebration.

Our Wedding Plans
Planning the wedding was like nothing I had ever

Planning the wedding was 4ike nothing I had ever done before. I'm a big planner—I've planned parties and events of all sorts, and I regularly host parties and dinners in our home. But I had a very particular vision in my head for my wedding, and the one thing that Brad and I both fully agreed upon was that we wanted it to be fun. This gave us great perspective as we planned the details—if it wasn't something that would make an impact on us or on our guests, we let it fall by the wayside. We planned the majority of the wedding with the vendors we had selected (and we had amazing vendors!) but hired a wedding coordinator for the actual weekend to execute all our hard work—Kathy Farris kept me sane.



Our Wedding Day
Our wedding day was relaxed—that is one thing we

Our wedding day was relaxed—that is one thing we have continuously heard from our family and from our wedding party. Some sweet friends threw me a "breakfast with the bride," where my bridesmaids and I had breakfast and mimosas in our pajamas while we had our hair and makeup done. Brad and his groomsmen went to a local hot spot for "BBQ and beer with the groom" until it was time to go to the church to change. The weather was beautiful, the leaves were changing, and the temperature was mild; all the elements you can't control but worry about anyway seemed to fall into place for us.

We didn't have a "theme" to the decor because we were very adamant about not having anything cheesy, but I wanted our wedding to feel like Gatsby had thrown a garden party. I wanted to capture a classic, soft romance but with some gilded, luxurious elements that were identifiably of that era. My gown was one of my favorite things, of course—it was the perfect juxtaposition of vintage detail and modern silhouette. My bridesmaids wore different bridesmaid dresses in the same shade of platinum, while my sister, who was my maid of honor, wore a unique dress in a darker, stormy shade. Brad and his groomsmen wore classic black Ralph Lauren tuxedos with cummerbunds and bow ties—there's nothing better than a man in a tux!

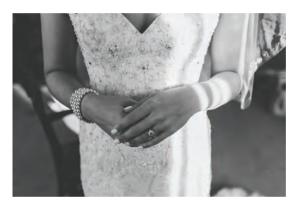
The ceremony was candlelit, so everything just glowed. My two brothers lit a memory candle at the very front of the sanctuary to honor our late grandparents and aunts. We hung three crystal chandeliers in the reception space, draped the walls and columns around the dance floor with white chiffon, and used candlelight uplighting that made the ballroom glow against the city lights. We had gorgeous gold Chiavari chairs placed around tables covered with white silk tablecloths, and we used sterling silver, gold, and mercury glass accents, from candles to framed photos of ourselves, throughout the room.

The floral arrangements were important to me because fresh flowers are among my favorite things in life. We had huge, lush, fluffy white arrangements of garden roses, peonies, and hydrangeas embellished with lavender rose accents and cascades of gorgeous silvery foliage. My bouquet was completely white and filled with garden roses and peonies, while the girls carried white hydrangeas, lavender roses, and the same pretty accents made up of seeded eucalyptus and other greens.

harden de se de se







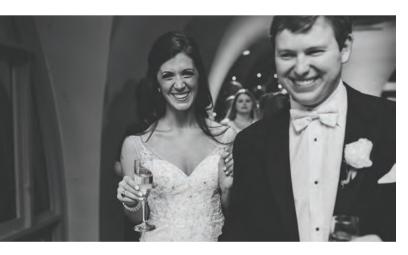














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My cousin Jessica, a graphic designer, did all of my paper products. She designed an H crest for us, which we put on everything. (I guess you know you're in marketing when you brand your own wedding.) It was on the welcome boxes for out-of-town guests at the hotel, the invitations, the ceremony programs, the cocktail napkins—everything! We even put it on our cake, which was a classic four-tiered beauty, each layer a different flavor. Our talented florist constructed a seven-foot arch of branches and hydrangeas with floating tea candles hanging down; this was placed behind the cake table and it took my breath away when I first saw it. And we had little photographs of our parents cutting their own wedding cakes, as well as Brad's parents' cake topper, which had also belonged to his grandparents. The groom's cake was Colonel Reb (big surprise), and the table was decorated with red and blue pom-poms and two framed Ole Miss needlepoints (one of the Lyceum, one of the Ole Miss Sigma Chi crest) that his late aunt had done for his father and uncles.

Brad and I are both big music lovers, and we really hit the nail on the head with our wedding choices. The ceremony featured a string quartet and two of our friends, Callie Self and Steven Gresham, who sang and played the acoustic guitar, respectively. Our reception band—Party Planet from Memphis—was out of this world. They had the big band, Motown sound that Brad and I both adore, but they also played some current tunes to get the crowd going. They learned Alabama Shakes' "I Found You" (a special song for us) for our first dance and played it almost better than the original. I think I had fifteen people come up to me during our reception and tell us how amazing the band was. My grandmother didn't even leave the dance floor. In fact, I have a photo of her dancing with the lead singer!

We had the staff bring out tambourines and glow sticks for our guests when the party really got started, and this was a huge hit—it also made for some hilarious photos.

Seeing the joy in my husband's eyes during our first look before the ceremony is something I will never forget. Getting ready for that moment with my bridesmaids,



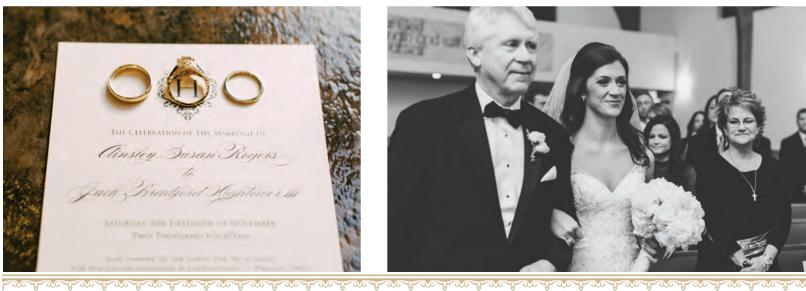




Ourguests tossed metallic confetti as we sprinted for the elevators. Our talented photographers got all those amazing elements, along with the excitement from our guests, in what I believe is the most perfect photo from our big day!







my sisters, and my mother was also really memorable—these women are some of my favorite people in this world, and it was incredibly special to me that they helped me prepare to be a bride. But our reception exit was my favorite moment. We wanted a big exit, full of pure celebration. During our planning, I kept thinking of the scene in the new adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* when the fireworks explode behind Leonardo DiCaprio at his party. Our exit would be taking place from the thirty-third floor (so all 250 guests wouldn't have to take the elevator down), and we couldn't exactly shoot off fireworks. Instead, as a nod to our cute New Year's Eve meeting and our Gatsby-inspired celebration, our guests tossed metallic confetti as we sprinted for the elevators. I wore a fur stole that had belonged to Brad's late grandmother, and our talented photographers captured all those amazing elements, along with the excitement of our guests, in what I believe is the most perfect photo from our big day! I'll treasure it forever.

Our Honeymoon

The day after our wedding, Brad and I rose bright and early to take off for the Zoëtry Agua Punta Cana resort in the Dominican Republic. We wanted a luxurious, all-inclusive resort but didn't want the crowds (and kids!) that often come with one. Through research and recommendations from friends, we found Zoëtry, which is a boutique resort that has a five-star spa, butler service, and gourmet restaurants. We couldn't have been happier and would definitely go back again—we didn't lift a finger the entire time, and the resort holds only 180 at max capacity, so we were practically on our own little island oasis.

Being engaged is lots of fun. And having your wedding is the most amazing blur of excitement and love. But being married is the best! I couldn't have imagined the amount of fun that I have during the little moments of each day with my sidekick for life. \blacksquare

Special Thanks

Photography: Kelly Ginn Photography

Flowers: L & Jay Productions

Reception Band: Party Planet

Ceremony Music: The Jackson Four String Quartet Reception Coordinator: Tara Jones at the Tower Center

Wedding Coordinator: Kathy Farris

Bride and Groom's Cakes: Cakes by Carolyn Paper and Pretty Little Details: Jessica Wood

To Our Families – To my patient mom, who listened to me stress, worry, and pick through the tiniest of details throughout our seven-month engagement and who, when I couldn't find what I was looking for, would push up her sleeves and make it or search for it herself. To my mother-in-law, who accompanied me to so many vendor meetings she probably could have created my vision for the wedding herself. To both of our dads, who reminded us to stay relaxed and were always lighthearted so that we were able to do just that. And to our siblings, who throughout the entire engagement celebrated with us, helped us, fulfilled the oddest requests, and were always ready to be the life of the party. Thank you!



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INVITE RADIANT SKIN TO YOUR WEDDING

By Carol Whiting
Photography courtesy of Aqua Medical Spa

our wedding will be amazing. Your dress is perfect, your ultimate venue is reserved, your invitations are beautiful, and your guest list is complete. But—how's the bride? The busy months preceding your joyful event can wreak havoc on your skin; and, when high stress meets little sleep, that "bridal glow" may be a noshow. Add radiant skin to your prenuptial checklist by seeking the advice of experienced professionals who can provide all you need to make a dazzling entrance on your special day.

Sandra Jackson, lead aesthetician at Aqua Medical Spa in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida, says timing is important. "Seek help early," she urges. "There are so many products on the market, and trial and error takes time. To discover what's best for your skin, start a few months before the wedding by consulting an experienced aesthetician. You'll bypass the gimmicks and the products that don't perform and receive professional advice specifically for your skin. In the consultation you should expect to discuss

your challenges and your expectations, review your options, and leave with a treatment plan that will help you reach your goals."

Beyond a full menu of aesthetician services, medical spas are physician-supervised and offer remedies you won't find at your average day spa. Dermatologists can provide restorative treatments like laser skin resurfacing, light-based phototherapy, and cosmetic injectable treatments, all of which can yield quick results, improve skin tone and texture, and smooth fine lines and wrinkles to achieve a more youthful appearance. And, if your skin is acne prone, a dermatologist is essential. Dr. Michael Stickler is a board-certified dermatologist and a supervising physician at Aqua Medical Spa. He reminds us, "Dermatologists have extensive education, training, and experience. You want to see a specialist that will utilize the most effective treatments, using the best methods and technologies available to restore the health and appearance of your skin."







Here are just a few of Aqua Medical Spa's prewedding treatments and timing tips that will have you walking down the aisle looking your best.

Six months before the wedding:

Say good-bye to stubborn fat. Consider body contouring with CoolSculpting. Whether you're buying a bikini for your tropical honeymoon or you just want to look slimmer in your gorgeous gown, CoolSculpting might be your solution. CoolSculpting is a noninvasive alternative to liposuction and is proven to permanently eliminate fat that has been resistant to your diet and exercise regimen. Multiple areas can be treated to slim your thighs, abdomen, arms, and other areas of your body that are prone to stubborn fat deposits. Some areas may need more than one treatment, depending on your goals.

Plan to stay dry. If you're concerned about excessive sweating on your wedding day, there is hope! The miraDry treatment eliminates or greatly reduces underarm sweating in one to three visits—for good. There is minimal discomfort and downtime, and the reward is simply life changing.

Five months before:

Start your series of intense pulsed light (IPL) treatments. Three IPL or BBL (broadband light) treatments will provide you with a more youthful appearance by reducing fine lines and removing darker areas of pigmentation and redness. BBL can be used to improve the tone and texture of your face, arms, hands, and legs.

Begin the Obagi Nu-Derm System. The Obagi system includes prescriptive tretinoin (Retin-A) to smooth wrinkles and hydroquinone to fade sunspots. Nothing you buy over the counter can compare.

Tighten and tone your skin. Venus Freeze treatments are administered in a series to tighten skin and reduce cellulite in areas that may not be as firm as they once were. These treatments are great for your face, neck, décolleté, arms, and thighs. You'll look toned and more youthful as you say "I do."

Four months before:

Reveal what's been hiding with a facial peel. Chemical peels are formulated in varying strengths to remove dead layers of skin and reveal newer, brighter, smoother skin. Aggressive peels that remove additional layers are not recommended within four months of the wedding; however, lighter peels can be scheduled frequently to get the results you're looking for.

Three months before:

Look refreshed, even when you're tired. Consider cosmetic injectable treatments. Schedule an appointment with a dermatologist to discuss the benefits of cosmetic injectables. Today, there are numerous products available that perform specific functions such as reducing wrinkles, filling deeper creases, providing lift, and restoring volume to the cheek area.

Grow longer, lusher lashes. If you'd like longer, darker eyelashes before your wedding day arrives, ask your dermatologist about Latisse. It is available by prescription and temporarily enhances growth to give you thicker, longer, "wow" lashes that will set your partner's heart aflutter.

Two months before:

Have your cosmetic injectable treatments administered. A follow-up appointment is always a good idea to assess the results and give you an opportunity to adjust further, if desired. You can also refresh the results a couple of weeks before the wedding date.



Six weeks before:

Choose your "big day" look with a GloMinerals makeup consultation. Take your wedding party along to the spa for a special treat. Learn application techniques from a professional to enhance, contour, and camouflage blemishes. You'll also have time to order any special products or colors.

Pack your bags. Your under-eye bags, that is. Ask for a Neotensil demonstration. Applied daily or just for special occasions, Neotensil is basically "shapewear for the eyes." When applied, it gently compresses, tightens, and holds the skin to reduce the appearance of under-eye bags and dark circles. (Mother of the bride: take note! They'll never know you've been crying for weeks.)

One to two weeks before:
Get ready! Have a microdermabrasion or dermaplaning treatment. These treatments gently exfoliate your skin; dermaplaning will also remove fine facial hair. You'll have a smooth base for your wedding makeup application and your skin will better absorb moisturizers and skin care products, extending their benefits.

Don't forget the details—make sure your brows are in perfect shape. Schedule lash and brow tinting or waxing treatments.







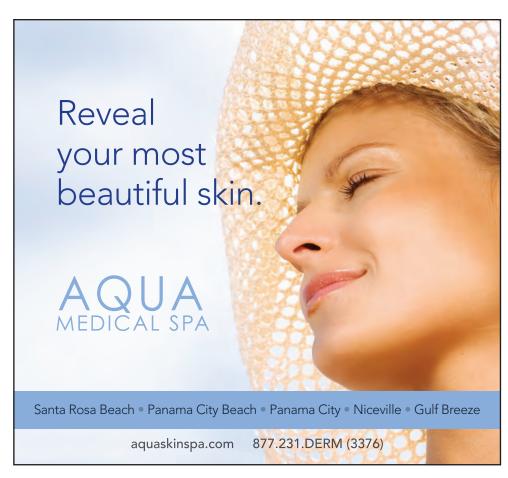
The week of your wedding:

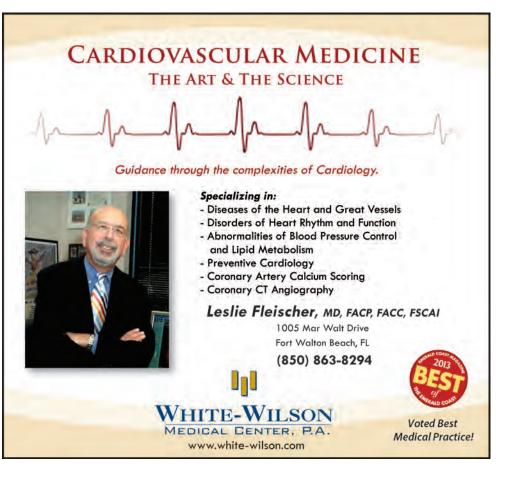
Pamper yourself; the day is almost here! An Ilike organic facial made from all-natural ingredients will hydrate and refresh your skin and, best of all, help relax any prewedding jitters. Enjoy!

Aqua Medical Spa is medically supervised by board-certified dermatologists and provides a comprehensive menu of cosmetic dermatology services along Florida's Gulf Coast in Santa Rosa Beach, Bluewater Bay/Niceville, Gulf Breeze, Panama City Beach, and Panama City. Additional locations include Tallahassee, Jacksonville, and Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, and Dothan, Alabama.

To schedule a complimentary consultation with an aesthetician or to learn more about Aqua Medical Spa, call (877) 231-3376 or visit

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Save-the-dates, invitations, RSVPs, menus, and all of your wedding's other personal touches should be unique to you. Thankfully, top-notch artists and graphic designers have caught on, and many are flourishing by creating special products customized for weddings around the world. Here are just a few of *VIE*'s favorites!

ALEXA PULITZER - New Orleans, Louisiana

alexapulitzer.com

When considering artistic exports from New Orleans, one most often thinks of music and cuisine. However, artists of all kinds are inspired by the saucy flavor, old-world sophistication, and cool attitude for which the Big Easy is known. For nearly twenty years, Alexa Pulitzer has mixed native culture with her vast experience abroad to create sophisticated original paper collections. Steadily gaining attention throughout the world, Pulitzer is highly sought-after for her custom stationery and invitations as well as her adornments for the home and wardrobe.







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DAUPHINE PRESS – West Deptford, New Jersey

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filetterpress.com

Chris Tipton and Preston Grubbs are committed to providing a great experience for all who want to get to know letterpress. They are the type of guys who enjoyed coloring books as kids. They have a strong passion for design, which has transferred to a desire to explore other creative outlets. The two gentlemen stumbled upon an old printing press one day, and they decided to dive headfirst into the world of letterpress design. Fresh Impression was formed soon after, and they haven't looked back since.





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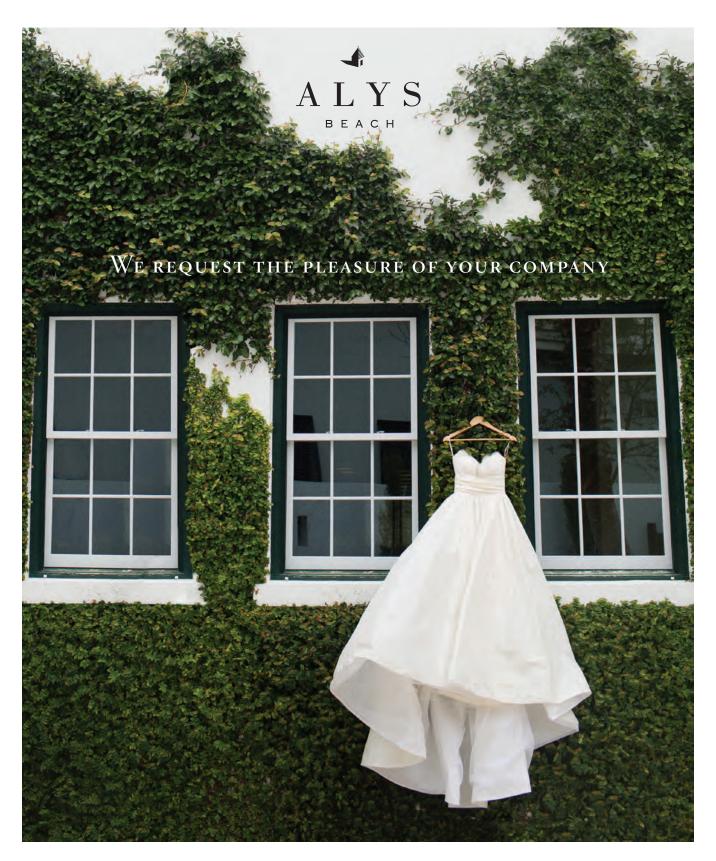
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Kortnee Senn, creator of Studio Senn, is a Navy wife, a mother to a handsome bundle of joy and a three-legged dog, a lover of all things classic and elegant, and a woman with an air of whimsy. Studio Senn proudly offers custom invitations, prints, and hand lettering in a range of mediums, including watercolor, acrylic, chalk, and ink. It is Senn's mission to create unique pieces of art that bring joy to all who view them. To share that joy, Studio Senn donates 10 percent of all purchases to ECPAT, an international organization dedicated to eliminating sexual exploitation of children. For more information about ECPAT and this wonderful cause, visit www.ecpat.net.



















January 3, 2015

Our love Story

Sean and I met online five years ago. He grew up in Niceville, Florida, and I grew up in Destin—we were near each other but went to different high schools, so we had never met back then. We talked for a while and eventually decided to meet on a blind date. He had me laughing for hours and time flew. We started dating a week later and have been together ever since. I was so lucky to happen upon him and to find a person that adds so much to my life.

Sean proposed in February of 2014, a few days before I had to leave on a business trip. I got home from work to discover dozens of flickering candles and a path of rose petals. After getting over the shock, I followed the petals to the backyard to find Sean down on one knee; our song, "Dream a Little Dream of Me," was playing in the background. He had on his vest and bow tie and looked so handsome. He held a handmade ring box in his hand and above him were strings of white lights. He asked me to marry him just as the sun was setting. It was so special and romantic!



Sean and I are both creative and "old souls," so it was important to have a timeless romantic event.

I wouldn't have changed a single thing!



Our Venue - Eden Gardens State Park

We looked at a lot of places before we decided on a wedding venue. We agreed that we didn't want it on the beach, since we both grew up near it, but we wanted something that included nature. We also were passionate about having a romantic backdrop for photos, so Eden Gardens State Park in Santa Rosa Beach was our dream come true! We had our reception at the Ocean Club near Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort.

Our Wedding Plans

Planning everything was really fun for us; we enjoyed bouncing ideas around and making special touches for our big day. I was lucky to have our family friend, Patti Terjak, a wedding planner who owns Surfside Brides, there to help us navigate all the details. Sean and I are both creative and are "old souls," so it was important to have a timeless and romantic event. I wouldn't have changed a single thing!

Our Wedding Day

The ceremony took place in a screened-in pavilion at Eden Gardens State Park. My vision for the ceremony was "garden romance," and our overall theme for the wedding was "I love you to the moon and back." We had the aisles lined with flickering lanterns leading up to a giant arbor draped in sheer, dreamy ivory fabric. I chose to walk down the aisle to an acoustic version of "Can't Help Falling in Love" by Ingrid Michaelson and was escorted by both of my lovely parents.

I will always remember waiting there with my parents by my side as the music changed to my song. I took my dad's arm and my mom's hand as we turned the corner to walk down the aisle, and then I saw Sean. It was the best thing in the world to me, and I remember that his expression was so full of love. I never had a moment of doubt or hesitation.

My dress was a ball gown in ivory with a sweetheart neckline and lace-up corset that ran all the way down my back. The bridesmaids were all dressed in different colors: royal blue, radiant orchid, midnight blue, plum, and periwinkle. They wore long convertible dresses that they all tied differently. Each groomsman wore a bow tie that matched his maid's gown. I chose a variety for their clothing, but the dominant colors for decor were gold and midnight blue, to reflect the night sky and stars. The girls' flowers were hydrangeas, and I had hydrangeas and Juliet roses in my bouquet—all ivory.

An interesting part of the wedding was that instead of having our officiant stand in front of us and everyone see our backs, she stood in the aisle and had us hold hands and face each other. Many of my guests loved that we did this because it made them truly feel part of our ceremony. We also decided on doing a wine box for the ceremony, which included placing glasses and a bottle of wine in a box along with love letters to each other; we will open the box and read those letters on our first anniversary together. We thought it was a cute idea in place of the unity candle or sand ceremony.

The reception was held at the Ocean Club restaurant, which was beautiful and still played into our romantic and elegant vibe. We chose this location for the delicious menu and fabulous dance floor. Upon arriving, we did all of our special dances

before dinner—Sean and I had been secretly practicing our first dance together for a few weeks so that we could surprise everyone. We chose to dance to "Dream a Little Dream of Me" and put together a routine full of twirls and dips—and even a pretzel twist. We had a blast!

A fun element at our reception was a handmade moon photo booth that our guests could sit in and take dreamy retro-style photos. Sean helped me cut it out and attached it to the bench while I painted and sketched it out.

Our cake was lovely: three-tiered with ivory and gold glitter drips falling from each level. I also found a vintage cake topper with a couple sitting on the moon kissing! The cake almost didn't make it—the stand I bought wasn't perfectly level and tended to lean. Luckily it lasted to the cake cutting and we got to try a piece of the delicious vanilla cake with white chocolate icing and diced strawberries between the layers.

Our Honeymoon

We spent a few nights in a suite at the Hilton at Sandestin Beach and Golf Resort to relax before going back to work. Sean is in his last semester of engineering at Florida State University, so we are waiting until June to go on a weeklong cruise to the Caribbean!

Special Thanks

Photography
James Stewart / Blacksuit FM Photography

Wedding PlannerPatti Terjak / Surfside Brides

Flowers Suzan Lesko

Bridal GownSweetheart Gowns

Cake Holy Cakes

Ceremony VenueEden State Gardens

Reception Venue
The Ocean Club

Hairstyling and Makeup Amanda Maus / Avantgarde Salon

DJDuane Mays / B-Boy Productions



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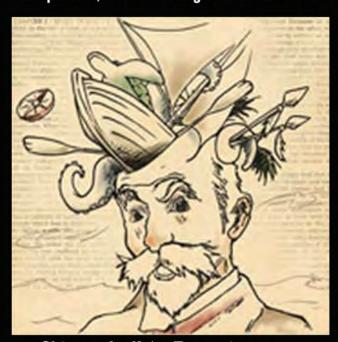




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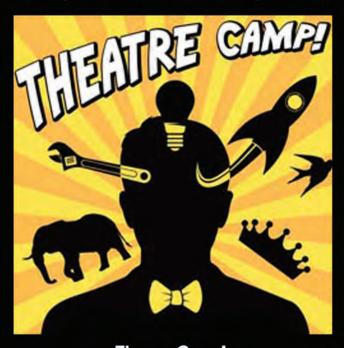
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Taste of the Race WITH EMERIL LAGASSE





n February 27, 2015, VIE joined the picturesque town of Seaside, Florida, for Taste of the Race, a culinary event presented by the Seaside School Half Marathon and 5K, which were subsequently held on March 1. Featuring special guest Chef Emeril Lagasse, along with almost twenty of the Gulf Coast's top chefs, Taste of the Race took place from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on the lawn of the Seaside Lyceum. Twinkling lights hung from the ceiling of the tents while a packed house mingled and enjoyed bites and beverages from some of the area's best chefs and restaurants. Nashville country music group Trick Pony performed live, while a silent auction was held in a tent in Seaside's Central Square. All proceeds from the evening benefited the Seaside School Foundation.

Guests enjoyed complimentary beer from Grayton Beer Company, wine from Wine World, craft spirits from Buffalo Trace, and Coca-Cola products. Delicious culinary creations were served up by chefs from some of the area's finest restaurants, including Emeril's Orlando, Emeril's Tchoup Chop, Jim 'N Nick's Bar-B-Q, The Bay, Great Southern Café, Fish Out of Water, Bud & Alley's, 723 Whiskey Bravo, V Seagrove, Bijoux Destin, Acme Oyster House, Wine World, Cuvee Bistro, Signature Catering of 30-A, Havana Beach at The Pearl, Stinky's Fish Camp, Crust Artisan Bakery, and Local Catch Bar and Grill.

Each year, the Seaside Neighborhood School hosts a half marathon and 5K event, inviting visitors and locals alike to participate. The half marathon course spans Scenic Highway 30-A from the Seaside Post Office to Gulf Place





and back again, offering runners a chance to achieve personal records on this relatively flat road course with bridges crossing five unique coastal dune lakes. A postrace celebration took place at the Seaside Amphitheater for all runners and their friends and families. The event is known to sell out annually, with more than 2,500 participants in the half marathon and more than 1,200 in the 5K.

The 2015 Seaside School Half Marathon and 5K Presenting Sponsor was Vera Bradley. Diamond Sponsors included Visit South Walton, Emeril's Florida, *VIE*, the Alys Foundation, OmegaFi, Destin Plastic Surgery, Jim 'N Nick's Bar-B-Q, Sunburst Beach Vacations, Grayton Beer

Company, Coastworthy, the St. Joe Community Foundation, Sunburst Beach Vacations, Bud & Alley's, and Wine World. Platinum sponsors included Silver Sands Premium Outlets, the Hub, Dr. Scott Runnels, WaterColor Vacation Rentals, Duckies Shop of Fun, Mercantile, the Hilton Sandestin Beach, the Storyteller Agency, Tents of Northwest Florida, CopySystems, 30A Deluxe Properties, *Emerald Coast Magazine*, Premier Island Management Group, Lilybell Hope, SoWal.com, Beachy Beach Real Estate, Cottage Rental Agency, and 30A.



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A TESTIMONIAL

Dear Alan,

It has been almost eight years since our wonderful Gulf-front home was completed, and I wanted to take a moment to tell you how happy Ed and I are with each and every detail. As an interior designer myself, and Ed with a career in real estate, we were knowledgeable and very involved clients. You and your staff handled our endless meetings with professionalism and patience.

Building a house on the dunes presents its own set of engineering complexities. Our project was especially challenging because of the massive amount of steel and concrete involved. You accepted the task with confidence and skill with an end result of beauty and structural integrity.

Besides hearing of the fine craftsmanship of Ficarra Builders from previous clients, we heard the words "honest and trustworthy" time and time again. Having worked with many builders in our respective fields, Ed and I really value quality and honesty. These qualities are often very hard to find, but we found both in you and your firm. We always felt you could solve any unforeseen problem, and that confidence allowed us to experience, with pleasure and excitement, the building of our custom home. We also appreciate the fact that you are as accessible today as you were during construction.

Thank you, Alan, for everything. You have our highest recommendation.

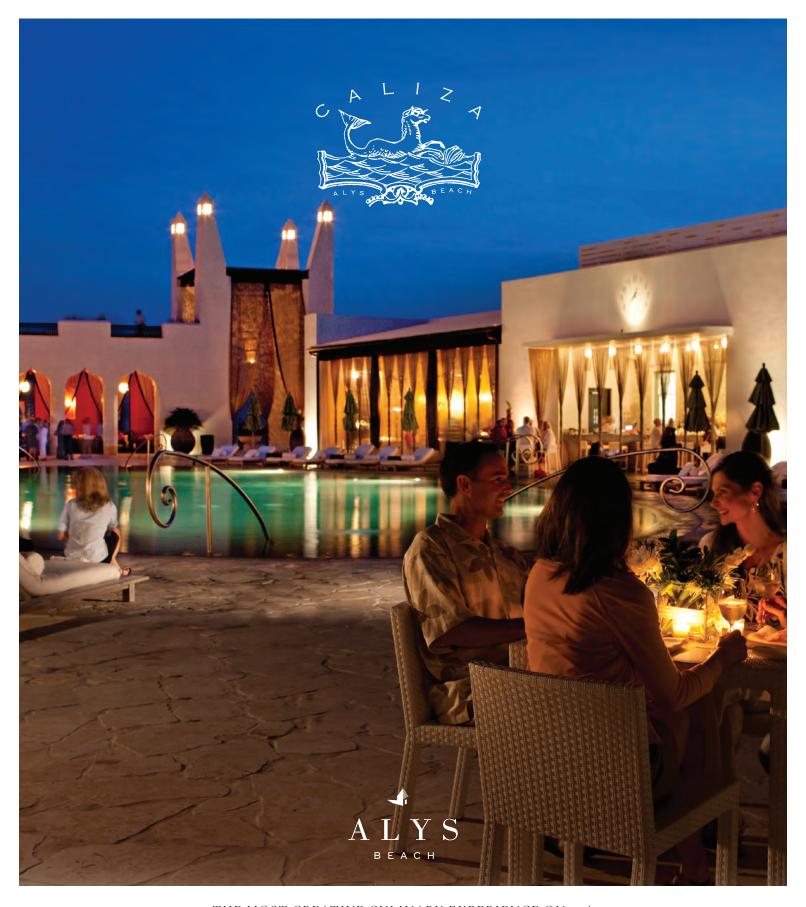
Sincerely,

Anne and Ed Erbesfield

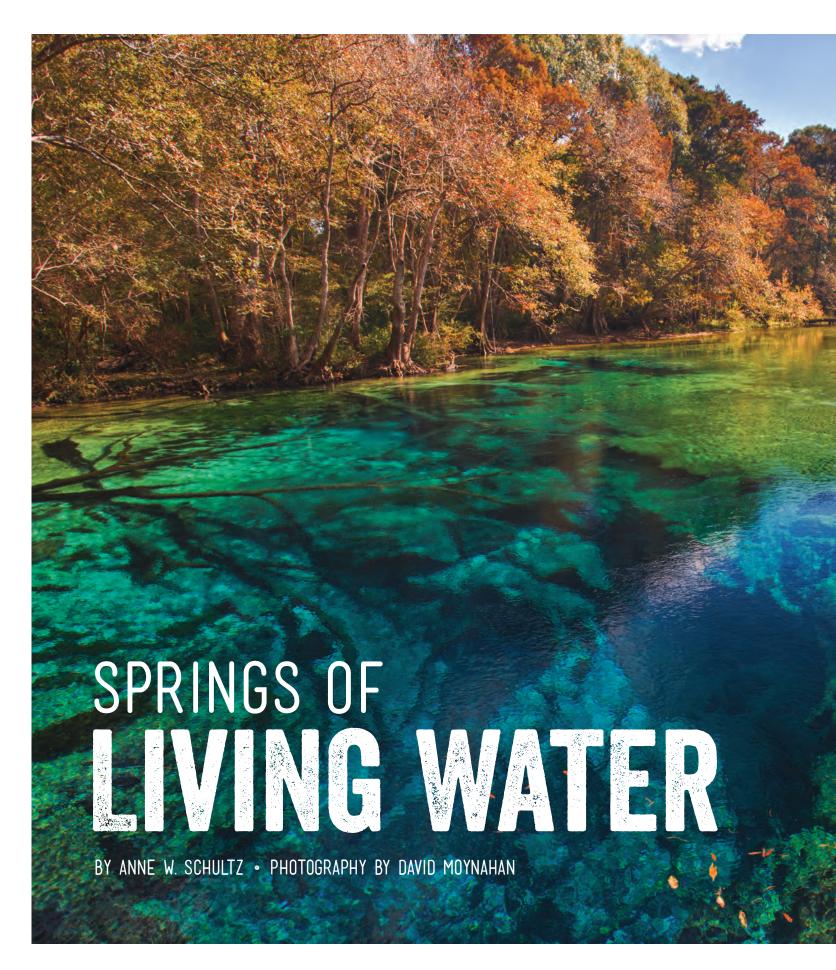


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tumbling upon a luminous pool of crystal clear water welling up in a dark, secluded forest is an almost-mystical experience. You see why Native Americans considered these waters sacred. Even in today's scientific age, it's startling to encounter intense blue water bubbling up from the earth like a vision in a dream or a mirage in a desert. In fact, a more scientific understanding of the geology and ancient origins of these pools makes God's creation even more miraculous. The water's transparency is a window into a subterranean kingdom more magical than Disney could ever have conceived. Hidden underground at depths up to three thousand feet, massive volumes of fresh water have flowed for millions of years through structures of porous limestone called the Floridan Aquifer. This is an extensive network of tunnels and passageways carrying an underground river across Florida and in places boiling up at the state's more than seven hundred springsthe greatest concentration on the planet.

Springs are rare gems of nature, like a solar eclipse or the green flash after a sunset, that spark the imagination and awaken awe and wonder. Their sheltering vegetation and healing waters lured Native Americans to spring banks over ten thousand years ago. Spanish explorer Ponce de León, obsessed by the legend of the Fountain of Youth, dragged his men through swamps infested with gators and snakes in a relentless search for it. Springs drew Colonial Americans into the Florida interior, where they displaced the original inhabitants and created their own settlements. They also attracted Florida's first tourists: wealthy tycoons, presidents, and others bumped down dusty roads in stagecoaches. Or they traveled by barge or, later, by steamboat, seeking springs' refreshing waters as cures for various ailments. Glass-bottom boats made springs even more alluring as they allowed visitors a deeper look into an underwater wonderland. Mermaid shows and theme parks turned Florida springs into

HIDDEN UNDERGROUND AT DEPTHS **UP TO THREE THOUSAND FEET. MASSIVE VOLUMES OF FRESH** WATER HAVE FLOWED FOR MILLIONS OF YEARS THROUGH STRUCTURES OF POROUS LIMESTONE CALLED THE FLORIDAN AQUIFER.

FOR AN INTIMATE ENCOUNTER WITH A SPRING ENVIRONMENT, IT'S HARD TO BEAT A KAYAK TRIP DOWN ICHETUCKNEE RIVER, A SIX-MILE SPRING RUN PRODUCED BY EIGHT MAJOR SPRINGS.

crowd-pleasing spectacles. Today the springs provide recreation for millions enthralled by kayaking, snorkeling, tubing, or cave diving in their crystal realms.

"The many springs that jewel the landscape of Florida are ornate exceptions to an environment usually veiled in obscurity," writes Doug Stamm in The Springs of Florida. "They are translucent openings into a dominion very rare: a crystalline world of fresh water at the edge of the sea." Each is unique. They appear in different sizes and flow through terrains in a variety of forms. Some produce clear-flowing rivers called spring runs. Others well up from the bottoms of streams, while some rise up offshore. Combined, they produce seven billion gallons of water a day. They are more numerous in northern Florida, where underlying limestone emerges closer to the surface. At least sixteen offshore springs occur in the Gulf of Mexico, north of Tampa, and along the coast of Florida's Panhandle. Could that explain the unusual clarity and color of the Gulf in this region?

"Because Florida's springs provide constant water flow, temperature, and chemistry, and admit an abundance of sunlight, they hold some of the most lush, biologically productive ecosystems in the world. They are home to the smallest species of fish in North America—the least killifish; to the largest reptile—the alligator; to endangered manatees; and to a spectacular assortment of wading birds and ducks," according to *Priceless Florida: Natural Ecosystems and Native Species*, coauthored by Eleanor Noss Whitney, D. Bruce Means, and Anne Rudloe—all PhD experts. It's possible to see abundant wildlife while swimming or snorkeling in springs; even from their banks, one can see through water so clear that fish appear to be suspended in air.

Better yet, visit Wakulla Springs—one of the deepest and largest springs in the world—for the best wildlife viewing. Preserved since 1934 as a wildlife refuge and made Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park in







1986, this six-thousand-acre sanctuary south of Tallahassee is pristine territory where nature abounds.

A ranger-guided tour boat cruises the dark-green, silken river studded with ancient cypress trees seen by earlier generations in movies like Tarzan's Secret Treasure and Creature from the Black Lagoon. It's like an African safari where, safely protected in a vehicle, the ranger eases up to wildlife behaving naturally without fear of human intrusion. But you wouldn't dare step out of the boat when you see what's lurking about. Ten-foot-plus alligators send passengers scurrying from side to side of the boat for a closer inspection of these prehistoric reptiles. Birds are everywhere. Ibis and egrets drift up like white clouds, then suddenly evaporate like mist into the surrounding greenery. The Florida anhinga is often seen spreading its wings to dry in the sun. With the patience of Job, a great blue heron stands motionless waiting for a bite. If you're lucky you might spot a Florida limpkin, one of the state's rarest birds, using its hooked bill to pluck an unlucky apple snail from its shell. Apple snails are the largest freshwater snail species in North America.

Passengers shriek when they spot a massive shape underwater: a Florida manatee, one of the thousands that arrive every winter like snowbirds fleeing the cold. These tropical marine mammals cannot survive in water colder than sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit. They would perish without the springs as a refuge when the ocean chills up. With their docile personalities and almost comical appearance, they are among Florida's most beloved visitors.

What passengers cannot see are aquatic caves more than two hundred feet below the surface. The sandy floor of a tunnel descending into that abyss is littered with bones of mastodons that lived during the Ice Age, when lower water levels left the cave dry. Cave divers exploring this extensive labyrinth report an immense room some two hundred feet across with an arched ceiling. These huge spaces provide a habitat for large numbers of species with senses adapted to darkness.

For an intimate encounter with a spring environment, it's hard to beat a kayak trip down Ichetucknee River, a six-mile spring run produced by eight major springs. From May until early September, the river is packed with visitors floating on inner tubes. Go before or after that season, when the river is practically empty and blessedly quiet! A thick hardwood forest with immense cypress trees draped in Spanish moss walls

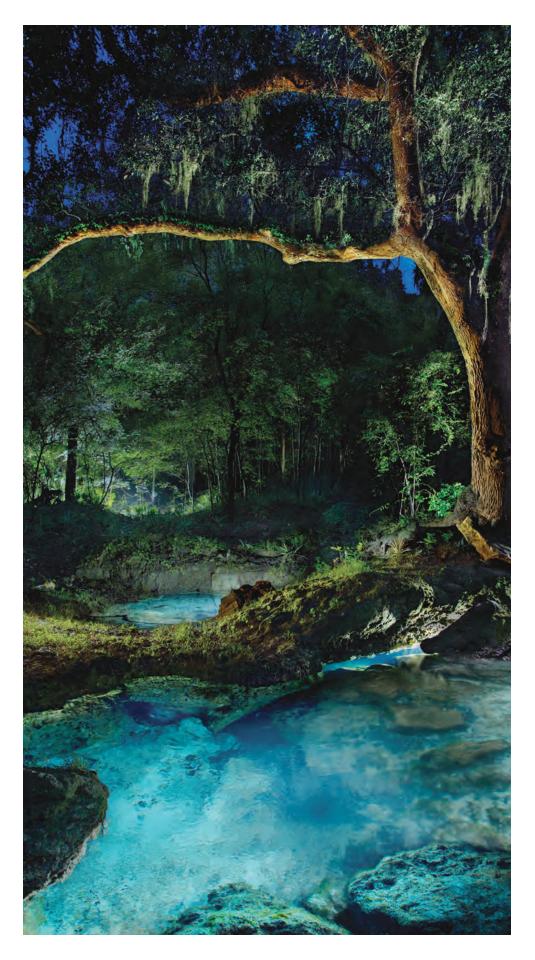
"NOT ONLY DID NATIVE AMERICANS REGARD NATURE AS SPIRITUAL, BUT THEY ALSO DEVELOPED A PRACTICAL BALANCED APPROACH FOR TAKING CARE OF IT."

you off from the outside world. The waterway is broad and shallow with such a slow current it requires little effort to paddle. Bathed in silence and lulled by the tranquility of flowing water, you soon slip away from the modern world into the one Native Americans paddled down for thousands of years.

Fish and turtles weave through fields of swaying eelgrass, its bright green color a lively contrast to stark clearings of chalky sand interspersed with craggy limestone. Turtles are lined up in a row sunbathing on logs or in the water near you, so close you could reach out and touch their shells. You hear *plop*, *plop*, *plop* as one by one they roll into the water upon your approach. The quiet sharpens your senses until your ears pick up the buzz of a bee or the high-pitched whine of a mosquito. Wind ruffles the water and sends tree leaves trembling. A startled deer rustles the grass, then bounds through dry, crackling underbrush. The sun creates a path of diamonds down the water and warms your face.

Immersed in this scene, it's easy to comprehend the Native Americans' spiritual connection to nature. They weren't partitioned off from the natural world like we are by walls and ceilings, or caged up in cars, or wired to the latest device. They spent most of their time outdoors. Over thousands of years, interacting with and closely observing the natural world taught them more about its complexities, intricate patterns, and how everything is interconnected and interrelated. "Not only did Native Americans regard nature as spiritual, but they also developed a practical balanced approach for taking care of it," says Peter Scalco, manager of Wakulla Springs State Park. "They understood they were part of nature, so how they impacted nature in turn impacted them."

We have gradually lost that connection over the last couple of hundred years we've lived here, especially since the Industrial Revolution, when people moved from farms into cities. Advancing technology accelerates the pace of separation from the natural world as it keeps us indoors more often.







THE FLORIDAN AQUIFER PROVIDES DRINKING WATER FOR MOST OF NORTH AND CENTRAL FLORIDA, INCLUDING MUNICIPALITIES LIKE TALLAHASSEE, JACKSONVILLE, AND ST. PETERSBURG.

On a recent kayak trip to Ichetucknee Springs, my husband and I noticed some alarming changes from our last visit ten years ago. This time, instead of being crystal clear the entire length, the water looked murky with sediments not far from where we put our kayaks in. Those lovely beds of eelgrass, once so electric green, are now coated in brownish gunk. We did see wildlife but not nearly as much as before. Driving in, we noticed signs on the road about protecting the springs, while placards placed around the park alerted visitors to its current threats. A park brochure informed us: "In recent years, the level of nitrates in water flowing from the springs has increased forty-five times the natural level."

The contamination of springs is a visible warning that groundwater in the aquifer is also impaired. Murkiness is not the only indication. In his *Tampa Bay Tribune* article "Florida's Vanishing Springs," staff writer Craig Pittman lists others: "The water in many springs no longer boils up like a fountain, the way they have for centuries. The water that does come out is polluted by nitrates. The pollution fuels the growth of toxic algae blooms, which are taking over springs and the rivers they feed and putting human health at risk. Finally, the fresh water coming out of many springs is showing signs of a growing saltiness, according to a study by the Florida Geological Survey. All of it—particularly the saltiness—is a dark omen for the future of the state's water supply."

The Floridan Aquifer provides drinking water for most of north and central Florida, including municipalities like Tallahassee, Jacksonville, and St. Petersburg. Pittman explains why springs are deteriorating: "the evidence points to too much pumping of fresh water—millions of gallons a day sprayed on suburban lawns and farmers' fields, run through showers and flushed down toilets, turned into steam to crank turbines for electricity, or siphoned into





plastic bottles for sale around the country. Floridians use 158 gallons of water a day per person, about 50 more than the national average."

As the authors of *Priceless Florida* remind us, "It behooves us, then, to protect and maintain our springs. Not only are they beautiful and important habitats for living things, they also are the guardians of our safety and health." We can learn how to conserve our precious resources by following the wisdom of America's first peoples. They treated nature with the dignity and respect it deserves as a sacred gift from the Creator. This prayer from the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* might be the place to start: "Open, O Lord, the eyes of all people to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works, that, rejoicing in thy whole creation, they honor thee with their substance, and be faithful stewards of thy bounty."

Learn how you can help protect these Florida treasures at floridasprings.org.

For more information about both Wakulla and Ichetucknee Springs State Parks, visit floridastateparks.org.

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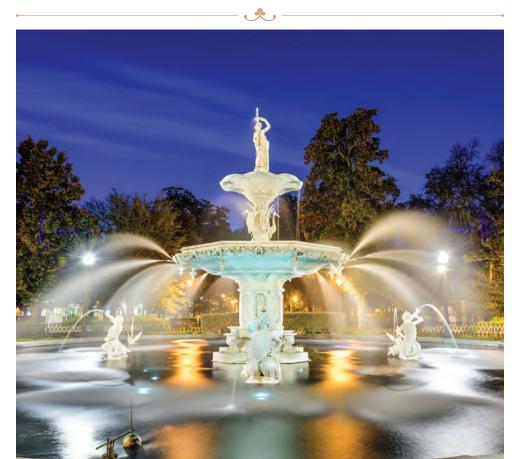




A TASTE OF SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

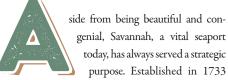
By Sallie W. Boyles

Like a charming hostess with a colorful past, a historic Southern city has a knack for entertaining, particularly by making captivating stories of yesteryear come alive. One such alluring place is Savannah, Georgia, a grande dame of the Low Country—a regional term of endearment for the coastal plains. Although gracious when people offer comparisons to her refined "sister city" of Charleston and even to fun-loving New Orleans, Savannah wastes no time proving that she is both multifaceted and one of a kind.





Above: Forsyth Fountain, an iconic focal point of Forsyth Park Below: Savannah waterfront at night



by General James Oglethorpe, when he and 120 passengers of the ship *Anne* landed on a river bluff, the city was the first in what would be Georgia, America's thirteenth colony. Her early settlers were some of England's working poor, so coastal Savannah provided a fresh start for them while facilitating trade with other colonies. The population also worked as a buffer between South Carolina and the Spanish fleets that threatened to invade. Notably, too, Oglethorpe befriended the Yamacraw Indians, ensuring peace for the settlement.

Countless memorials pay tribute to Oglethorpe, but none is more significant than the Savannah plan, a blueprint for the city that he initiated. Starting with a grid of four squares, he designated the center of each square as a public gathering place or park, and laid out streets, homes, and public buildings around those green spaces. Creating an urban forest within the heart of Savannah, the twenty-two squares that exist today feature year-round flowers, majestic live oaks, and magnolias draped with Spanish moss, statuary, fountains, and park benches. Surrounded by mansions and townhomes dating back to the 1700s, the squares provide a genteel setting and a vivid portrayal of days gone by.

The tranquil scenery, however, camouflages a tumultuous past: the Siege of Savannah, the American Revolutionary War's second-deadliest battle; two devastating fires, one in 1796 and another in 1820; and William T. Sherman's Civil War conquest. Fortunately, instead of burning Savannah as he had Atlanta, the Union general presented the city—along with "150 heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, and also about 25,000 bales of cotton"—to Abraham Lincoln as a Christmas gift! This is according to the book, *Savannah and Hilton Head* by Rich Wittish and Betty Darby.

Alongside promoting the notion that their city's Southern belles cajoled Sherman into preserving their beloved home, locals credit yet another band of women for coming to Savannah's rescue in the 1950s. Over time, nine hundred historic homes had been torn down. By purchasing and restoring the Isaiah Davenport house, built in 1820, the women turned the tide and launched the Historic Savannah

Foundation. In 1966, over two square miles of Savannah's Historic District were designated a National Historic Landmark District, precipitating a wave of restoration projects. Preserved architectural treasures include intricate ironwork adornments and structures made of tabby—a blend of lime, water, sand, oyster shells, and ash.

Savannah's historic restorations gained the city recognition, but longtime residents contend that the most powerful modern-day PR campaign hit in 1994, when author John Berendt published Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, an intriguing nonfictional account of a scandalous murder with references to voodoo. Upon visiting, curious travelers would find plenty to see and do, and expert sources like Travel + Leisure magazine, which ranked Savannah third among US and Canadian cities in its 2014 World's Best Awards, further helped to spread the word.

For those just arriving in town, a ride around in an open-air trolley bus or horse-drawn carriage provides a delightful overview of the homes, churches, parks, museums, and other attractions to visit, plus options for shopping, dining, and entertainment. Chatham Area Transit further offers a free shuttle service, while Savannah Pedicab Company delivers a fun alternative with a unique proposition: for trips that take less than thirty minutes, riders may pay whatever they deem the transport is worth!

Since the city grid is so easy to follow, many take advantage of the family-friendly atmosphere during daylight hours to walk throughout Savannah's historic neighborhoods: the Historic District comprises the two-and-a-half-square-mile National Historic Landmark District; the Victorian District, running south of the Historic District, encompasses fifty blocks of many brightly painted buildings; City Market, just two blocks from River Street, features art galleries and studios, eateries, and stores; Factors Walk describes the bluff above River Street that contains former cotton warehouses and merchant offices, now converted to restaurants, pubs, and shops; and River Street, a nine-block stretch of renovated riverfront warehouses, has earned a reputation for its restaurants, specialty retailers, and galleries.

In addition to the Davenport House Museum, mustsee historic stops include the English Regency-style Owens-Thomas House, a mansion from 1819 that occupies a full city block; the Andrew Low House,



Southern live oak

CREATING AN URBAN FOREST WITHIN THE HEART OF SAVANNAH, THE TWENTY-TWO SQUARES THAT EXIST TODAY FEATURE YEAR-ROUND FLOWERS, MAJESTIC LIVE OAKS, AND MAGNOLIAS DRAPED WITH SPANISH MOSS.

completed in 1849, which hosted Robert E. Lee and later became the home of Juliette Gordon Low, founder of the Girl Scouts of America; the childhood home of author Flannery O'Connor; the Sorrel-Weed House, a Greek Revival beauty completed in 1840; and the infamous Mercer Williams House, a Civil War-era masterpiece that became both the home, death place, and supposed haunt of Jim Williams, the real-life main character of Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil.

Coincidentally, paranormal experts deem Savannah one of the most haunted cities in the country, and ghost tours on foot or in a converted hearse are popular. While serious ghost seekers are particularly drawn to Colonial Park Cemetery, nicknamed "Paranormal Central," a gravesite is not the only place for an otherworldly encounter—or an active imagination! Choice stops include the Olde Pink House, dating back to 1789, and the Pirates' House, built circa 1753.

Some assert that the only spiritual activity worth observing in Savannah occurs in her houses of worship, including the First Bryan Baptist Church, the oldest continuous African American church in the United States; the breathtaking Victorian Gothic Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist, the oldest Roman Catholic church in Georgia; Temple Mickve Israel, the country's only Gothic Revival synagogue building and home to the third-oldest Jewish congregation in the United States; and the Unitarian Universalist Church, where James Pierpont is said to have written "Jingle Bells" during his time there as organist and choir master.















The Mansion on Forsyth Park, clockwise from top left: The historic mansion (left) at 700 Drayton Street alongside the new hotel addition (right), a quintessential guest room; 700 Drayton dining room; Bösendorfer Lounge; Casimir's Lounge; Poseidon Spa

Attractions and events around Savannah range from religious to rowdy, as in her hugely attended annual Saint Patrick's Day festivities (second only to New York City's) with a parade that marked its 191st year in 2015. Public and private organizations host many happenings outdoors, such as First Fridays and First Saturdays on the River, a March-through-December celebration of art, entertainment, and crafts on River Street. Spring highlights include Savannah's Music Festival, which showcases over a hundred performances at various venues, and the SCAD (Savannah College of Art and Design) Sidewalk Arts Festival. Pleasant from spring through fall, Tybee Island—*the* beach—draws crowds to its May Beach Bum Parade and Fourth of July fireworks. Oktoberfest on the River, the Savannah Film Festival, the Savannah Food and Wine Festival, and the Telfair Art Fair are among numerous fall events packing the calendar. The year-end also stays busy with the Savannah River Bridge Run, the Holiday Tour of Homes, and the Savannah Waterfront Association's Christmas on the River and Lighted Parade.

Although approaching her three hundredth birthday, Savannah seems young at heart, especially as thousands of students attend the Savannah College of Art and Design. Winding in and around the Historic District, the college undeniably influences local culture. Lovers of fine art can view students' original works at the SCAD Museum of Art and also purchase their creations from the local shopSCAD store. The ultramodern Jepson Center—part of the Telfair Museums, the oldest public art museum in the Southeast—also boasts an impressive public gallery for contemporary exhibitions.

Those who embrace the fine art of shopping love Savannah's locally cultivated retailers. Savannah Bee Company entices buyers with tastings of wild honey and an assortment of bee products from independent beekeepers in the region and as far away as Italy. One Fish Two Fish carries home decor and personal accessories sourced from neighboring shores (Daufuskie Island, South Carolina) as well as distant islands (Bali). The Paula Deen Store, overflowing with cookware, tableware, and kitchen accessories, is a great place for tea towels that say "Hey Y'all" and other colloquialisms.

Whether dropping in for a weekend or taking an extended holiday, visitors who crave a bona fide Savannah getaway—one that allows them to savor the flavors of the city—will also find locally inspired places to rest their heads at night, thanks in part to Savannah native Richard Kessler. Deciding the city needed a luxury hotel, the former president, CEO, and chairman of Days Inns built the kind of place he'd love to stay in (and does) while spending time in Savannah.

"Savannah is my hometown; therefore, I take particular interest and pride in the city," says Kessler. "Savannah's architecture and quaintness are not matched anywhere that I have traveled in the U.S." Thus, to complement all that the city has to offer, Kessler opened the Mansion on Forsyth Park, his own company's first Savannah hotel, in 2005.

Located at 700 Drayton Street in the Historic District across from 22-acre Forsyth Park, the Mansion on Forsyth Park complex comprises the Kayton Family Mansion, a Victorian Romanesque home built in 1888, plus the new hotel. Developing the big plan as well as attending to the fine details, Kessler—who holds bachelor's and master's degrees in industrial engineering and operations research from the Georgia Institute of Technology and a master's degree in hotel administration from Cornell University—took every measure to restore the old mansion while

Love your style



LUNA LUZ





Foyer of the Mansion on Forsyth Park

AS ONE WHO SAVORS LIFE'S FINER PLEASURES, KESSLER IMPARTS HIS LOVE OF TRAVEL, ART, AND MUSIC WITH THE HOPE THAT HOTEL GUESTS AND VISITORS SHARE A SIMILAR APPRECIATION.

erecting something new that complements it. Past- and present-day architecture, therefore, flow seamlessly: terra-cotta bricks were specially made to match the old, and turrets on the new building mirror the original mansion's architecture.

The interior of the new building (which contains 125 guest rooms, a grand ballroom, an art gallery/shop, a lounge, meeting galleries, and the Poseidon Spa) is also reminiscent of another era, although many design elements are contemporary.

A luminous onyx reception desk, pink Verona marble columns, authentic Versace furnishings, and exquisite artwork—namely, a William Russell Walker painting of a horse from Kessler's personal collection—make the first impressions. A marble courtyard (the picture-perfect site for intimate weddings),

observed through glass doors, and a manor-style pool are a few steps away, as is the sophisticated Bösendorfer Lounge. All the while, in the background plays subtle music chosen by Richard Kessler and his children, Mark Kessler and Laura Kessler Van Til, who are both Kessler executives. The surroundings are elegant, but the staff, friendly in the manner typical to Savannah, sets a tone that invites guests, including children and dogs, to relax and enjoy.

As one who savors life's finer pleasures, Kessler imparts his love of travel, art, and music with the hope that hotel guests and visitors share a similar appreciation through their own interpretations.

If showing someone around the place, he'd point out favorite paintings by French impressionist Jean Claude Roy (part of the collection of over four hundred original works by numerous artists, necessitating a full-time art gallery director). "The Mansion itself is a very romantic hotel," says Kessler, noting that the three Bösendorfer grand pianos on the property "are played at different times for our guests to enjoy." Yet another intriguing form of art is a museum-worthy display of antique and vintage hats from the 1870s to the 1970s.

Among all of the Mansion's exceptional features, Kessler loves to show off the grand ballroom. Opulent touches—velvet fabric, gold-leaf columns, Italian-made chandeliers that Kessler designed himself, and hand-loomed carpet by Stoddard Templeton, the same Scottish company that made rugs for the Titanic—impart an old-world ambience, one that travels down the corridors, onto the elevators, and into the guest rooms. "The art, the music, and the luxury of the guest rooms are all principal to the experience," says Joseph Kelley, general manager of the Mansion on Forsyth Park.

All things considered, many agree that the jewel of the property is the impeccably restored mansion. Hallmarks of the period home—rich dark woods, high ceilings, and leaded glass windows—take visitors back in time, while contemporary art and decadent crystal lighting hint of places traveled more recently. "The 1888 mansion is one of the best examples of the city's architecture," says Kelley. "We feel it's a privilege to have it in our hands. To care for this place requires a lot of work, but the effort is well worthwhile."

The building, however, has far more to offer than looks alone, as it is used for restaurant and private event dining, cocktailing, live musical entertainment, and cooking classes. Under the direction of Chef Richard Beichner, who has over twenty years of culinary expertise that includes cooking for President George W. Bush, 700 Drayton Restaurant takes diners from a Southern breakfast of shrimp and grits to a thoughtfully composed wine dinner that celebrates the season and chosen region. First bites and sips inevitably silence a room.

Before or after dining, in-the-know locals and travelers gather in Casimir's Lounge (classy but fun with a bit of glitz) for live music and an arsenal of libations. If taking a private mixology class, participants might prepare a Sherman Artillery Spritzer (an aperitif of cognac, champagne, maraschino syrup, and other sweet surprises) and also learn the nuances of a Low

Country "porch pounder"—in other words, whether to enjoy a drink on the veranda out front or out back. If one can imbibe and continue to wave politely to passersby, the front porch will do. If the punch is too strong, then the back porch, concealed by a high privacy fence, is appropriate!

For deeper epicurean insights, the 700 Kitchen Cooking School, managed by Chef Peter Russo, regularly features tastes of the South, but any menu can be arranged. A natural-born foodie who loves to teach and claims the 700 Kitchen is "the best office in town," Chef Russo also divulges his favorite Italian culinary secrets.

Considering all that his team orchestrates, General Manager Kelley contends, "Our staff is among our greatest assets." He further notes that when such talented people relocate to Savannah, they also become assets to the city through their civic involvement and contributions.

Decidedly proud of the Mansion on Forsyth Park, Kelley would love for tourists and event planners to look no further for accommodations, but he happily recommends one of Kessler's sister properties, the Bohemian Hotel Savannah Riverfront, to those seeking an equally exceptional yet different experience. (Richard Kessler, by the way, defines *bohemian* as 50 percent Old World, 35 percent gypsy free-spirited, and 15 percent California free-spirited.) Even better, since the two hotels share amenities, registered guests can enjoy the best of both worlds and conveniently charge all purchases to their rooms.

Right on the river, just a mile and a half away, the Bohemian presents all of the bounty anticipated in a Kessler hotel—music, original artwork, touches of velvet, crystal lighting, and impressive food and drink menus—along with a sense of antiquity. The newly constructed property opened in 2009, but local historians guided the Bohemian's concept to look like an eighteenth-century port of call and feel like a passenger ship. Leather club chairs, dressers in the style of old-fashioned steamer trucks, and oyster shell—encrusted light fixtures turn guest rooms into staterooms.

Many rooms overlook the Savannah River, and anyone can drop into Rocks on the Roof, a place-to-be bar with some of the city's most impressive views of the Talmadge Memorial Bridge. The balcony deck is ideal for watching ships traveling through and listening for the maritime horns of two vessels passing one another. The effect is romantic, but live music, plenty of wine, beer, and signature cocktails—like Sweet Tea Bourbon—and tapas-style edibles keep the vibe young and hip.

To satisfy serious hunger pangs, Rocks on the River, the restaurant located on the lobby level with a main entrance that opens onto River Street, welcomes drop-ins of all ages and food interests. The menu reflects a love of Southern delicacies—light, flavorful fried green tomatoes; mouthwatering chicken and waffles; locally caught seafood—and shares a camaraderie with those who have hearty appetites. Chef Eric Backer, who has a knack for sourcing unique ingredients and mastering multicultural dishes, continually surprises with new additions and worldly flavor combinations that pair wonderfully with expertly sourced wines.

"The Kessler Group's mission is inspiring places, intuitive services, exuberant guests," says Nick Saltmarsh, interim general manager of the Bohemian in Savannah and general manager of the soon-to-open Grand Bohemian Hotel Charleston. "We are about as far from the big-box hotel chain as you can get. Richard Kessler is a true maverick, and this is a forward-thinking company."



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Bohemian Hotel Savannah Riverfront, *clockwise from top left*: the Bohemian at night; the hotel foyer featuring a velvet settee; Rocks on the River restaurant; balcony seating at Rocks on the Roof lounge overlooking the Savannah River

Interestingly, however, nine Kessler properties are wholly owned subsidiaries of Marriott Hotels.

In 2010, Kessler first accepted an offer to co-brand seven of his hotels with Marriott while retaining management control and preserving the intrinsic qualities of his properties. The relationship inspired the Autograph Collection, a Marriott showcase of hand-selected hotels around the globe, each of which falls under one or a few getaway themes: artistic, culinary, historic, indulgent, luxury, natural, sporting, urban, and wedding. While Marriott owns a portfolio of one-of-a-kind properties, Autograph Collection hotels receive worldwide marketing

exposure, and customers explore the world with peace of mind and Marriott's benefits, including loyalty programs.

As the Kessler Group branches out, Richard Kessler remains deeply loyal to Savannah. The extraordinary Plant Riverside project underscores his commitment. In 2012, Kessler purchased a decommissioned Georgia Power plant building, dating back to 1912, with a massive redevelopment project in mind—one that will give new life to nearly four city blocks of Savannah riverfront property yet preserve the beautiful brick shell and intriguing architectural features inside. From considerable planning, the scheme for Plant

Riverside entails two distinctive hotels, retail shops, restaurants, a children's museum, open-air pavilions, pedestrian walkways, and parking, all scheduled in one phase of construction that will soon break ground. The \$220 million investment should yield eight hundred permanent new jobs.

"The Riverside complex will contain the seventh and eighth hotels that I have developed in Savannah over the past thirty-five years," says Kessler. "I believe that is the most that anyone has built in the history of Savannah. I am particularly excited about the project because I think it will be a gift to the city, the citizens, and its visitors."





Inside Rocks on the River restaurant

To interpret his vision, which requires urban planning, restoration, and new construction and involves the Army Corps of Engineers, Kessler turned to nationally renowned architect Christian Sottile, dean of the SCAD School of Building Arts and principal of Sottile and Sottile Architects, a firm that specializes in urban designs and historic preservations. "Richard asked us to create something that would give back to the city, adding green space and quality of life features," says Sottile. "It was not about maximizing what he could build." Optimizing the waterfront's advantages and granting plenty of public access, Plant Riverside takes Southern hospitality all the way to the rooftops with pools, bars, and event decks.

"This is not just an infill project," Sottile emphasizes. "This is an urban design strategy that ties into the existing city street infrastructure." The City of Savannah has agreed to extend the Savannah Riverwalk to the future promenade and take existing streets to Plant Riverside.

"Working with the renowned architect firm of Sottile and Sottile, and with the mayor, city manager, and city leaders, who have been very supportive, is enabling this project to become a reality," says Kessler. "I truly believe, as do others in the city, that this project will transform River Street over the years and certainly have a positive influence on the city as a whole."

Describing the venture as "a cornerstone for the largest historic district in the country," Sottile realizes and values the significant role he plays, but gives the credit to Richard Kessler. "It takes a maverick's vision to do such work."

Remaining a beautiful, relevant city does take work, but past and present, Savannah has succeeded in attracting visionaries, who have not only recognized her unique qualities but also understood how to enhance her appeal. Now or in the future, if people want to see what she has to offer and even how she compares to other cities of the South, Savannah welcomes visitors to drop by, hoping they do plan to stay long enough to get to know her properly, any time of the year.





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Engagement eggs

KEVIN KORMAN SURPRISED HIS FIANCÉE, ANGELA, WITH THE WEDDING OF HER DREAMS— A FEW HOURS AFTER HE PROPOSED.

By Tori Phelps · Photography by Jacqueline Ward Smage

In a now-classic line from *When Harry Met Sally*, Harry Burns declares, "When you realize you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible." Kevin Korman knew the feeling, and he was head over heels in love enough to do something about it. He decided to create a gift for his beloved, Angela: a fairy-tale wedding that illustrated his absolute devotion. How did she react? Just take a look at the pictures.

love at First Sight

The couple, now living in Freeport, Florida, met by chance at the 2013 Digital Graffiti art festival in Alys Beach. They weren't complete strangers, though. Angela, a transplant from a small town outside Nashville, was busy juggling a career as an accounting and human resources director at a law firm and raising her daughter, Eleanor. She made a brief foray into online dating, an unremarkable experience—except for an invitation by a chef named Kevin to meet for coffee. She politely declined, believing the hour-long drive between them was too far.

Soon afterward, Angela accompanied some friends to Digital Graffiti. While moving through the line to grab a bite to eat, she looked up and locked eyes with the festival's executive chef. She knew instantly that it was the guy from the dating site; more than that, though, she knew her life had changed. "It hit me," she recalls. "There he is. He's the one—the one I've been waiting for. The one who's been waiting for me. Maybe it was the strobe lights or the laser beams reflecting off the walls, but I swear I saw fireworks."

In spite of—or maybe because of—the jolt she felt, Angela was hesitant to fall into a relationship that she instinctively knew would be *it*. Kevin had no such reservations. He was enamored immediately, but by the time he was able to break away from his duties to search for her, Angela was gone.

Fate wasn't done yet, though, and the two met again a few months later. This time, Angela stopped fighting it. "I couldn't keep running, and there wasn't any reason to," she says.

From that day forward, the two were inseparable. Dates to local haunts like George's in Alys Beach and Seagar's in Destin turned into trips to New Orleans, Las Vegas, New York, and Washington, D.C. Each time they booked a flight, Angela was sure that Kevin would pop the question on that trip. When the couple returned to Digital Graffiti in 2014, Angela was confident an engagement was in the works that night. One year from their first, brief meeting would be the perfect opportunity, she reasoned, even wondering if he would write the proposal on the side of a building. He had kept assuring her, after all, that his proposal would be amazing.













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However, no ring appeared on any of those trips or even at Digital Graffiti. Angela knew it was coming because Kevin kept asking if she had picked out a dress yet. Trying to do her part for their eventual nuptials, she spent hours scouring the Internet for the perfect gown, rings, venue, etc. She was driving herself crazy trying to make decisions, but the truth was that she didn't care about the details. "Kevin and I had both been married before," she explains. "We'd had the traditional weddings—and the less-than-spectacular marriages. I wanted to do everything the opposite of that. I didn't want a shower or a registry; I didn't want anyone to walk me down the aisle. I just wanted to live happily ever after with the man who changed my mind about love at first sight."

Unbeknownst to Angela, Kevin had spent five months planning their dream day. During the course of their many discussions about how, when, and where to tie the knot, he recognized that his beloved was overwhelmed by all the decisions to be made. "I decided I would take the stress out of it for her so she could just enjoy the day," Kevin says.

Angela did notice that he was very interested in her research. She had made a wedding playlist on her computer, which Kevin put on his phone so "he would have something to listen to while he was at work," he said. Then there was the wedding ring she ordered for him with her fingerprint engraved on it, which he said he was "putting away" so it wouldn't get lost.

Frankly, he was running out of excuses for his behavior. But then, *finally*, the big day arrived.

A Magical Proposal—and Wedding

September 14, 2014, started out like any other day for Angela, except that she felt groggy, thanks to too little sleep the night before. Kevin thoughtfully brought her a cup of coffee in bed. It was a little strange that he also brought her a bottle of nail polish—the color was called "Got Engaged." Stranger still, he picked out a dress for her and said she an hour to get ready to leave.

The sleep-deprived fog cleared enough for her to understand that something special was going on. *The proposal*, she thought giddily, scurrying around the house. In the car, she tried to guess where Kevin was taking her. The airport? One of their favorite restaurants? The beach?

Their destination was a private pier in the picturesque community of WaterColor, which held a picnic brunch Kevin had prepared the day before. He had arranged for Jackie Ward from Jaqueline Ward Images to hide nearby and photograph the day's events, and for Storied Films to capture the whole day on video. Multiple cameras caught what turned out to be the amazing proposal that Kevin had promised.

Angela was still reveling in the morning's events when Kevin guided her into a waiting limo, handed her a note and a journal, and bid her farewell. This was the first of four stops she would make that day, each with a gift and a note that hid the words "borrowed," "new," "old," and "blue." (The journal represented "borrowed.")

Angela realized she was in the middle of more than just a proposal; the cameramen in the bushes helped her arrive at that bit of insight. Still, she only thought that Kevin was surprising her with an engagement party later that night or a bridal photo shoot, so she sat back and enjoyed the ride.

The next stop was Vivo Spa Salon in Rosemary Beach, which had opened just for Angela that day. She got another note and jewelry (something "new"), including her choice of pearl-encrusted bobby pins or an antique hair clip. Also waiting inside was Angela's best friend, whom Kevin had flown in from Nashville. "I cried hard," she confesses. "It got ugly."

After getting their hair and nails done, the pals were whisked to Fonville Press in Alys Beach, where Kevin had prepared lunch. Joining them at the coffee shop were Angela's sister from Tennessee and Kevin's sister-in-law from Maryland. While enjoying the salads and dips Kevin had left, Angela finally stumbled upon the journal page that spelled out his plans for a proposal and wedding in the same day. At that point, Angela's sister gave her another note, along with their late grandmother's gloves (something "old"), which Angela had long talked about wearing at her wedding.

With a new understanding that today was, in fact, her wedding day, Angela and her group headed to a room Kevin had reserved in Alys Beach. The special guests waiting here included the couple's mothers; Angela's daughter, Eleanor; and a friend ready to apply Angela's makeup. Eleanor had the last note and a bouquet wrapped in her great-grandmother's blue handkerchief (something "blue").

Also in the room was the dress Angela had bought several months earlier with the intention of customizing it to her taste. As the secret wedding date approached and Angela continued to take apart and remake the dress, Kevin's anxiety had ratcheted ever higher. Luckily, Angela's mother had convinced her daughter to complete the final alterations the night before the secret proposal.

Most of the women left the bride-to-be alone when it was time to get ready for the ceremony. In those quiet moments, the enormity of what Kevin had accomplished hit her. "I thought about how selfless he was to take all the stress of planning a wedding off my shoulders and execute my vision without burdening me with what could have been a never-ending list of details and worries," she says. "It was truly the best wedding present my husband could give me."

Kevin, however, was still wrapped up in those details. As his fiancée was enjoying a day of pampering all over town, he and his sous chef, Cody Smith, were preparing an eleven-course meal and putting the finishing touches on the three wedding cakes Kevin had made. Meanwhile, Kevin had enlisted the help of good friend Elizabeth Sinnott of Elegant Beginnings to coordinate setup at the pavilion where the ceremony would take place. The decor included everything Angela had ever mentioned or stashed on her Pinterest wedding board.

A fierce storm delayed the sunset ceremony for a bit, but even Mother Nature wouldn't dare mess up their perfect day. In exchange for the delay, she delivered a dramatic nighttime backdrop filled with twinkling stars.

All that was left was to get married.

The vows. The kiss. Dancing. Toasting. Course after course of spectacular food. It was a magical evening for the newlyweds and their delighted guests. At last, for the first time in weeks, Kevin got to relax. He had spent the previous night hosting an unveiling dinner for everyone involved in the plan, during which he admitted that they hadn't come into town for a surprise engagement party, as they had been told, but instead for a surprise wedding.



Most grooms would be hesitant to spring a same-day wedding on their brides, but Kevin knew Angela wouldn't miss the months of stress-laden wedding prep. His main concern was about getting the details right for her. "Would she like the shoes I picked? Would she be upset that she didn't get to be involved in the decorations? In reality, almost all of the details were chosen by her," he says, pointing to her Pinterest board and his sneaky questions. "I was hoping that the effect of the whole day would outweigh any small details that were missed."

Angela certainly had no complaints, calling the culmination of her husband's hard work "unbelievable." It was the least she deserved, says Kevin. "For a very long time I was the guy who didn't believe in marriage or relationships," he confesses. "I surely didn't believe in love at first sight. Angie changed all of that. As corny as it sounds, it was like I found my missing half."

Though not much in life could top Kevin's stunning surprise, Angela gave it her best shot. On Christmas morning, she surprised him with the news that they would welcome a new baby this August.

Thus, the fairy tale continues ... V

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aybe it's the immense scale of its raw nature—its grandeur and wild ruggedness—but a cell phone seems transient in this ancient landscape where some trees live for a thousand years. There is a power in wilderness: an energy force you can sometimes feel. We met a whale-watching guide who shared her experience diving with whales. "As I dove alongside the whale, I felt his song vibrating through every organ in my body. A biologist who dove with me explained whales adjust their sonar to your sound waves and can communicate with you. I'll never forget it," she exclaimed.

Ample opportunities for such life-changing adventures abound on this 280-mile-long island where nature reigns. Few places offer such diversity in climate, culture, and geography packed into so a small space. Tramp endless trails through skyscraper trees or rocky bluffs above the sea. Stroll surf-pounded beaches tracked by bears and cougars (some five thousand live here in the largest concentration worldwide). Excursion boats ply the isolated waterways of Clayoquot Sound searching for whales and sea lions. Yet you're never far from world-class lodges, B and Bs, cottages, and family resorts. The Pacific Northwest led the sustainable food movement, so restaurants serve local produce and fresh seafood cooked up West Coast-style. And the people are some of the kindest, friendliest, and most courteous around.

Vancouver Island kept bleeping on my radar screen. I kept bumping into people who raved about it. I kept reading about it in travel magazines where it showed up on a regular basis as one of the best destinations in North America. "People come from all over the world to see a Canadian wilderness with few people around," confirmed one shop owner. Now it's our turn. To guarantee there are few people, my husband and I visit in June, avoiding the July—August tourist season.

Journeys begin in Victoria, British Columbia's capital, located on the island's southern tip, where ferries or flights arrive. One of the oldest cities in the Pacific Northwest, Victoria began as a trading post for the Hudson's Bay Company in 1843. Wilderness will still sometimes find a way to spill over into this vibrant harbor city. Even at a bastion of British civility like the Empress





Hotel where high tea is served, a cougar once roamed into the parking garage! At the Royal BC Museum, which is ranked among the top five museums in North America, learn about the First Nations peoples, whose history in what is now British Columbia dates back more than ten thousand years. The museum displays one of the world's best North Pacific Coast indigenous art and culture collections, including historic handcarved totems.

From Victoria drive north to the east coast and linger awhile before crossing over to the wilder west where 90 percent of the land is preserved in the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and the Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.



AMPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCH LIFE-CHANGING ADVENTURES ABOUND ON THIS 280-MILE LONG ISLAND WHERE NATURE REIGNS.

THE EAST COAST: FROM COWICHAN TO CAMPBELL RIVER

Stretching for 125 miles, the midsection of Vancouver Island provides a sunny, drier climate as it's shielded from Pacific storms by the central mountain range. The area boasts charming seaside villages and old-school resorts fronting long hard-packed beaches. Several provincial parks offer activities such as hiking, boating, kayaking, and camping.

INN THE ESTRUARY

Inn the Estuary is conveniently located—and is aptly named—as elegant suites overlook an extraordinary estuary created by the owners. Transforming a neighbor's Christmas tree farm into a thriving estuary would be a daunting task for most; but Marianne and Harold Robinson pulled it off beautifully. "We first purchased the property on Nanoose Bay as an investment as it bordered an eighty-acre national wildlife refuge," explained Harold. But after spending time here and falling in love with the landscape, Marianne had other ideas. "Why not build a home, as this could be beautiful once we restore the estuary," she suggested. Five years ago they acquired permits and worked with an environmental biologist to turn their dream into reality. While building, they lived in the independent suites that now serve as guest quarters. "We never appreciated nature until we started observing it more closely," says Harold. "Now we are passionate about preserving it."

Bird-watch from the comfort of your living room through walls of glass or from a soaking tub on your private patio. Spacious suites are decorated in soothing earth tones. Plush couches, leather easy chairs, and cozy fleece throws ensure relaxation. The Robinsons learned how to please guests by operating a B and B in Nanaimo for ten years. They stock refrigerators with breakfast fixings so guests can enjoy their morning privacy. They add niceties like hot cocoa, microwave popcorn, and complimentary DVDs. They are always available to help. It's hard to leave this cushy atmosphere, but day trips beckon.



Photo by Artez Photography at Nanaimo

Set within the Nanoose Estuary, the Inn at Estuary is an upscale, contemporary B and B within a fourminute walk from Qualicum National Wildlife Area. Complimentary perks include the use of kayaks, life jackets, bikes and helmets, plus passes to Milner Gardens and Woodlands.

Inn The Estruary Hosts: Harold and Marianne Robinson www.InnTheEstuary.com InnTheEstuary@shaw.ca (250) 468-9983

STRATHCONA PARK LODGE & OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTER

The only lodging near Strathcona Provincial Park, this resort resembles an Alpine village with its rustic hand-hewn lodge and collection of cottages scattered around a glassy lake so still it mirrors jagged snowpeaked mountains, trees, and clouds above. It is British Columbia's oldest adventure lodge, founded in 1959 by Jim and Myrna Boulding, both Canadian schoolteachers who wanted to educate children and families about nature. Their mission statement reads: "To teach the wonder, spirit, and worth of people and the natural world through outdoor pursuits."

School children arrive in early summer for educational activities, while July and August are reserved for visitors drawn by the many adventure tours offered. Some of these include kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding, orienteering, and zip-lining. An experienced staff plans wilderness adventures at the park. "We program. Even Olympians come here," says David Boulding.

range, it protects such superlatives as the island's highest peak and BC's range from casual strolls to arduous multiday hikes through wilderness. Feel like the first humans on earth as you have the park mostly to yourselves.

attract amazing youth from all over the world through our leadership training Designated a park in 1911, Strathcona is BC's oldest and, at six hundred thousand acres, one of its largest. Tucked along the central mountain highest waterfall. The park encompasses lakes, old-growth forest, and vast wilderness tracts, along with glaciers and treacherous alpine terrain. Trails

THE WILD WEST COAST

Travelers sense something wild and woolly is ahead as the road to the west coast zigzags into torturous switchbacks and precipitous drop-offs, but nothing prepares them for the stupendous scenery. This isolated coast is the traditional territory of the First Nations and a remote fishing and logging region that had no public road access until the 1950s. Much of it is now preserved in rocky headlands, dense forests, and wilderness beaches stretching thirty miles from Ucluelet to Tofino. Ucluelet, the smaller laid-back town, makes an ideal base.

BEACHWOOD GUEST HOUSE

"Bird-watching is fantastic as the waterfront is a nature preserve," says Joanna Maltby, describing her vacation home overlooking Ucluelet Inlet and Kvarno Island. Nature is viewed from nearly every room inside the two-bedroom home or from outdoors on a deck. The spacious open floor plan with vaulted ceiling is flooded with light from skylights and large windows. Guests love the well-stocked kitchen, the bookshelves filled with games, books, and DVDs, the heated bathroom tile floors, and the fireplace. "We are only two minutes from the Wild Pacific Trail and five minutes from Pacific Rim Park," explains Maltby. She provides an insider's list of things like favorite trails, restaurants, and outfitters.

Access trails off the highway to the Long Beach unit of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, one of Canada's most famous parks (it attracts a



Photo courtesy of Strathcona Park Lodge & Outdoor Education Centre

Set on 160 acres of woodland along the shore of Upper Campbell Lake, Strathcona Park Lodge & Outdoor Education Centre is about twenty-five miles from Campbell River. Cottages offer kitchenettes or full kitchens, and most have lake views

Strathcona Park Lodge & Outdoor Education Center www.StrathconaParkLodge.com Info@ StrathconaParkLodge.com (250) 286-3122

Strathcona Provincial Park www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks (250) 474-1336



Photo courtesy of Beachwood Guesthouse

Beachwood Guesthouse is located on the waterfront of Ucluelet Inlet between the town of Ucluelet and Pacific Rim National Park. It is only minutes from the Wild Pacific Trail, the town of Ucluelet, and the Kwisitis Visitor Centre. There are striking views of Ucluelet Inlet and Kvarno Island from most rooms.

million visitors a year). The park preserves the Canadian portion of coastal temperate rain forests that stretch along the Pacific from California to Alaska. These rain forests are lush like their tropical relatives, but the dominant trees are conifers rather than tropical species. Moisture in the form of snow, fog, or rain—at least one hundred inches a year—is the key ingredient for the exuberant growth. A park pamphlet describes it this way: "No matter where you are in the park, if your feet aren't in salt water, you are probably in the rain forest."



Trails and boardwalks meander from shoreline to higher elevations, giving hikers exposure to the four different zones where primary trees (Sitka spruce, western hemlock, western red cedar, and shore pine) appear in various forms. What each forest looks like depends on factors like topography, nutrients in the soil, exposure to wind, salt, and sand, and human activity.

See how a harsh environment affects trees at the Shorepine Bog Trail. A boardwalk takes visitors through a bizarre landscape of stunted trees rising from a spongy carpet of sphagnum moss. Deprived of adequate nutrition, these trees are short like bushes, yet some are over three hundred years old. Look down at the tiny sundew—the same carnivorous plant found in northwest Florida bogs—to realize how interconnected our planet truly is!

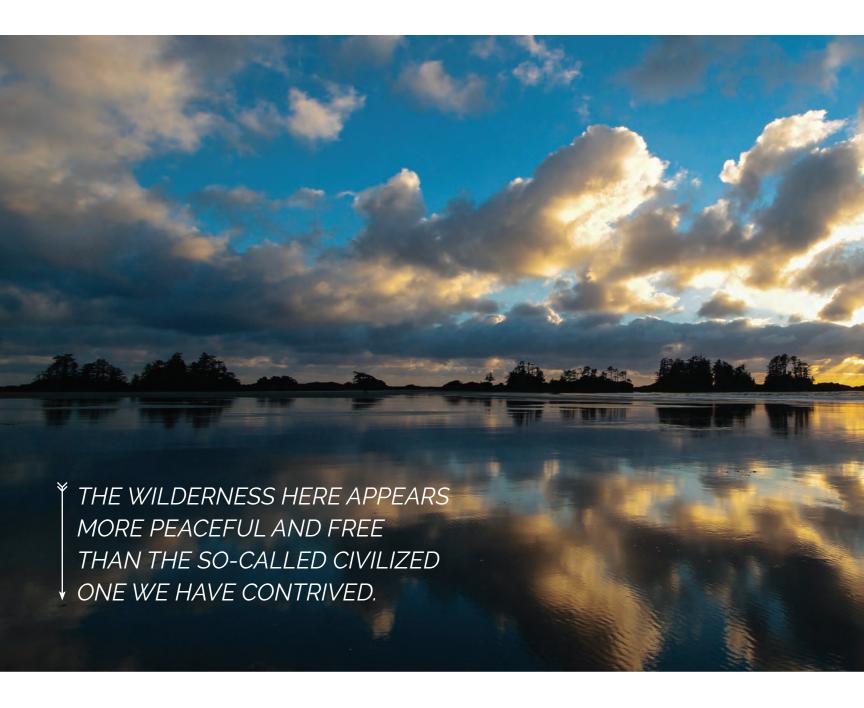
For a dramatic contrast, try the Rainforest Trail. Look up at the majestic trees so tall and massive that people become dwarfed—like small children sheltered by a family of benevolent giants. It's a lush world of ferns, emerald-green mosses, and masses of plants that spring up from the moist forest floor in countless shades of green. Search the canopy for glimpses of sky and sunlight filtered through lacy openings between pine-needled boughs.

The Schooner Cove Trail leads to a rocky shore with tide pools where another universe is exposed at low tide. Clamber over rocks and see how animals survive without water by closing up until the high tide returns. Look for colorful anemones that resemble flowers but are actually animals that sting their prey. Nuu-chah-nulth elders refer to low tide as "the table being set" because of the seafood they harvest in this intertidal zone.

Learn more about the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations people at the Kwisitis Visitor Centre overlooking Wickaninnish Beach. Life-size replicas of a long house and realistic figures on a whale hunt illustrate their culture and traditions. Giant murals depict marine mammals and rain forests. Hike one of their historic trails behind the center.

Ferocious winds and waves rolling in from Japan have splintered the peninsula into the ragged fingers of inlets, bays, and coves of Clayoquot Sound. It's one of the world's richest ecosystems, best explored by boat from Tofino. Leave at dawn with Mike White of Browning Pass Charters to observe black bears foraging for breakfast on the beaches. Hefty bears toss large boulders aside as if they were beach balls. "Watch these two," White alerts his passengers. "This is mating season and it looks like we've got a male and female courting." What an amazing opportunity to experience the wonders of the wild at fairly close range.

"Guaranteed sightings since 1982," advertises Jamie's, a respected whalewatching outfit. The captain gives a running commentary about whales as the sixty-five-foot boat streams past Meares Island to open ocean. "In April, about twenty thousand gray whales migrate here from their Baja California birthplace.

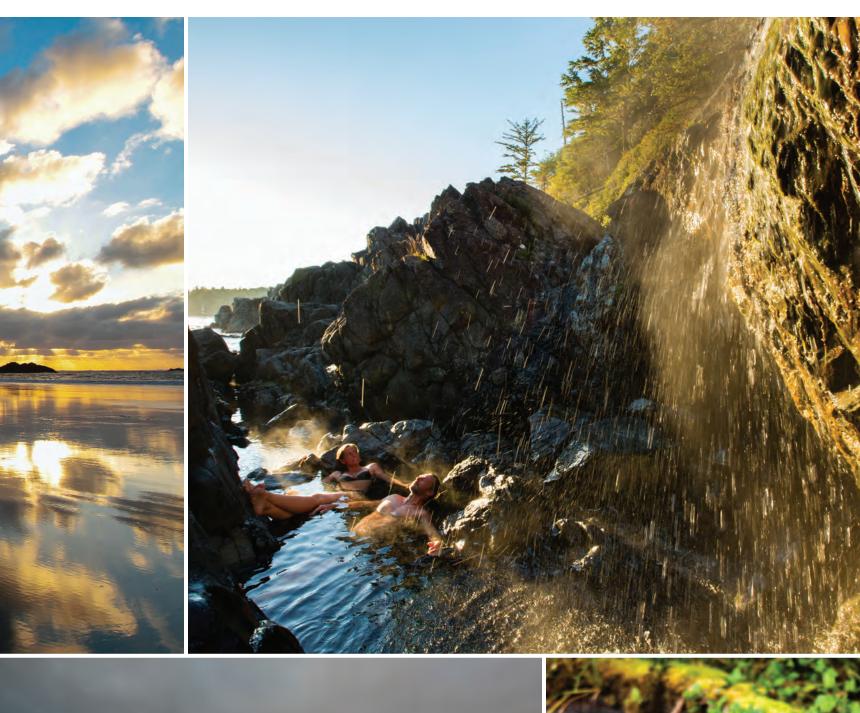


They consume about a ton of krill a day. Orcas prefer fish from deeper ocean," he explains. He points at a plume of spray before a whale emerges, its sleek gray body glistening wet. Jamie's did it again! The boat passes a sea lion colony before heading in from amazing encounters with creatures of the deep.

Beachwood Guesthouse Ucluelet, BC Hosts: Joanna & Jon Maltby www.vrbo.com/308807 BeachwoodVacationRental@gmail.com

Pacific Rim National Park Reserve www.pc.gc.ca PacRim.Info@pc.gc.ca (250) 726-3500 The wilderness here appears more peaceful and free than the so-called civilization we have contrived. It speaks more of the underlying spirit of God working in perfect harmony and awesome beauty. It's more like a sacred dance orchestrated by an Unseen Hand, where everything instinctively knows its part in the ongoing pageantry of life. Where trees march down mountains, where salmon leap upstream, where amorous bears cavort on beaches, while whales sing in the ocean depths and dolphins click out tunes—all communicating the glory of God.

Visit Vancouver Island and let the wonders of the wild touch your soul like they have mine.







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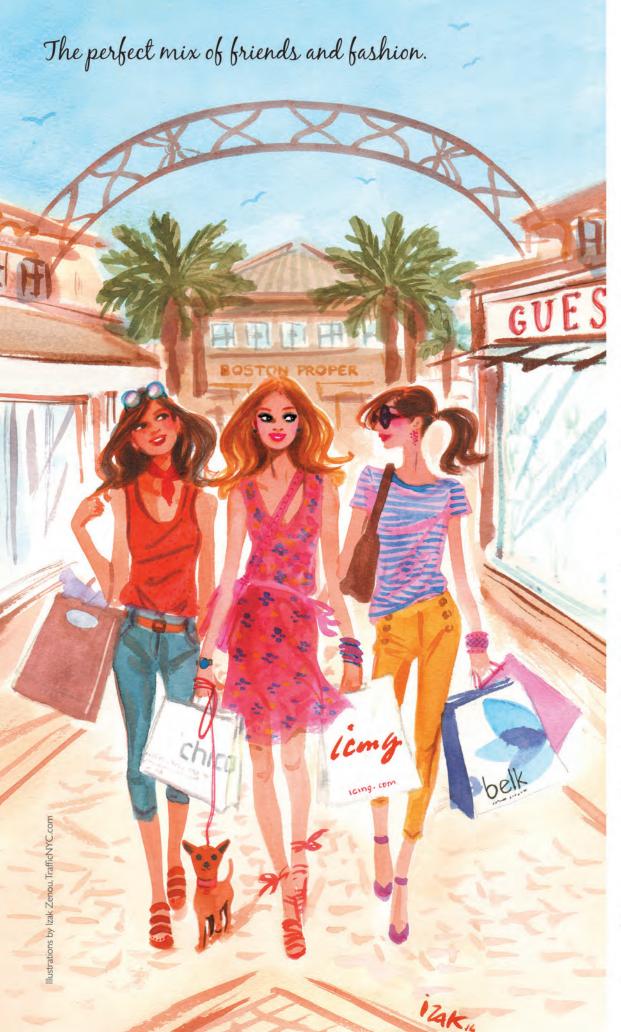
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Groom's View

OF A BARN TO BALLROOM
WEDDING



BY: JACOB WATKINS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY BLUE ROOM PHOTOGRAPHY



I MAY BE BIASED, BUT I BELIEVE THAT TOGETHER, WITH A TON OF HELP FROM MANY OF OUR FAMILY MEMBERS, WE PLANNED THE MOST PERFECT WEDDING I HAVE EVER HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF ATTENDING.

"Yes!"

It all began with a simple "Yes." It was the best day of my life; I had never been so happy. I had proposed to my future bride, Devan, and she had confirmed we would spend the rest of our lives together. My job was over, right? All that was left was to show up in my tux on the wedding day—or at least I thought so. A month or so after our proposal, I asked my new fiancée, "Is there anything I can help with?" and she replied with another excited "Yes!" I was officially signed up to help with wedding plans.

Now, I would be lying if I didn't admit I was somewhat happy to be included in planning our big day. Unlike my future wife, I may not have spent my whole life dreaming about this day, but I felt a great amount of pride in the idea that I could help make her dreams come true. I knew my job in wedding planning was to make sure everything she wanted could happen. I took this responsibility very seriously.

Wedding planning reaffirmed what I knew: my future wife and I were the perfect team. There was nothing we couldn't tackle when we put our minds together. I may be biased, but I believe that together, with a *ton* of help from many of our family members, we planned the most perfect wedding I have ever had the privilege of attending.

So the planning journey began. The first—and most important—decision we had to make was the church for the wedding. Luckily, this was an easy one. We both grew up in traditionally Catholic families in the small town of Fairhope, Alabama. There is a small white chapel located on Mobile Bay near Fairhope; it's surrounded by huge Spanish moss—covered oak trees and it offers glorious views of amazing sunsets every night. This was a no-brainer. Choosing the date for the wedding was also pretty easy; whatever day the church was available was our day. May 3, 2014, will forever be a very important day in our home.

While choosing the church was an easy decision, it may have been the *only* easy one. I decided to opt out of some of the smaller details. Obviously the dress, the invitation design, and this thing called a "save the date" were not found anywhere on the list of my responsibilities. (I was relieved.) I got to help with the cool stuff like choosing the reception venue, the food, the band, the drinks, and, most important, the cake—or should I say, *cakes*.

Deciding on the reception venue took the most time. We visited at least five different places, each very cool in its own way. Everyone had a different opinion on the pros and cons of each. There were a lot of factors to determine; we both come from very large families and were getting married in our hometown, so we had to find something big enough to accommodate everyone. We also wanted something different from the weddings we had been to before—this proved challenging. After a few weeks of discussing it, we realized we had been overlooking the perfect venue daily. Literally every day. Devan's father, a farmer, owns a huge barn. The reason we didn't consider it at first: it is a true working barn full of everything needed to run a large-scale farm. It didn't have pretty chandeliers, it was missing a fireplace, and it did not come with any sort of dance floor. But even without all that, we knew it was the perfect place for our wedding. It was the place most special to my wife.

Preparing the barn for the reception was one of the most memorable parts of the wedding planning. My father-in-law and his friends spent nearly two weeks removing everything from the barn, and when I arrived, it was time to begin cleaning. We spent days cleaning the walls and floors. It all had to be perfect for the event. Once we got the barn cleaned, our vendors took over.



First, Nadine Andrews of Sterling Event Design, who was in charge of draping the barn, did her job. She covered the ceiling and walls with beautiful fabrics. Working from a scissor lift, she carefully put each piece of fabric in place. When she completed her part, Will Isherwood, the lighting expert, took over. He hung café lights across the entire interior of the barn as well as around the exterior. He strategically placed spotlights to highlight the centerpieces, the tables, and the large pecan trees that surround the barn. It had been transformed into a ballroom unlike any of the venues we visited.

Finally, the floral and event designer, Ron Barrett of Barrett Greer, went to work. Now, I am not much of a flower expert, but what Ron did was nothing less than amazing. He placed beautiful trees in the barn, hung large balls of flowers throughout, and perfectly placed every piece of decor. I will never forget entering the barn when we arrived for the reception; the place looked like nothing I had seen before. It was better than any other venue we could have chosen. Devan and I were both speechless. The barn will probably never look like that again, but for one night, it was truly amazing.

After we chose the barn, everything else fell into place. We went with the Motown band Hotwire for the reception music. Our friends and families love to dance and have a good time; we knew Hotwire could accommodate and they did not disappoint. Georgia Roussos Catering prepared our menu, full of Devan's and my favorite items. It included an awesome spread of shrimp, a large risotto bar, a carving station, and a ton of hors d'oeuvres.

My favorite part of planning for the wedding was choosing the drinks. At the bar, we offered a variety of beers including Fat Tire, SweetWater Blue, and Landshark (three of our favorites). The wine served was Greg Norman Cabernet and













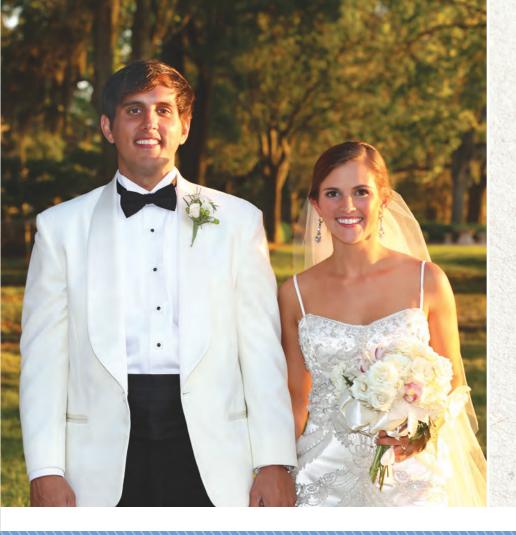
I WILL NEVER FORGET
ENTERING THE BARN
WHEN WE ARRIVED FOR
THE RECEPTION; THE
PLACE LOOKED LIKE
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SEEN BEFORE.

Dreaming Tree Chardonnay. We also included a champagne toast after we cut the cake. The best part of the bar was our specialty drink: a mojito served with a strawberry-mint Popsicle (made by Devan and me). It was a hit!

We always wanted our wedding to be unique. This was something we discussed when making every decision. We really excelled at being different when it came to the cake. Devan knew from the beginning that she didn't want just a regular big white traditional wedding cake; she wanted a lot of cakes. The cake table was the focal point at the entrance into the barn and it was beautiful. We had a round cake, an oval cake, a square cake, some Bundt cakes, banana pudding shooters, and mini pecan pies. Each cake had a different icing and different delicious fillings. The oval cake was covered in blueberries. The entire cake table was decorated using produce from Devan's father's market, Allegri Farm Market. Marsha Laird of Taste of Heaven made the cakes. I really cannot do this cake table justice; you will just have to check out the pictures. Not only was it really pretty, but every piece of dessert on that table was also delicious.

In addition to all the major items, Devan added a lot of extra special little touches to the party. Our guests parted with jars of pepper jellies and preserves that were family recipes.

Each guest also used either an orange koozie or a blue koozie. These colors were used for two reasons. Of course, the first was that we both love Auburn University. The second was that each color noted either "single" or "taken" status. We really were trying to make it easy for our friends to have a good time!



We also had a number of hand-painted signs that Devan and I made together. We placed family photos from our parents' and grandparents' weddings throughout the reception as well. My favorite "special touch" of the entire night was our getaway. We left in my 1977 Jeep CJ-7, which I had saved up for last year in a special fund. As we were leaving, our guests were entertained with a fireworks display as their personal sparklers helped light up the night. It was incredible.

Devan and I grew closer than we had ever been while making decisions together. I recommend to all of my friends that they get involved in any way they can when it comes to planning their big day. You learn a lot about yourself and your future wife in doing so. I promise it is a lot of fun, and seeing it all work out perfectly is awesome.

As all the planning came to an end and I stood at the altar in the most beautiful setting one could ask for, I watched Devan walk down the aisle, as gorgeous as I had ever seen her, and all I could think to myself was, "How did I get so lucky?" ■

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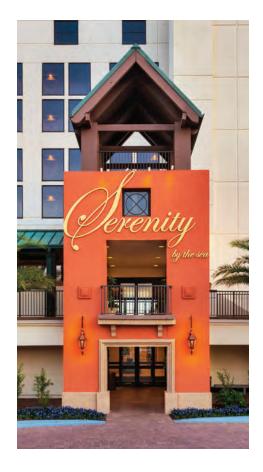
f you are looking for a day of leisure alone or with your posse, Serenity by the sea is an epic win. With sixteen treatment rooms—including one just for couples—guests can enjoy a variety of signature and traditional treatments and massages for men and women. Calming music, soft lighting, and lavender aromatherapy create the ideal environment for a blissful, rejuvenating, and calming experience. Did I mention the canisters of refreshing fruit-infused water and attentive service at every turn? And, of course, there is always the random celebrity sighting. Serenity by the sea is the perfect place for anyone to unwind.

My first visit to Serenity by the sea was an unexpected delight. Private men's and women's lounges provide quiet for guests to relax. I donned an ultraluxe robe and slippers and stepped into the steam room before having a deep tissue massage that melted the week's cares away. The spa's spacious, full-service salon features four pedicure and three manicure stations, four hair service stations, and plenty of room. Before hitting the whirlpool, I witnessed an excited bridal party glide in for a full day of spa treatments. It wasn't my wedding day, but I tried them all too!

The complete renovation of Serenity by the sea also includes an all-new, state-of-the-art fitness center that offers twenty-four-hour access. It is part of a select group of hotel fitness facilities worldwide designed to meet the standards of Hilton Fitness by Precor, an initiative aimed at providing guests with workout essentials while on the go. Personal training sessions, water aerobics, and other fitness classes are available to guests, but I declined a workout on my special spa day and instead set my sights on feeling fabulous and feminine.

The spa's spacious, full-service salon features four pedicure and three manicure stations, four hair service stations, and plenty of room.







The individual body treatments, massage therapies, facials, waxing, nail treatments, hair services, and makeup applications all look fabulous, but I decided that the Serenity Signature treatment couldn't be beat. It included a gentle exfoliation followed by rehydration and my choice of the hand/foot/scalp massage or a Marine Refresher Facial (my pick) that left me feeling better than fine. Spa packages are also available and range from the full-day Total Indulgence package and the Four-Diamond package—both with wine from the preferred wine list at Seagar's (the resort's AAA Four-Diamond restaurant)—to the Millennium Man package designed just for men. Next time, I'll bring my boyfriend!

On my way out, I stopped by the Spa Shoppe to select a gift for a friend and found the finest in spa products, including Phytologie, Pure Fiji, Skin Authority, MD Formulations, and-my personal favorite—bareMinerals makeup. Hair care products include Schwarzkopf's BC Bonacure and OSiS+ lines, and Serenity's exclusive Seaology bath and body products are available for purchase as well. I chose a novelty robe and hair care gift certificate for my friend and included a note with a request that my friend return with me for another day of serenityby the sea.



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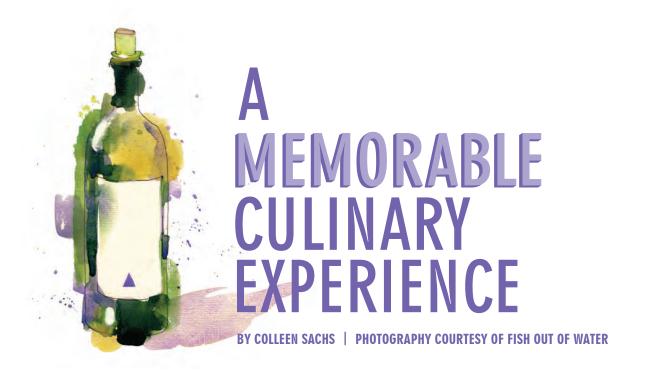


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hen Fish Out of Water first opened in the picturesque communication picturesque community of WaterColor, Florida, I was impressed at the commitment to exceptional quality on display. The restaurant was not only beautiful, but it also paid tribute to the natural beauty surrounding it. And, the menu was a wonderful example of food that was available locally. Now, with the naming of Todd Rogers as the new corporate executive chef for the nine restaurants that are part of St. Joe Club and Resorts (including Fish Out of Water), the commitment to creating an incomparable restaurant that fits its location is still evident.

Rogers, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, has a great deal of experience in the hospitality industry, making him particularly well suited to this position. His impressive résumé includes Ritz-Carlton hotels in Naples, Florida, and Houston, Texas. He also spent time at Nemacolin Woodlands Resort and Spa in Farmington, Pennsylvania, and the Cloister at Sea Island in Georgia. Over his career of nearly thirty years, he has cooked for numerous world leaders and dignitaries, including Queen Elizabeth II. He has also cooked at the prestigious James Beard House in New York.

Rogers embraces the farm-to-table movement and continues to serve food that is produced locally.





CHEF TODD ROGERS

OVER HIS CAREER OF NEARLY
THIRTY YEARS, HE HAS COOKED
FOR NUMEROUS WORLD LEADERS
AND DIGNITARIES, INCLUDING
OUEEN ELIZABETH II.

A quick glance at the menu makes this evident as the words *crab*, *shrimp*, *grouper*, and *snapper* pop off the page. The signature seafood dish at Fish Out of Water is Gulf Black Grouper. A deep bronze exterior gives way to perfectly moist white fish. The fish sits atop pureed cauliflower and leek fondue. Lobster tempura tops it all off.

Crab cakes and shrimp cocktail are seafood starters, and Sicilian soup with calamari, grouper, crab, and shrimp is also on the menu. The FOOW Seafood Grill features grouper, lobster, shrimp, and scallops served with ratatouille and saffron cream.

In addition to an abundance of fresh seafood, there is an abundance of local produce at Fish Out of Water. The best example is the cucumber arugula salad. A sheet of thinly sliced cucumber is wrapped around slightly peppery arugula that is so fresh it tastes like it was just picked from a kitchen garden. The salad is completed with local melon cut into thin squares and stacked, which is then topped with a goat cheese mousse, fragrant with rosemary and thyme.

Although seafood is an obvious choice at Fish Out of Water, other dishes rival their ocean counterparts. The chicken breast on the menu gets the Southern treatment with a sweet tea glaze and Conecuh dirty rice. The duck preparation is exquisite: rosy slices of very tender duck breast are layered on top of confit-laced pea risotto and topped with seared Hudson Valley foie gras. Steak and lamb options emphasize the depth of this restaurant.

Attention to detail includes making breads on-site. A lovely basket of tiny corn muffins, Asiago bread, and focaccia is served with whipped butter topped with a bit of smoked salt. There are many thoughtful touches throughout the menu. For example, an effort is made to make menu items gluten-free when possible. A potato crust on the crab cake appetizer provides a golden crust without wheat. Most desserts are also gluten-free, including the soufflé of the day.

Fine detail also shows in the wine, beer, and spirits program. Wines by the glass are chosen to pair with



individual menu items. Pfaffl Zeiseneck Grüner Veltliner is lovely with the arugula salad. Château Tanunda Grand Barossa Shiraz with the duck is a brilliant choice. Keeping things as local as possible, the craft beer selections come from Pensacola and Apalachicola. Classic cocktails and Fish Out of Water creations (several available without alcohol) are wonderful to enjoy while perusing the menu and relaxing in the beautiful dining room.

The decor serves as a complement to the outdoor surroundings and the Gulf of Mexico: the walls are the color of sand and a sand-dollar motif adorns the carpet. Swaying sea grass is evoked in a metalwork rail with glass finials. For the best view of the Gulf, sit at the high-top tables on the outside veranda, where ceiling fans create a breeze. While the view outside is spectacular, the quiet dining room is elegant and serene, and there really isn't a bad seat in the house.

When discussing his philosophy, Rogers says, "We source the finest ingredients we can find to help us create the best food we can provide. We change the menus three to four times a year to demonstrate the diversity of ingredients found on the Emerald Coast, creating modern, regional, or classical dishes that are intense in flavor and beautiful to the eyes and that provide a memorable culinary experience." A dinner at Fish Out of Water shows that he is succeeding.







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BY J.L. MEYER PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATASHA JASPERSON



In a world where many marriages end in divorce, it seems these couples have figured out the secret to love everlasting. On April 18, about a dozen couples gathered on the sugary-white sands of Mexico Beach, Florida, to renew their promises to each other.





Il couples who had previously been married in the little coastal town or on its shores were invited to return for a shared vow renewal ceremony on the beach at Sunset Park followed by a reception that was held at the El Governor Motel. The event was organized and hosted by the Mexico Beach Community Development Council, whose goal is to create a destination for tourists and locals alike to come and enjoy the beach, the variety of exceptional events, and the genuine hospitality found there.

"Marrying Jack" Mullen, licensed notary and member of the Mexico Beach CDC, performed the ceremony. Mullen loves bringing couples together in holy matrimony in Mexico Beach and sharing his town with visitors. "The best part of doing weddings is working with people at a very happy time in their life," he says. "They've found a certain someone they want to stay with for the rest of their life, and it's really fulfilling to be the one to join them together."

Despite a blustery day at the beach, the rain held out long enough for the shared vow renewal to take place, and the event even attracted the attention of beachgoers who stopped to watch the sweet moments and listened to the thoughtful oration on lifelong commitment.

To learn more about weddings and vow renewals in Mexico Beach, visit MEXICOBEACH.COM







They've found a certain someone they want to stay with for the rest of their life, and it's really fulfilling to be the one to join them together."





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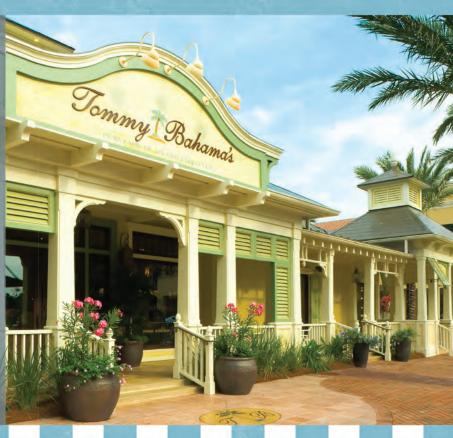
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FOOD AND FANCIES FROM AUSTRALIA TO NEW ZEALAND

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLLEEN SACHS

I sat at my desk with a letter in my hand. An opportunity to spend three weeks in Australia and New Zealand had come up. I was finally going to travel to places I had wanted to go since I was a child, when my father returned completely smitten from a business trip there. They were places that promised enough similarities to the United States to make them familiar yet had enough differences to make them exotic. They were places with fascinating wildlife, spectacular scenery, and a bounty of incredible food.

SYDNEY

Sydney, home to gorgeous beaches and world-class cuisine, was my starting line. There is never a lack of adventure when exploring Sydney. Dive, surf, or cycle at Manly Beach, or spend the night at the Taronga Zoo in a safari-style tent.

The Amora Hotel Jamison was a comfortable home base, with its spacious rooms and professional staff. Sydneysiders love breakfast, and Amora's Gallery Restaurant is a good option. (Try the pancake stack with crispy bacon and caramelized bananas!) Amora Hotel Jamison is located close to the Rocks and the Opera House, both popular Sydney destinations. It is also steps away from the Wynyard train station and a short walk from the Circular Quay (the hub of the ferry system), making transportation convenient.

One of the best things to do when visiting Sydney is free: the six-kilometer walk along the coast from Bondi Beach to Coogee Beach. Starting at Bondi, one of the most famous surfing beaches in the world, the route takes you past beaches, along tidal pools and coves, and through parks and residential areas. Each beach offers exciting activities such as surfing, snorkeling, and swimming. In between the beaches are hidden gems, such as the beautiful natural pool surrounded by rocks, known as a bogey hole, on the

path north of Coogee. Swim in the protected area as waves break on the rocks, or sun on one of the large

Dining in Sydney hits all ranges of price and cuisine. Sepia is considered by many to be one of the best restaurants in the world today, and Quay is known for its outstanding food and breathtaking Opera House views. When researching dining in Sydney, it was obvious to me that one restaurant, Tetsuya's, served as the genesis of Australian fine cuisine by influencing many of today's chefs in Sydney and beyond. Dining at Tetsuya Wakuda's eponymous restaurant is to take a journey through the bounty of Australia via the

There is never a lack of adventure when exploring Sydney. Dive, surf, or cycle at Manly Beach, or spend the night at the Taronga Zoo in a safari-style tent.

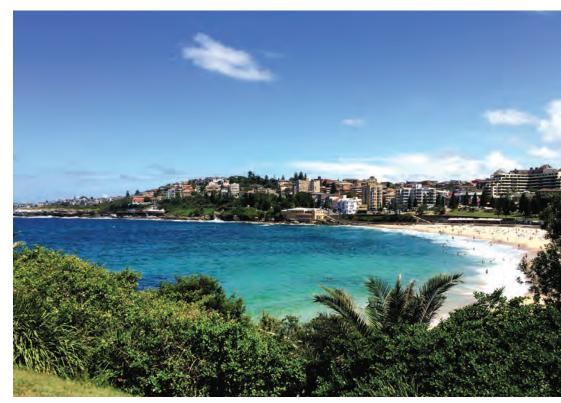
cuisines of Japan and France. Tetsuya's decor, with its extensive art collection and tables overlooking a lovely Japanese garden, exudes quiet elegance.

So does the food. Nothing is over the top; whether it is chilled pea soup with a quenelle of bitter chocolate sorbet or seared veal tenderloin with smoked bone marrow, the highest quality ingredients come together in creative ways. Tetsuya's signature dish is a confit of Petuna ocean trout—with brilliant coralhued flesh and a silky texture that show beautifully served with a fresh, crunchy fennel salad and a bit of trout roe. Tetsuya's degustation menu of ten courses is thoughtfully paired with wines from Australia, New Zealand, France, Italy, Spain, and Japan.

On the casual end of things is Chur Burger, which is in the food-obsessed Surry Hills area. The menu is simple: thick, juicy burgers, creamy milkshakes, and crave-worthy sides. House-made soda is pulled from a tap, while beer and wine are also available. The burgers aren't limited to beef; a lamb burger is dressed with mint sauce and feta, while a spiced chickpea fritter is topped with grated beetroot and honey labne. The best bite of food at Chur Burger was a blackboard special: superb McClure's pickle spears, coated with a crumb crust, deep-fried to a golden brown, and served with jalapeño aioli.



Fried McClure's pickle spears with jalapeno aioli, Chur Burger



Coogee Beach

HOBART, TASMANIA

Further south is the Australian state of Tasmania, a large island with almost half its area dedicated to conservation. Strict quarantine laws keep out potentially invasive plants, making Tasmania a locavore's paradise. Hobart has a deep history as the gateway to Antarctica, but it also has a very young, hip feel. In the evening, locals make their way to Salamanca Place to have dinner and catch up with friends. Restaurants like Cargo Bar Pizza Lounge have outdoor dining along the sidewalk, lending a communal air to the neighborhood. On Saturdays, Salamanca is also the site of a popular market with about three hundred vendor stalls.

Franklin, a new bar and restaurant not far from Salamanca, is one of the hottest tickets in town. Chef David Moyle sources the best that Tasmania has to offer for his menu, which emphasizes seafood (including periwinkles, octopus, and abalone) but doesn't disappoint with meat and fowl either (sweetbreads, pigeon, and bone marrow). With a modern aesthetic, Franklin is a perfect fit in Hobart.

Just up the Derwent River is professional gambler David Walsh's MONA. Walsh has created a world that includes the Museum of Old and New Art, restaurants, the Moorilla winery, the Moo Brew brewery, and entertainment venues. The best way to get to MONA is via the ferry, which features the Posh Pit, where guests are served wine, beer, and canapés or you can spend less on the ride and sit on seats that look like fanciful sheep.

The grounds are dotted with art installations, including an ornate metal cement mixer. The museum-which explores death, sex, and dark themes, such as in the Hiroshima in Tasmania exhibit—can be thought provoking, irreverent, avant-garde, disturbing, and beautiful all at once. As the cylindrical elevator descended into the bowels of the museum, I felt as if I was inside the early 1990s video game Myst, working my way through a labyrinth and looking for clues.

MONA's restaurant, the Source, is a sensory experience in the best of ways. Subdued but elegant, the dining room has a lovely river view and is the perfect backdrop for Chef Philippe Leban's food. Chef Leban's culinary pedigree and name may be French, but his accent and food are all Australia. Visiting at the end of the Australian summer meant fruits and vegetables were at their peak, as exhibited



by my warm salad of yellow beans, mint, and peaches. The fresh seafood included a mound of Moreton Bay bugs (flathead lobsters) covered with slivers of apple resembling fish scales, and dory lapped with chaudfroid sauce and served with baby zucchini and radishes. Local raspberries were the star of a napoleon, and a chocolate tart was teamed with sweet strawberries and ice cream made with local cream. To accompany a meal at the Source, try one of Moorilla's wines from either the New World-inspired Praxis series or the Old World-style Muse series.

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, MONA's open-air market of clothing, crafts, and consumables was in full swing. I felt very connected to the island—which residents lovingly call Tassie—as I sat on the grass, listened to music, and had a cone of Scott Logie's Black Mountain Larder Crème Anglaise ice cream, made from Derwent Valley dairy products.

Hobart has a deep history as the gateway to Antarctica, but it also has a very young, hip feel.

DUNEDIN

Leaving Australia behind me, the South Island of New Zealand provided something different at every turn, beginning in the southeast coastal town of Dunedin. Some say it is the most Scottish town outside of Scotland, and the damp, chilly day emphasized that idea during my visit.



Raspberry napoleon at The Source

Princes and George Streets meet at a statue of the Scottish poet Robert Burns at the Octagon, an eight-sided plaza in the city center. I strolled along these streets taking in views of historic buildings, gardens, shops, and restaurants. Locals recommended Fish Hook (their motto is "We catch it, we cook it") on George Street for classic fish and chips, with a golden beer-battered crust and incredibly moist, flaky fish inside.

Just off the Octagon on Stuart Street is Scotia Bar and Bistro. Mary Jane Hewitson, who owns Scotia with her husband, Jazz, and his brother Paul, related that Scotia got its start as a whisky-collecting competition between Jazz and Paul (more than 250 varieties are behind the bar today). Scotia pays tribute to Scottish cuisine in a most delicious way. Mary Jane says, "People think Scottish food is stodgy, but we do some little twists on things." A New Zealand touch is part of each Scottish classic. New Zealand lamb shines, with a meltingly tender duo of rack of lamb and slow-cooked neck of hogget (the next stage up in age from lamb) served atop a rice-stuffed onion. Scotia's haggis tastes like very moist meatloaf. Instead of the traditional accompaniment of neeps (turnips), Scotia serves mashed kumara, a New Zealand sweet potato. It is a dish so delicious that you always want just one more bite. The same is true of the cullen skink (smoked fish, potato, and herb chowder).

After eating your way through Dunedin, spend some time on the nearby Otago Peninsula, with the Pacific on one side and Otago Harbour on the other. The peninsula is home to a breeding colony of northern royal albatross, and there are abundant opportunities to explore hills and valleys, stroll along the beach, and view wildlife up close.

One of the best ways to do all of this is on a mountain bike. While it is easy to rent a bike and head out on your own, I opted for a small group tour from Offtrack MTB Tours. Guide Nick Beekhuis led our group through bucolic pastureland and around marshlands and tidal inlets populated by swans and small wading birds. Near the end of the ride, we left our bikes at a car park and hiked a short distance across farmland to a pristine beach, where a yellow-eyed penguin nest was visible and fur seals provided entertainment.



Cullen skink at Scotia in Dunedin



Salmon beet salad at Scotia in Dunedin



A fur seal on an Otago Peninsula beach - Photo by Val Deeb

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FIORDLAND NATIONAL PARK

Cross to New Zealand's west coast to see majestic Milford Sound in Fiordland National Park, a major part of the Te Wahipounamu World Heritage site. Tours are available by plane, boat, and kayak. While much of the country's geology resulted from volcanic activity, the fiords (locally referred to as sounds) were created by glaciers. Fiordland is accessible and popular with visitors for its stark, unspoiled beauty. As the boat I was on made its way through the sounds, I realized that it was one of the few places I had ever been where people had left no mark. The cliffs are covered with beech trees, the tree ferns are lush and abundant, and clouds hang on jagged peaks, giving the area an otherworldly feel.

On rainy days (with three hundred inches each year, this is one of the rainiest places on Earth), the cliffs explode with waterfalls, the most famous of which is Stirling Falls. The rain also makes Milford Sound an exceptional scuba destination, as a layer of freshwater from the rain collects tannins that darken the sound, causing sea life that normally avoids light and lives deep in the water to come much closer to the surface.

AKAROA

Further up the east coast from Dunedin is the charming village of Akaroa, located in the crater of

a defunct volcano. Akaroa is as French as Dunedin is Scottish. Enjoy a meal of mussels steamed with cider in the fragrant, lavender-lined front garden of the Brasserie. Stroll down Rue Lavaud and Beach Road past cafés, boutiques, parks, and the beach. Everything here moves at a leisurely pace.

Akaroa Harbour is home to Hector's dolphins; at just four to five feet in length, they are the smallest dolphins in the world. Tour operators at the wharf take visitors on boats to see—and even swim with—these beautiful dolphins in a marine sanctuary.

While I was planning this trip, a friend recommended a tour so unusual that I just had to try it out. Local postman Robin Burleigh drives a bright red van that holds up to ten people. In the mornings and afternoons, he drives it as a school bus; during the middle of the day, he takes people through ten valleys and stops at about a hundred and forty postboxes on his rural route, which covers a large portion of the Banks Peninsula near Akaroa. Robin has a wealth of information about the area and conveys it in an entertaining way. He made stops at places that aren't found in guidebooks, including a small church that had Maori carvings throughout the interior and a picnic table where he set out tea, coffee, biscuits, and cheese. His wife, Jo, had included homemade relishes and pastries. One of the last stops was the place Robin called "the most beautiful beach in the world": the beach at Le Bons Bay, which was peaceful and had sand that sparkled in the sun. It was easy to see why this is the place Robin and Jo call home.

A group of four ladies (three of them sisters) had come down from Wellington and Christchurch to take the tour, and we spent the day trading stories and comparing accents. Along the way, I got some information about my next destination—Wellington.

WELLINGTON

Wellington is located on the southern coast of New Zealand's North Island. With water and hills surrounding the city, beautiful views are easy to find. Take the cable car from Lambton Quay to the scenic lookout at Kelburn; then, watch the sunset from the top of Mount Victoria.

For a different kind of view, I headed to Cuba Street, where I shopped bohemian style at vintage boutiques, perused art galleries, and watched street performers. Global Culture sells great kiwiana, such as artisan jewelry, Royce McGlashen pottery, and prints of Dick Frizzell's controversial *Mickey to Tiki Tu Meke*, which depicts the transformation of a cartoon character into a Maori mythological icon.

A few blocks from Cuba Street is the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Filled with interactive exhibits, Te Papa highlights New Zealand's nature, art, culture, and geological history (including an earthquake simulation). *The Bush City* outdoor exhibit takes you through the landscape and features a sand pit that lets kids dig for fossils. The *Mana Whenua* exhibit explores the culture of the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand.

Wellington is about many things, but food just might rank above all the others. On Cuba Street, Floriditas Café and Restaurant is an excellent stop for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Go for a leisurely brunch of avocado, rocket (arugula), and poached eggs on ciabatta with hollandaise, and wash it down with a Bellini.

Across the street from Te Papa is the elegant and whimsical Hippopotamus, located in the hip Museum Art Hotel. Lunch, dinner, and high tea can all be enjoyed there. When you step off the elevator, be sure to look up and see the herd of tiny elephants walking upside down on the ceiling. Just inside the entrance, a beautiful mirrored bar reflects

the mod pink-and-green decor and the harbor view. It is a lovely place to enjoy afternoon cocktails and a board of duck liver pâté with mulled wine gelée, cornichon, caramelized onion, and an assortment of bread and crackers.

In the Mount Victoria area, Ortega Fish Shack produces some of the best food in Wellington. The atmosphere is laid back, but the food and drinks are seriously good. I had creamy oysters from Stewart Island and gurnard, a sustainable fish that also happens to be delicious. Meltingly tender beef filet with fries and crepes with orange caramel sauce prove that seafood isn't the only thing this restaurant does well. There is also an extensive list of wine, beer (Kereru Toasted Coconut Porter is a must try), and creative cocktails.

ROTORUA

When planning this trip, I wasn't sure that I wanted to go to Rotorua, with its reputation for being a bit of a tourist trap (one of its nicknames is Roto-Vegas). But I found that a knowledgeable guide could make all the difference when you want to get off the beaten path. Susanna Shelton, a US transplant, and Aussie Karen Conroy conduct small group tours of the area. In one day, I saw a redwood forest, steaming mud pools, and boiling geothermal springs. I learned how locals still use the steaming pools, within steps of their homes, for cooking. I stood at a spot where I saw adjacent lakes of completely different colors, visited the lovely Government Gardens, and made a sixtystep descent through lush bush to see Okere Falls.

AUCKLAND

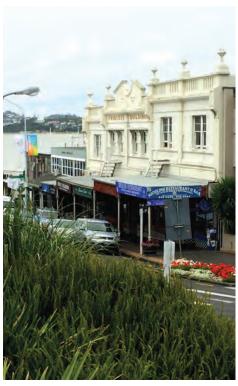
While in Australia, I had the good fortune to meet twin sisters from the Auckland area, one who lived on Waiheke Island and the other in Devonport. A conversation and some handwritten notes from the sisters transformed an ordinary day of visiting tourist destinations into a lovely day of exploration for me.

Reachable by ferry from downtown Auckland, Waiheke Island offers vineyards, breweries, beaches, hiking, diving, and zip-lining. A twenty-five-minute ferry ride from Waiheke ends at the charming village of Devonport, where I wandered up Victoria Road, stopping into shops along the way, before reaching Mount Victoria. The steep but pleasant climb paid off with views of Auckland and the surrounding area. It was a relaxing afternoon where my biggest decision was whether to eat at Manuka Cafe, Corelli's, or Bette's Bar and Eatery.

As I enjoyed my meal (at Manuka Cafe), I thought about the things I had learned about Australia and New Zealand. The people are friendly, the food is fresh and delicious, the scenery is spectacular, and sisters apparently like to travel together. Like my father before me, I was completely smitten.



Delicious Bellini at Hippopotamus, Wellington



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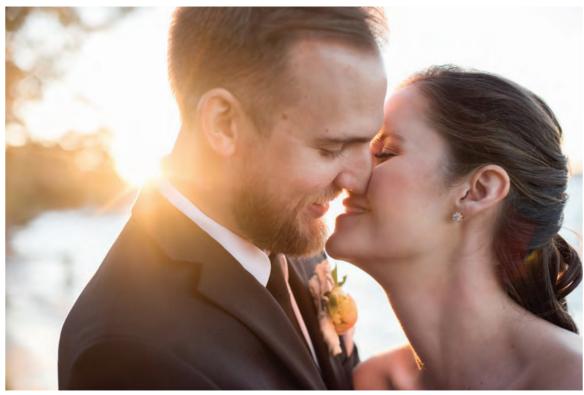


Photo by Melissa Wilson Photography

hen you dream about having the perfect wedding, you dream about floating down the aisle with a gorgeous soul mate, cutting a beautiful three-tier cake, and then partying the night away at a breathtaking venue that you will never forget. But who will be there to help you put everything in order—to make sure that you have the perfect florist, the photographer you adore, and the cake that tastes better than you could ever have imagined?

Every wedding needs a little assistance, and that's where the WES comes in! The WES, an abbreviation for Wedding and Event Specialists, is your one-stop wedding and event collective, currently housing over twenty vendors that cover everything from event planning and design to photography and catering.

The WES, formerly known as the Wedding Studio, is located in Pensacola, Florida. It was originally the idea of a group of vendors who took a trip to West Palm Beach for a wedding in a bustling destination area. After the trip, Sara Gillianne, one of the original founders of the Wedding Studio and owner of Sara Gillianne Weddings and Events, decided it was time to revolutionize the wedding industry on the Gulf Coast. She wanted to make Pensacola and the surrounding area a hot spot for destination weddings.

Gillianne opened her shop in a small office building on Zaragoza Street and soon ran out of space for all of the vendors interested in joining the newly formed collective. This led to the discovery of and relocation to the shop's new home in the heart of downtown Pensacola. "We were lucky to find a beautiful location that embodies us now, located at 130 South Palafox Street," says Gillianne. "The WES is a place where wedding and event vendors have a beautiful, professional place to meet their clients. A spot that can inspire and make the client feel comfortable—not to mention the convenience of it all."

One of the WES vendors, Melissa Wilson of Melissa Wilson Photography, explains, "Being part of a collaborative venture such as the WES gives me the opportunity to bask in inspiration and creativity with some of the best vendors on the Gulf Coast! And being able to offer a beautiful meeting space for my sweet couples is the best bonus!"

After just one year in the new location, Gillianne—along with Chloe Winchester of Supposey Wedding Florals and co-owner of Gulf Coast Pedicabs, Jessi Field of Jessi Field Photography, and Ramsey Coates of AnydayDJ.com—decided that it was time for a change. "We are all heading up different parts of the leadership here and helping entrepreneurs and other locals promote, refine, and grow their small businesses," says Winchester.

The WES is a place where wedding and event vendors have a beautiful, professional place to meet their clients. A spot that can inspire and make the client feel comfortable, not to mention the convenience of it all.





Photo by Melissa Wilson Photography

Having someone by your side from the beginning until your wedding day can be a relief and even allow for more time to focus on the little things that really make all the difference.

Photo by Jessi Field

After pulling in hundreds of weddings, this talented group of vendors realized the potential for growth in a thriving downtown area. This led to their announcement in March 2015 that the Wedding Studio would be rebranded to the WES. This opened the doors to other types of events, both for locals and others looking for a destination to host their parties, concerts, and more. "We are able to work with the best in the industry to create events like no other in the Pensacola area," explains Leia Triplett of Sara Gillianne Weddings and Events. "The creative process is so much more exciting when you have others to bounce ideas off of. I work best when I work with a team, and that's what the WES is: a team of wedding and event professionals that all bring something special and unique to the table. Each vendor company has its own style and that just adds value and depth to the WES."

By offering more services, the WES has also attracted new vendors and has once more opened the door to allow more creative artists to join. "The best advice I have for anyone out there, even with the smallest thought of starting a business: Do it! Don't wait. Start today, dream big, and work hard," Winchester says. "You will have to sacrifice a lot, but a big hustle and constant hard work will make your passion and dream into a reality."

According to The Wedding Report, there were 3,798 weddings in the Pensacola area in 2013, bringing in over \$90 million. Couples from out of town need the most assistance in planning their weddings, since most are either not familiar with the area or have not been back recently to see what new areas have grown since their last visit. So Gillianne and her team at the WES decided to make the



wedding planning and execution process as stressfree as possible, allowing the couple to come in from out of town and find all their vendors in one place. This helps the couple to relax before the big day. Having someone by your side from the beginning until your wedding day can be a relief and even allow for more time to focus on the little things that really make all the difference.

"I have daydreamed about the perfect wedding ever since I was a little girl," says WES bride Lindsey Speedy, who celebrated her wedding last year and gives a perfect example of what the WES strives to bring to brides from across the country. "When I became engaged, I couldn't wait to start planning and organizing everything; the only problem was that our wedding destination was about two thousand miles away from where we live. Even though I was born and raised in Pensacola, I had no idea who to talk to, where to go, what questions to ask—nothing. I almost thought we should just run away and elope! Thank goodness I found Sara and her team of specialists at the WES. Our wedding planning experience was absolutely stress-free and a lot of fun! They took our vision and made it a reality,

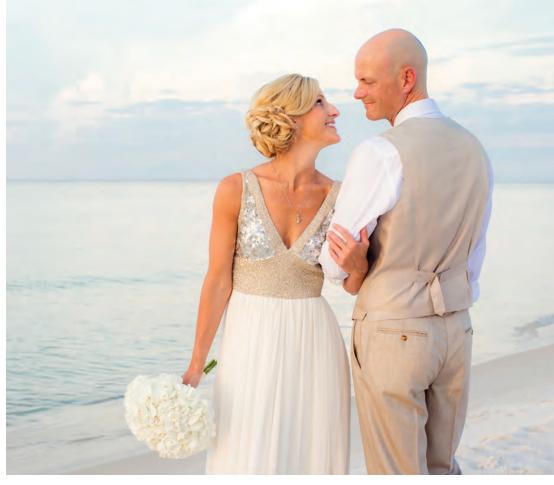


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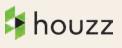




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down to the last detail. Our wedding was everything we wanted and more. We are forever grateful to the WES team for making our wedding day the absolute best day of our lives!"

The WES doesn't only focus on destination weddings. They make it convenient for local couples—a huge part of their clientele—to stop by, speak to a wedding or event planner, and get a complete overview of everything the WES has to offer. The WES can assist with all of the wedding vendors, from beginning to end, or with just one or two last-minute additions. They offer a little bit of everything, which allows for a unique spin on each couple's ideal wedding. Couples can bring in their ideas and watch them unfold!

"The WES is a great tool for me as a wedding planner because it allows me to coordinate a dream wedding for any couple, no matter the style or budget," says Triplett, who has been a wedding planner for over five years and loves the selection that the WES offers clients. "We have a diverse group of photographers, florists, bakers, calligraphers, musicians, caterers, and makeup artists that all offer a unique and personal style with a varying range of prices. Knowing these vendors and their level of work makes the planning process much easier. We all work so closely together that we are able to build a trust with each vendor. When our couples see all of their vendors working so hard together to pull off their dream wedding, it makes their day that much more special! And as a wedding planner, that's the most important thing to me."

When Gillianne wrote up the business plan for the Wedding Studio, she never imagined the vision would bring so many creative people together and develop into what it is today. "I love everything that we have become, from this being a simple idea to our dream growing and improving right before my eyes," she says. "The vendors are more than just vendors; we have become family."

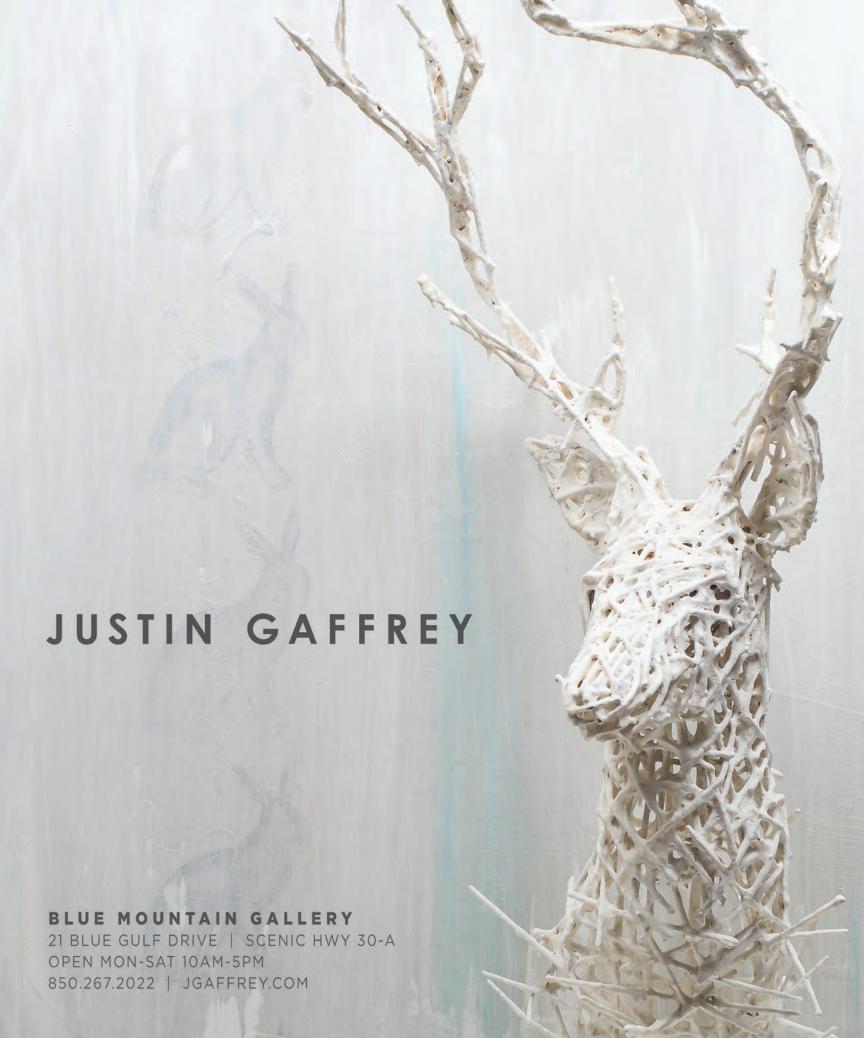
The WES is open to all wedding and event vendors interested in joining the collective and invites you to stop by and meet the vendors currently calling the WES their home. W

They offer a little bit of everything, which allows for a unique spin on each couple's ideal wedding. Couples can bring in their ideas and watch them unfold!



Photo by Melissa Wilson Photography

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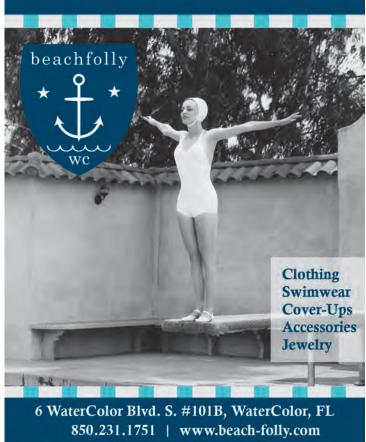


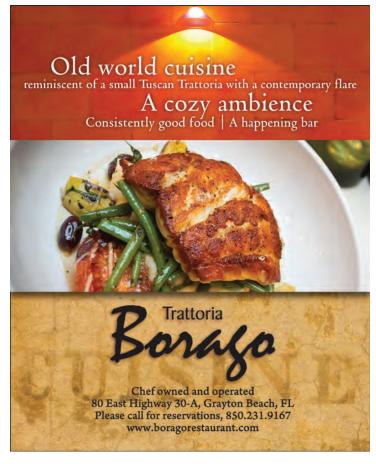














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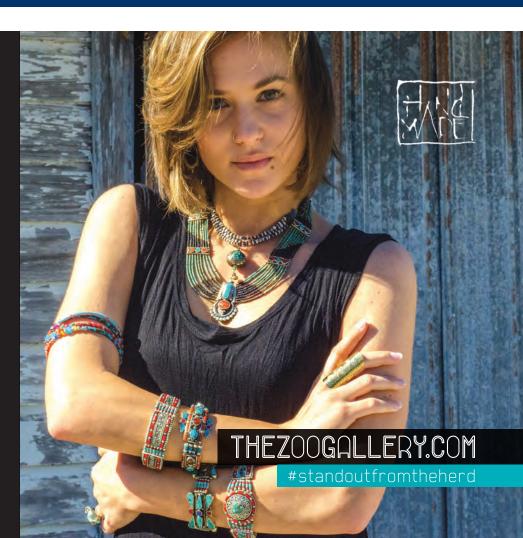


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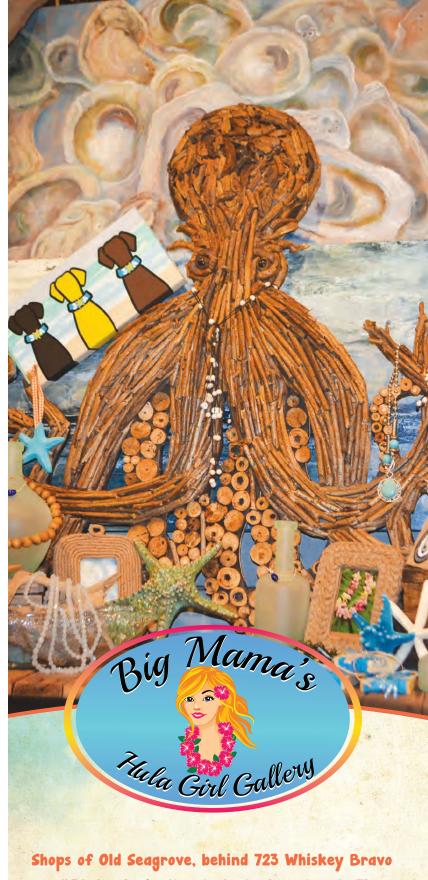
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