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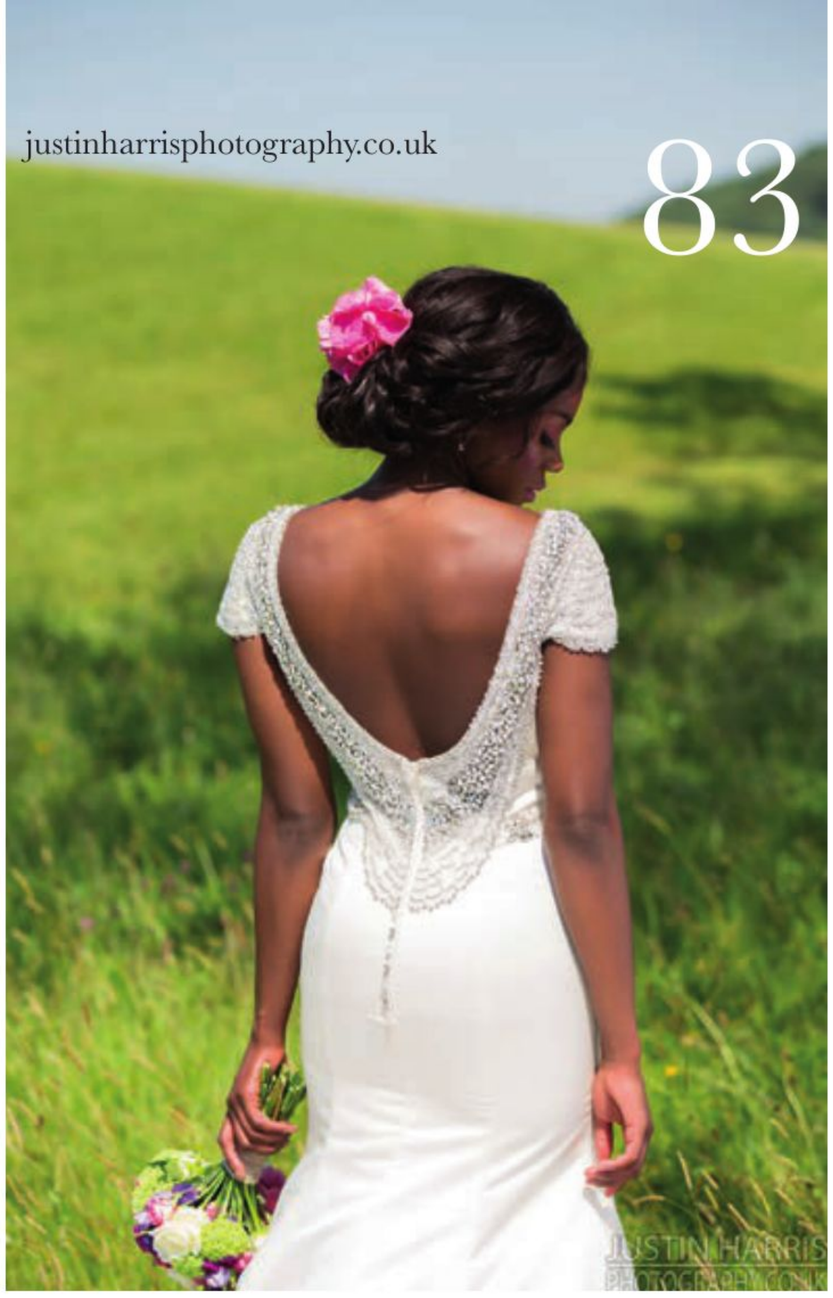

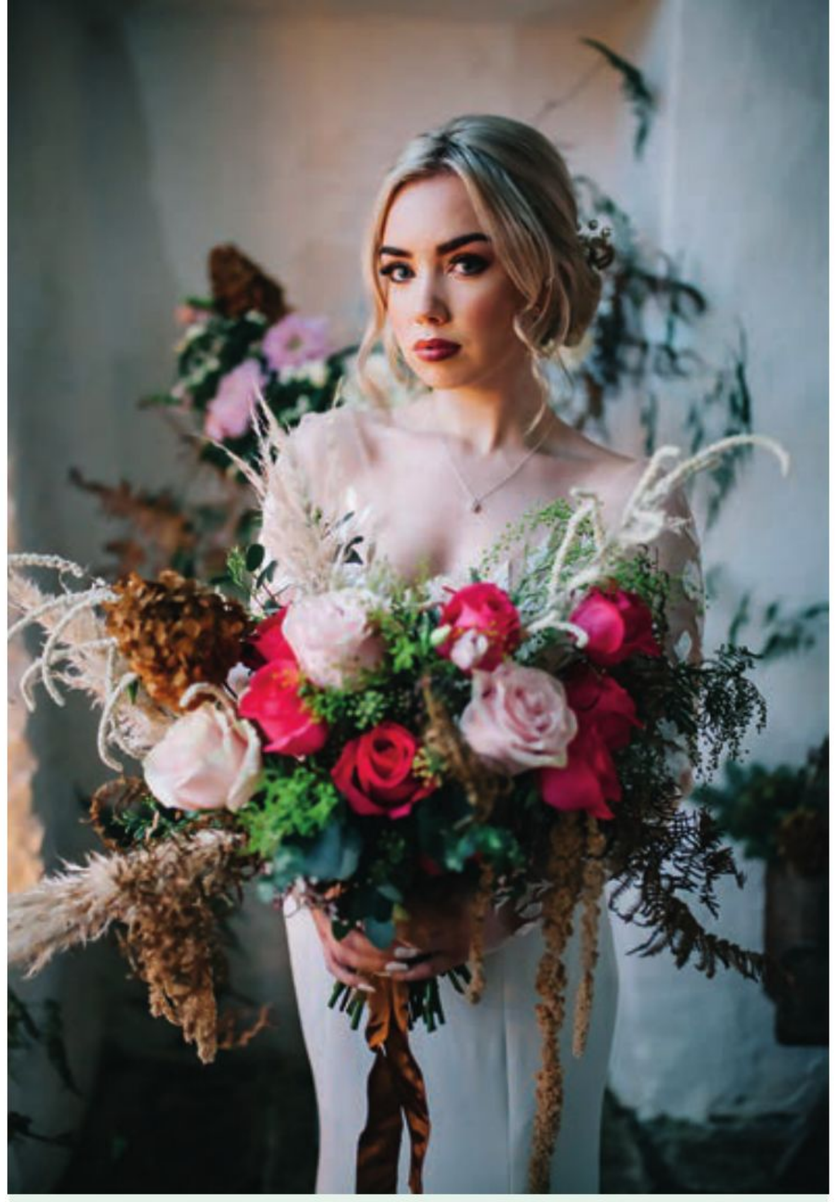

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This issue's cover is taken from the regional shoot on page 103. It was photographed by Andrew Cockerill Photography (andrewcockerill.com).

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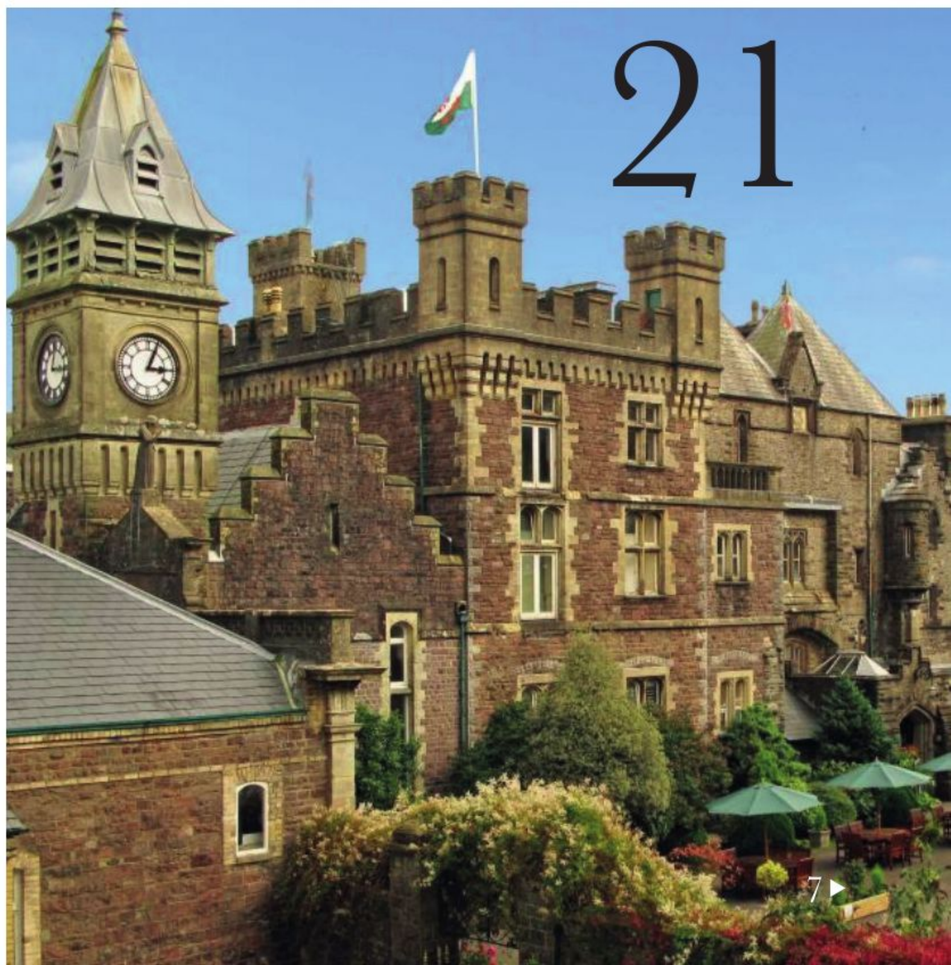

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ISSN 1756-6428

kd EVENTS & PUBLISHING
cwe COUNTY WEDDING EVENTS

Hop into spring

It's finally time to get rid of that winter coat and celebrate – spring is here! I for one am happy to say goodbye to the gloomy weather and welcome in the new season. There's always a hint of excitement in the air as everyone's getting over the winter blues and preparing for summer.

This is an exciting time in your life, whether you're newly engaged or an existing reader – we understand how important it is to get those details just right. We want your nuptials to not only look spectacular but also be something you look back at fondly for the rest of your life, so think of us as your new BBF for all things weddings.

This issue is bursting with inspiration; we have four real weddings starting on page 39, a guide on how to choose your big-day entertainment on page 65 and the latest gowns on page 83.

I hope you enjoy the issue and don't forget you can submit your wedding at any time by visiting this link – yoursouthwales.wedding/get-involved-real-wedding

Melissa x

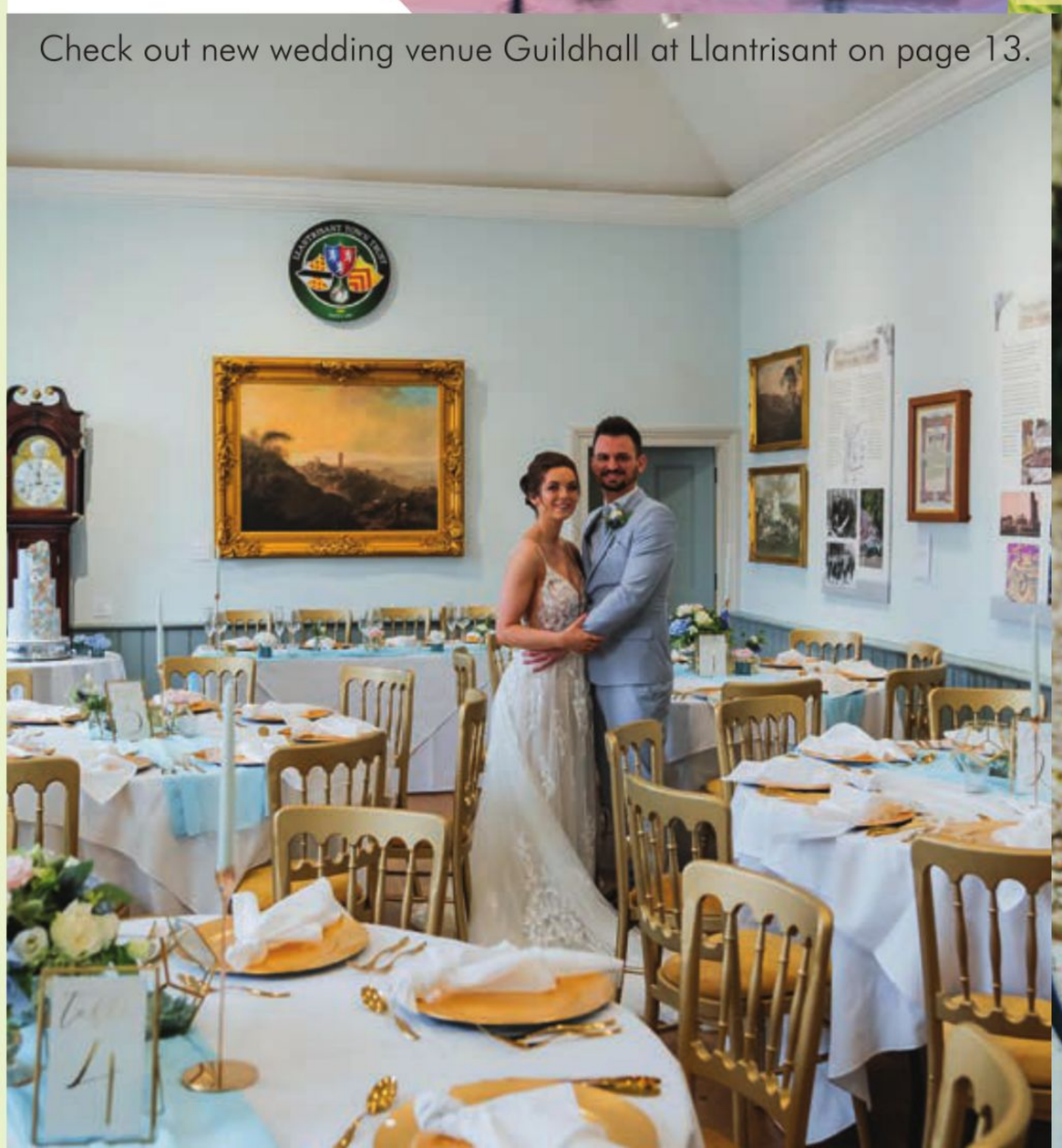
Melissa Barker,
Editor

Check out our fun and frivolous fashion feature on page 91.

When it comes to dress shopping, there's a lot of pressure to find *the one*. You want something that's going to make you feel like a bride but also complement your figure and personality. To help, we've asked some of the region's finest boutiques to send in their favourite gowns on page 83.

WIN!
A HONEYMOON IN OMAN, WORTH £3,000, ON PAGE 129.

Check out new wedding venue Guildhall at Llantrisant on page 13.



I'm in love with bride Rhian's wedding dress. Flip to page 39 to see more from her wedding.

EDITOR'S LETTER

ffotos.co.uk

How adorable is this picture? Turn to page 44 to find out more about Laura and Bart's nuptials.

Looking for somewhere hot for your honeymoon? You're in luck! We're focusing on Morocco over on page 122.

Choosing your wedding entertainment can be a difficult task; there's a lot you need to take into consideration – from the age range of your guests to finding an entertainer everyone will love. Turn to page 65 to get heaps of inspiration.

Ensure your locks looks amazing with our hair accessories feature on page 100.

eveashphotography.co.uk

I love Lucinda and Matthew's forest-themed wedding. Check out page 51 to see more.

I was lucky enough to visit Llechwen Hall Hotel in Llanfabon and try their luxurious facilities. Read my full review on page 34.

FONMON CASTLE

When Only a Castle will do!

Venues don't come much more special than a 12th-century Norman castle and Fonmon Castle is set in 340 beautiful acres in the Vale of Glamorgan.

On Saturday 21st March we are delighted to launch our brand new contemporary Wedding Village featuring our three top hat Tipi with a Wedding Venue showcase. Couples are invited to book a time slot to come and view the beautiful spaces and talk to our experienced wedding team and award winning caterers. Our wedding village includes giant lawn games, chill out areas, beautiful scented gardens and a view of the breath-taking landscape, all providing a picture perfect setting to celebrate.

2020/2021 dates filling fast… Ask about our midweek all-inclusive package starting from £7,995 for 50 daytime and 100 evening guests.

Chris Andrews Photography

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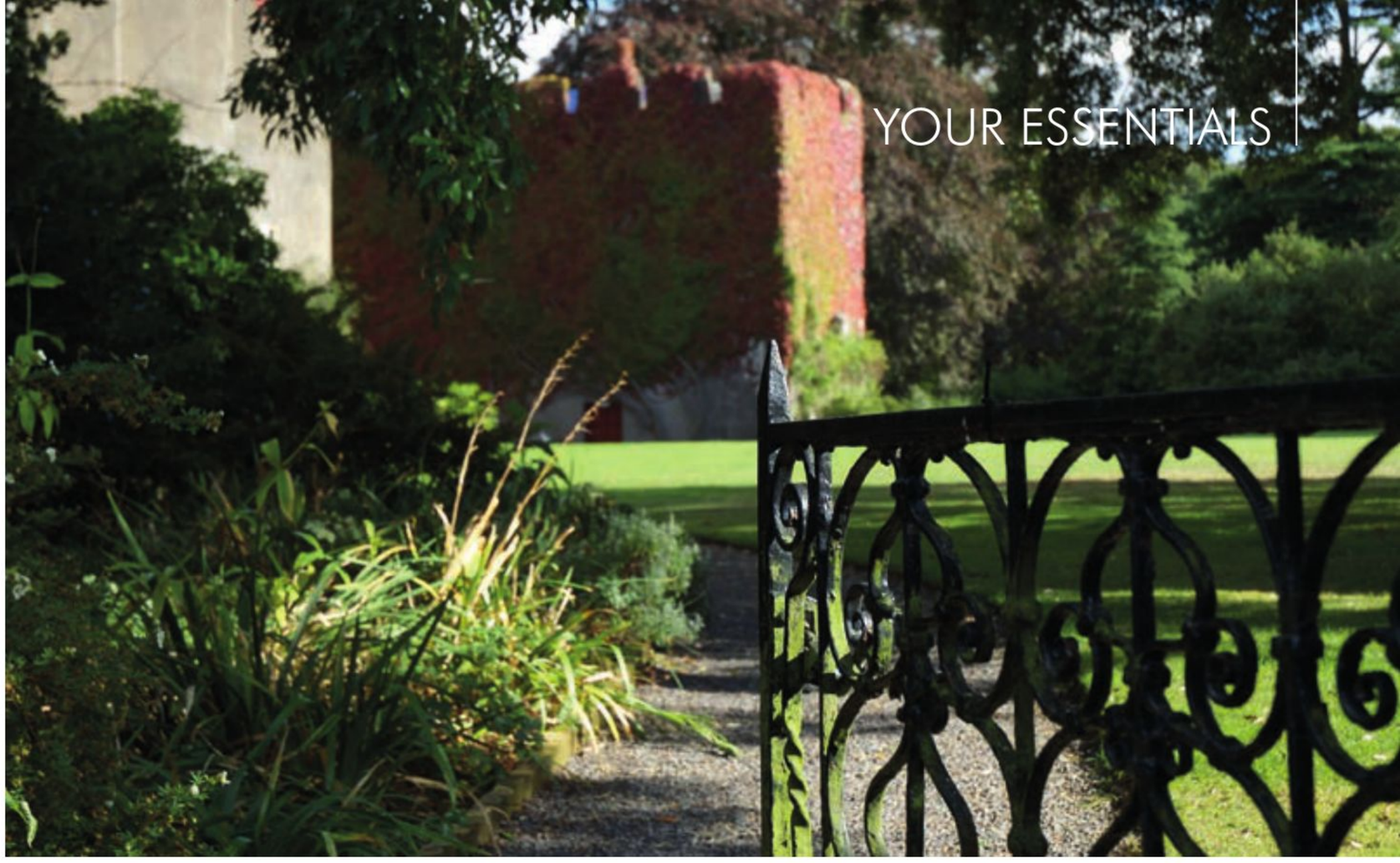

CONGRATULATIONS!

Fonmon Castle Limited was recently listed as one of the finalists in the Wedding Venue of the Year category at The Welsh Wedding Awards 2020. The property changed ownership last January and is now in the care of Nigel Ford and family who are currently making renovations and restorations to maintain this 12th-century Grade I listed castle.

Gaynor Openshaw, the sales and events manager, said: "We're delighted to have been nominated for Wedding Venue of the Year in our region and thank all of the lovely couples that voted for us." Visit fonmoncastle.com for more.

REST AND RELAXATION

The four-star Vale Resort in Hensol has been named Wales' Best Resort Spa 2019 for the third year in a row at the fifth annual World Spa Awards.

The Vale Spa has 19 treatment rooms and five bespoke relaxation zones. These areas include leather sofas, magazines, water beds, water features, low lighting, a 20-metre pool, a whirlpool bath, a steam room and a sauna.

Stephanie Metson, the marketing manager at the Vale Resort, said: "To have won this award not once, not twice, but three times, is testament to the hard work our entire team put in day in and day out. The World Travel Awards is recognised on a global scale and is an industry-wide benchmark of quality, so to meet its high standards more than once demonstrates our commitment to offering the best quality service. We believe our spa, which is Wales' largest, offers a warm welcome and access to plenty of bespoke relaxation suites, in addition to indulgent treatments, and that sets us apart from other hotels with spa facilities. We recently also announced a craft gin distillery which is opening in the cellars of Hensol Castle, and if that wasn't enough, this summer we're investing in a major spa refurbishment. It will include expanding our spa's wet facilities, further evidence of how we continue to invest and raise the standard of our offerings."

For more information, visit valeresort.com

Nearlywed NEWS

All the latest from around the region

NEW VENUE ALERT!

The Guildhall at Llantrisant is a new wedding venue in Llantrisant. The 14th-century building stands proudly on the crest of a hill alongside the splendour of an ancient castle. Surrounded by breathtaking landscapes and scenery, the Grade II listed property offers a wealth of activities. As a heritage and visitors centre, it tells the remarkable story of a historic Welsh town which has witnessed a colourful past unlike any other.

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To find out more, visit llantrisantguildhall.co.uk

A LUXURY ADDITION

De Courceys Manor is a five-star wedding venue in Cardiff. The property recently won Best Wedding Venue in East Wales at the 2019 National Wedding Awards and to celebrate has launched a new pamper and prep suite. Situated within the manor's grounds, the new addition will have an impeccable interior design for utmost comfort and relaxation. Couples can expect a dedicated dressing area for hair and make-up, a luxury bedroom that sleeps up to six people, a stylish living area, a private garden with seating, robes, slippers and a continental breakfast to your door on the morning of the wedding.

To find out more, visit decourceys.co.uk

Ring-a-ding-bling

Luxury jewellers, Laings, has launched 2020 with a campaign that's all about adventure and exploring. The New Year brings with it an air of excitement and Laings Cardiff has transformed to reflect this. Featuring a range of elegant diamonds and handsome wristwatches, the beautiful pieces are perfect for weddings.

Sally Alobaidi, the head of marketing at Laings, commented: "Laings will be with you every step of the way, for any adventure that you embark on. Whether it's a proposal to take the next step of your journey together, an anniversary present to celebrate how far you've come or a bespoke piece of jewellery to mark a new adventure, we'll be with you to your final destination and beyond."

Check out laingsuk.com to see more.

A DAY OF CELEBRATION

The Ceridwen Centre is a multi-award-winning eco-sensitive holiday retreat and wedding venue situated within 40 acres of an organic farm in the Teifi Valley. Couples looking for a fabulous heated barn for a workshop, meeting or party are welcome to visit on Saturday 21st March, 2020 between 10am and 12:30pm. Couples planning their vows are welcome to visit between 1:30 and 4pm.

The staff anticipate that it will be of most interest to those planning an out-of-summer ceremony and/or reception between mid-September and the end of April.

Teas, coffees and cake will be served all day with soup and homemade bread available at lunchtime.

For more information, visit ceridwencentre.co.uk

DRINK IT ALL IN

The Isle of Harris Distillery's products are now available to purchase from Fire and Ice in Pembrokeshire. First opening in 2015 in The Isle of Harris, a small island in the Outer Hebrides off the coast of Scotland, the company has five local distillers and a team of more than 30 staff.

The Hearach Single Malt is a single malt whisky that's been matured in ex-bourbon and ex-oloroso casks at a shore-side warehouse. Alternatively, the award-winning Isle of Harris Gin is made up of juniper, coriander, bitter orange peel, sugar and liquorice.

Check out harrisdistillery.com and fireandicewales.com for more information.

Finalist in the upcoming 3rd Welsh #WeddingAwards 2020

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To find out more, visit oharafloraldesign.com

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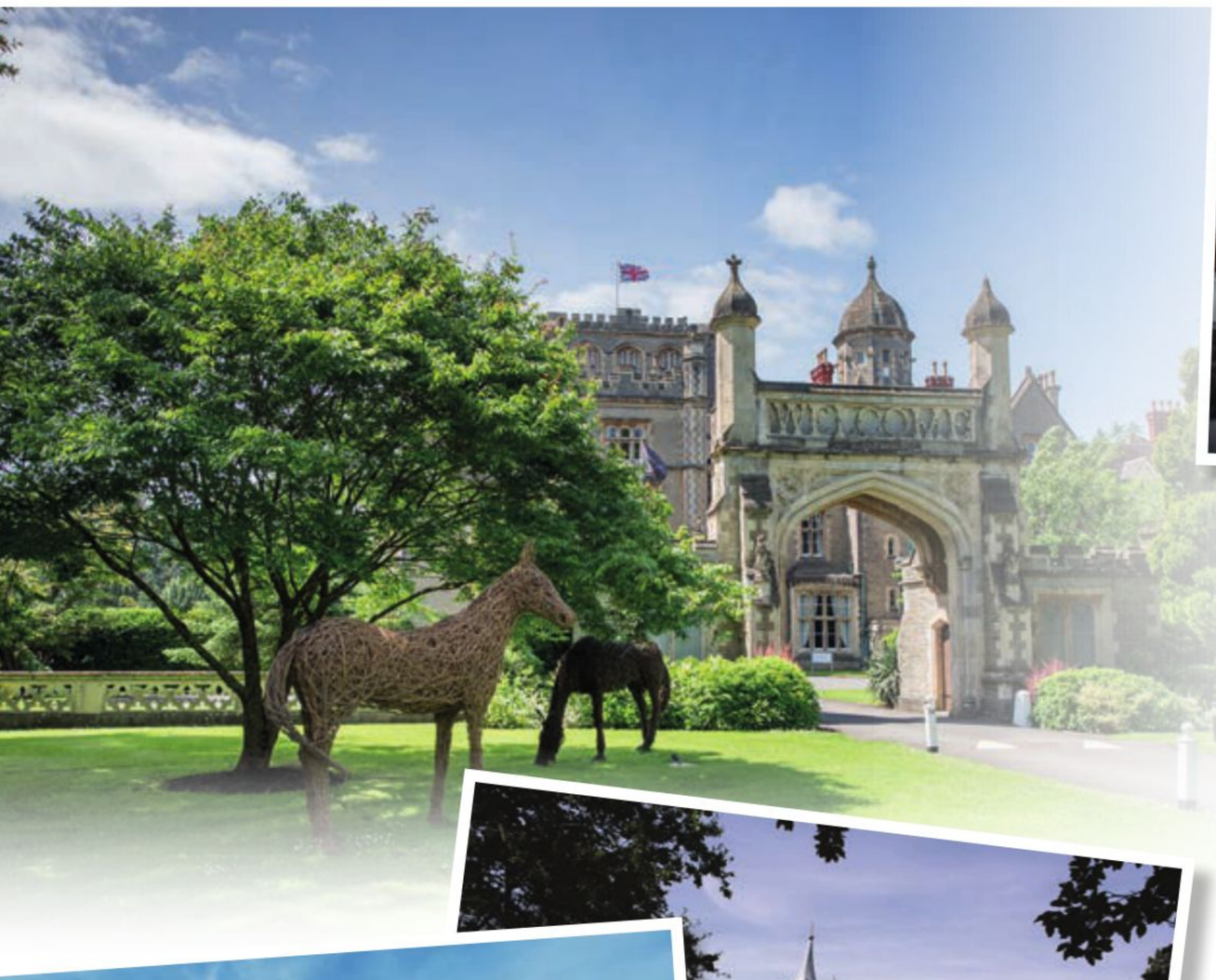

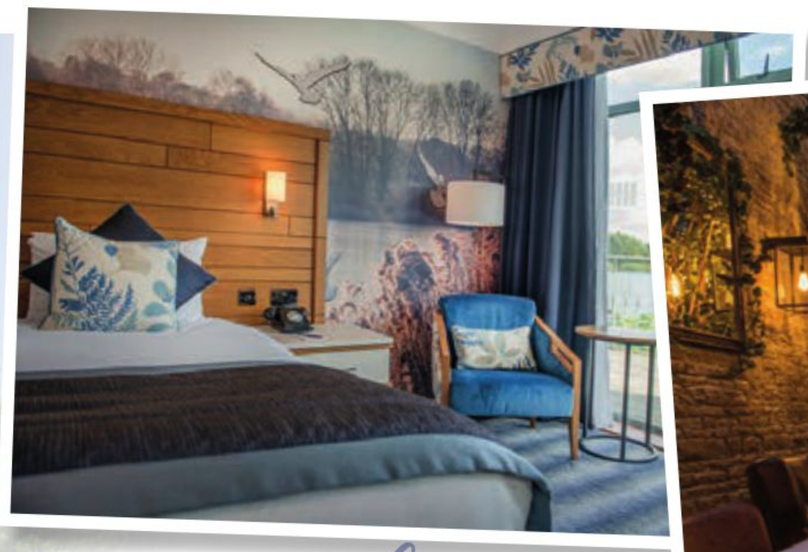

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Norton House Hotel is an independent country house hotel, which has been thoroughly refurbished with weddings in mind. The property exudes 1970s charm and features an impressive entrance, with a round-headed arch door, elegant windows and 17 individually-designed bedrooms. Wedding photographs can be taken in the private grounds, which include a secluded lawn, original raised patio, and wide stone steps; plus Swansea Bay is just a short stroll away.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

❤ **Drawing Room.** Decorated in a neutral style, this gorgeous space offers a stylish backdrop to any wedding, with large period windows and elegant double doors that lead onto the garden. It's capable of holding 90 friends and family.

DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

❤ **Garden Room.** This light and airy room overlooks the garden and features double doors that open onto the patio area. It can accommodate 90 loved ones for the reception and is adjacent to the Drawing Room and Bar, which guests can use throughout the event.

WE LOVE...

The hotel offers a menu tasting for six people, a complimentary bedroom for the happy couple on the night of the wedding, and on their first anniversary, and fully inclusive packages which include exclusive use of the hotel. Packages start from just £4,100.

BRANGWYN, SA1 4PE

01792 635 432 | brangwyn.co.uk

The Brangwyn is a striking venue that retains many of its original features. Built in the 1930s, the property boasts breathtaking views of Swansea seafront, grand architecture and an Art Deco look.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

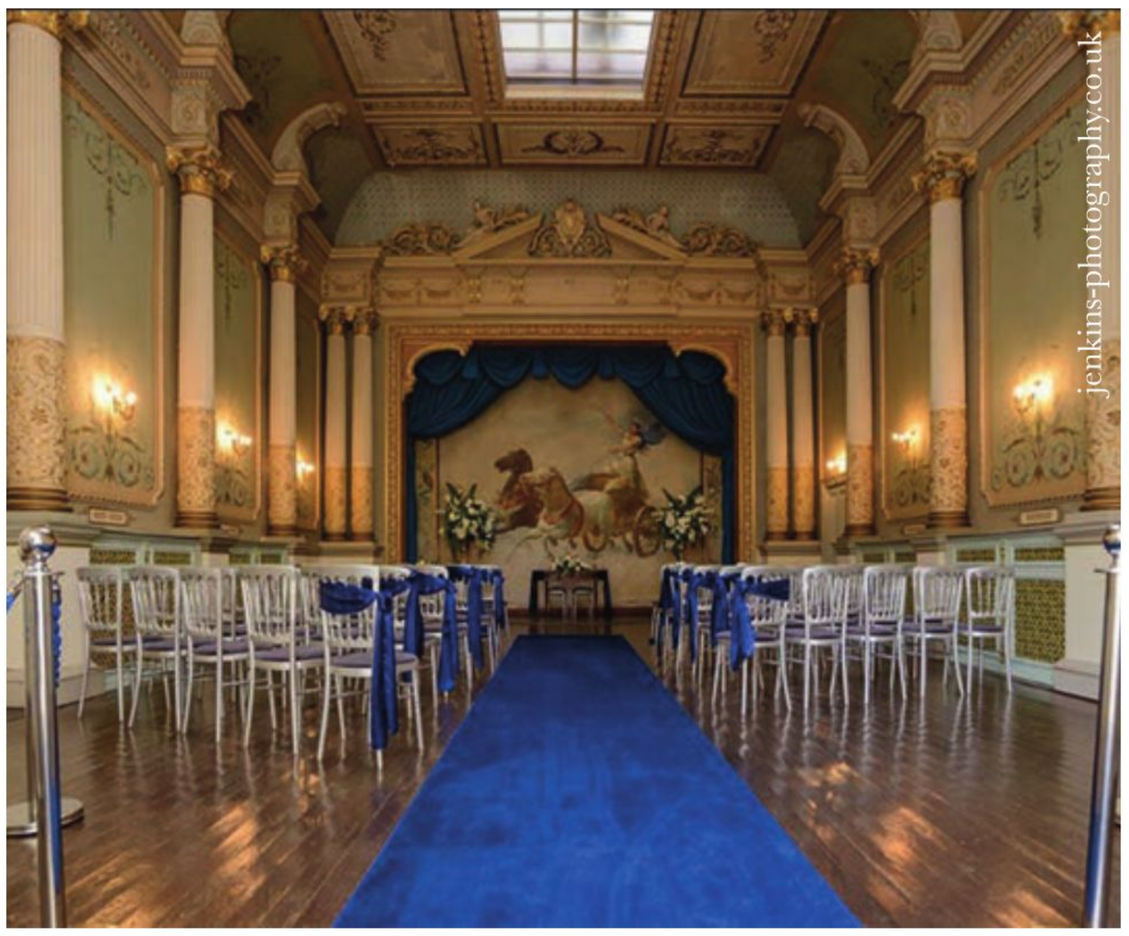
❤ **Brangwyn Hall.** This large room boasts high ceilings and is home to the British Empire Panels, created by renowned artist Sir Brangwyn.

❤ **The George Hall.** Decorated in luxurious golds and creams, it's great for those looking for a blank canvas.

❤ **Lord Mayor's Reception Room.** Available for intimate nuptials, this charming space is beautifully decorated and would look amazing in those all-important photographs.

WE LOVE...

The venue's rich décor.



jenkins-photography.co.uk

CRAIG Y NOS CASTLE, SA9 1GL

01639 731 167 | craigynoscastle.com

Craig Y Nos Castle is located in the heart of the Brecon Beacons and is surrounded by acres of peaceful countryside. Once home to opera singer Adelina Patti, the property boasts 36 en suite bedrooms, a bar, a private lounge and a gym.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

❤ **Theatre.** This flexible space is one of only eight Grade I listed opera houses in the UK. The room has a gorgeous 125-year-old curtain, depicting Madame Patti on a chariot in Rossini's last Italian opera. What's more, the walls are decorated with the names of Patti's favourite composers, and it can hold 120 friends and family.

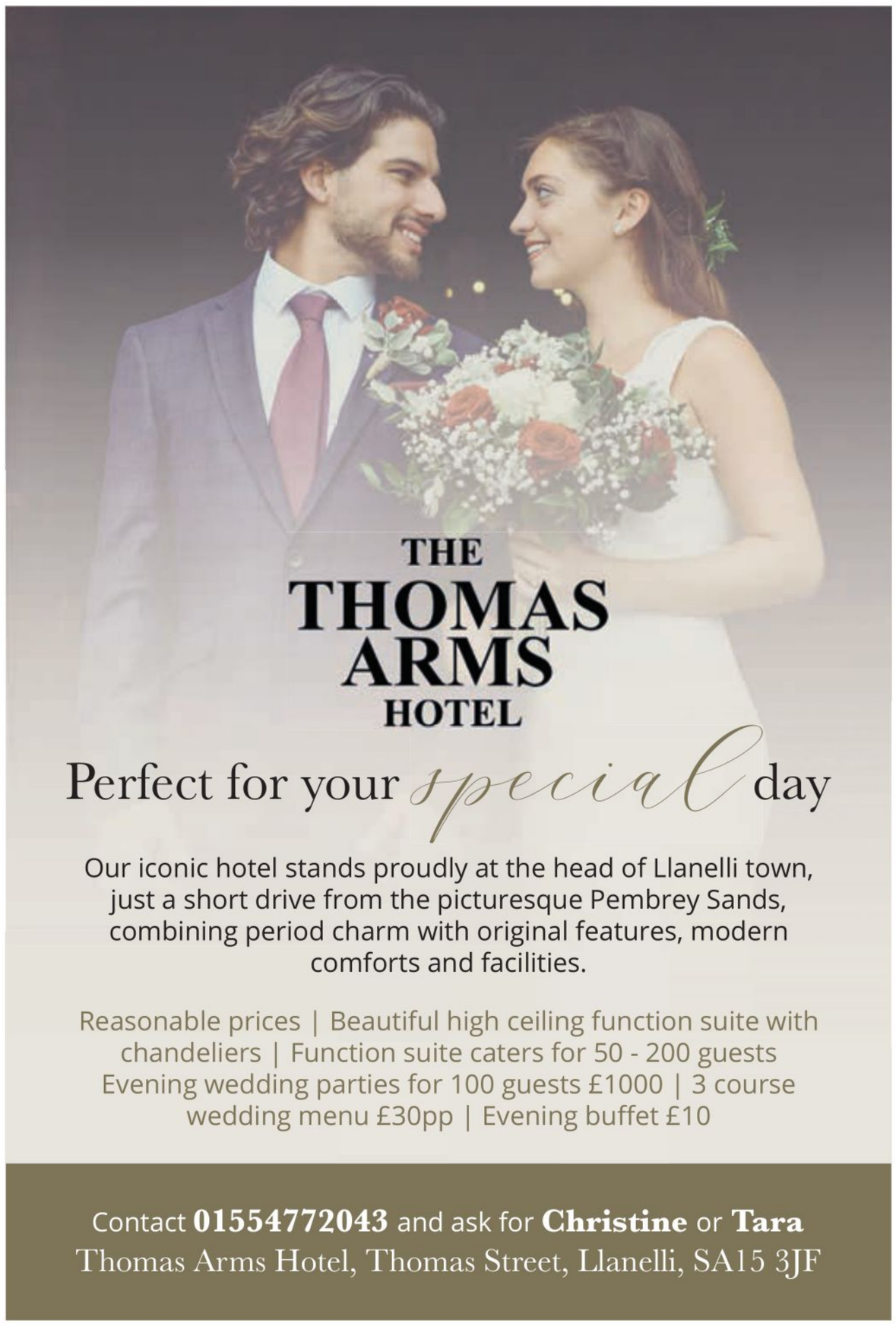
DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

❤ **Conservatory.** Receptions can take place in this beautifully decorated room, which has a maximum capacity of 130 loved ones.

❤ **The Music Room and Billard Room.** Ideal for larger nuptials, these spaces can hold a further 120 guests.

WE LOVE...

The Patti Bar and Nicolini Lounge are located in the centre of the castle, and both are available for guests to use throughout the night. There are also some great last minute deals available over the next six months.



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THE PLOUGH, SA19 6NP

01558 823 431 | ploughrhosmaen.com

Set in the beautiful Towy Valley with outstanding views of the Brecon Beacons is The Plough. The four-star property is an award-winning boutique hotel and boasts picturesque gardens, manicured lawns and beautiful trees that are a photographer's delight.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

❤ **The Gallery Dining Room.** This gorgeous room has high-vaulted ceilings and beams that create a chic backdrop for weddings, with space for 124 loved ones for the vows and breakfast and 250 for the evening reception.

❤ **Conservatory.** A private suite that's perfect for intimate gatherings of 40 nearest and dearest.

❤ **Penlan Suite.** Boasting impressive views of the garden, this area can accommodate 36 friends and family throughout the day.

❤ **Garden.** Couples having an al fresco celebration can celebrate in the garden with 120 guests.

❤ **The Lounge.** This casual and relaxing space is capable of holding 15 attendees.

WE LOVE...

Lovebirds will receive a complimentary menu tasting, bridal suite on the night of the wedding, a choice of wedding packages and preferential tariff for guests accommodation.

THE THOMAS ARMS HOTEL, SA15 3JF

01554 772 043 | thomasarms.co.uk

The Thomas Arms Hotel is a beautifully restored public house that lends itself to all occasions. The property boasts outside areas, two car parks, a five-star hygiene award and has recently been recognised for being the Champion in Brains for Best Feedback.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

❤ **Grand Function Suite.** This newly-refurbished space has high ceilings and grand chandeliers with space for 200 loved ones. Alternatively, there are two other areas available for ceremonies.

WE LOVE...

The complimentary bridal suite, cake stand, knife, easel and wedding coordinator.

Your first kiss has led to this...

Image courtesy of Pippa Carvall Photography

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A PLACE TO REST *your head*

Tie the knot in a hotel

GLEN-YR-AFON, NP15 1SY

01291 672 302 | glen-yr-afon.co.uk

Surrounded by acres of charming countryside and picturesque gardens is the grand Glen-Yr-Afon. The award-winning hotel is home to 28 modern bedrooms and is just a short walk away from the town of Usk, which is full of boutique shops and charming restaurants. Opening in 1974, the four-star Victorian villa has a neutral décor throughout which can be personalised.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

Couples can tie the knot in the Ballroom, an elegant space, with large bay windows and room for 150 loved ones throughout the day.

The Library, with its conical ceiling and striking interior, can hold 30 friends and family for the vows and 20 for the reception.

The Dining Room can also be used, with room for 45 nearest and dearest for the vows, 35 for the meal and 22 for the evening celebration.

Weather depending, lovebirds can get married in the venue's grounds or in the grand Ballroom with up to 150 guests.

WE LOVE...

The venue's charming grounds and on-site bedrooms.

DE COURCEYS MANOR, CF15 9QN

02920 892 232 | decourceys.co.uk

De Courceys Manor is a five-star property that's been family-owned and managed since 2009. Inside this Georgian manor is a classic décor, with Waterford crystal chandeliers, a gin bar and French boudoir-style toilets. Situated in acres of manicured gardens, there are plenty of places to take those all-important photographs, including ornamental statues, a bespoke moongate swing and beautiful lights that can be set to any colour. Guests are welcome to stay in the six double cottages and two family cottages, able to accommodate up to 30 people.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

Couples can get married in the Oriental Suite, which has a neutral décor throughout, perfect for couples looking for a blank canvas and space for 25 guests.

Alternatively, the Floral Suite can be used. This room oozes elegance and can cater for up to 130 friends and family for the service and 60 for the wedding breakfast.

The Tapestry Suite has a dedicated bar and room for 130 nearest and dearest throughout the day.

WE LOVE...

Nearlyweds will receive a voucher for a complimentary Sunday lunch to celebrate their first anniversary.

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VALE RESORT, CF32 8JY

01443 665 803 | valeresort.com

The Vale Resort is nestled in more than 650 acres of countryside and manicured gardens and offers ample opportunities to take those all-important photographs. Boasting 143 luxurious bedrooms, two championship golf courses, an award-winning restaurant and extensive leisure facilities, there's plenty to keep guests entertained. The Vale Spa is the region's largest and has 19 treatment rooms, five relaxation zones and a range of indulgent treatments.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

Ceremonies can take place in The Castle Suite. An elegant area, with high ceilings, large windows and space for 400 friends and family for the service, wedding breakfast and reception.

Alternatively, the Morgannwg Suite can be used. This grand space with its own balcony and sweeping staircase overlooking the picturesque Welsh countryside, has a private bar, striking décor and can accommodate 130 for the meal and 200 for the evening celebration.

The Conservatory is a charming room that's capable of holding 120 nearest and dearest for the ceremony, 60 for dinner and 80 for the party.

Smaller nuptials of up to 50 people take place in the Cowbridge Lounge.

WE LOVE...

The happy couple will receive a complimentary bedroom on the night of the wedding, an anniversary dinner, a month's membership to the health club, a free round of golf and a 20 per cent discount at the spa.

WELSH GREEN WEDDINGS, SA44 5XE

01559 370 517 | welshgreenweddings.co.uk

Welsh Green Weddings is a family-owned farm with a stone and slate exterior situated in the Carmarthenshire countryside. The property boasts a friendly yet professional atmosphere and has a range of overnight accommodation available for more than 60 people, including a double-decker bus and gypsy caravan.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

The Old Dairy is capable of holding 76 nearest and dearest throughout the day.

The Byre can also be used, with space for up to 25 loved ones for the service and reception.

Alternatively, The Oak Pagoda is available. This intimate area can accommodate 10 members of the wedding party and the rest of the guests are seated on pews, benches and hay bales in the Walled Garden.

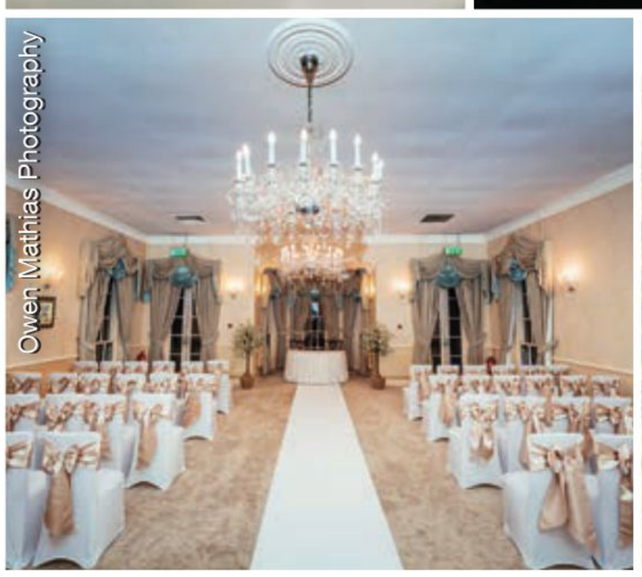
The Triple Tipi is a beautifully decorated space perfect for both intimate and large celebrations with a maximum capacity of 200 friends and family.

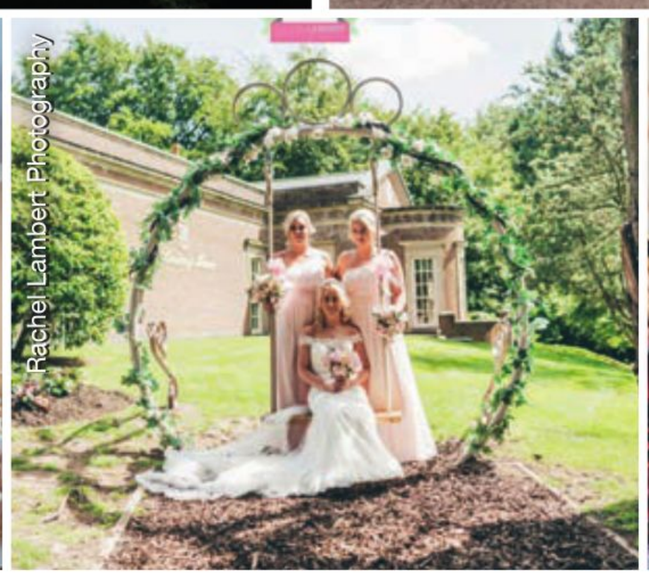
The Pole Barn has space for 200 people.

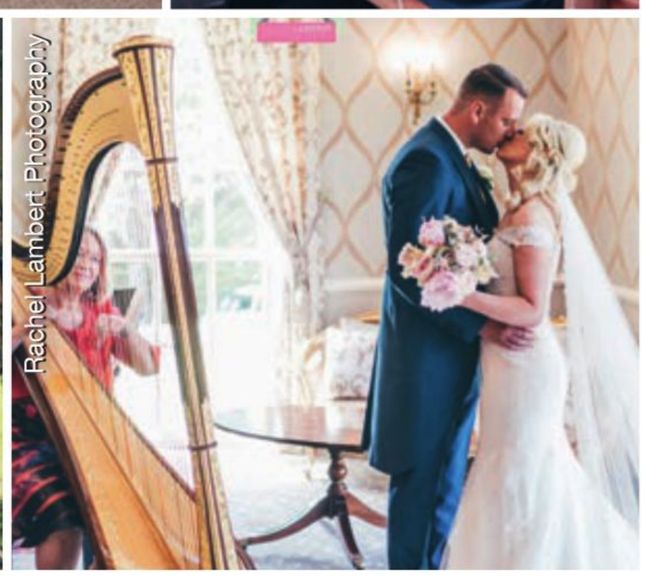
WE LOVE...

The venue's quirky accommodation.

De Courceys Manor







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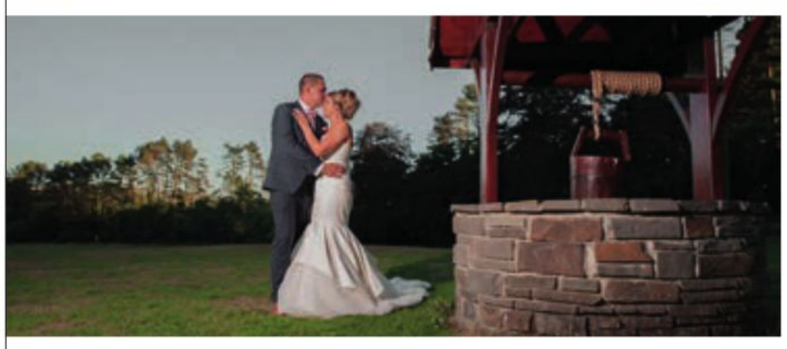

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Dennis O'Connell Photography

THE GLYN CLYDACH, SA10 7AJ

01792 818 411 | glynclydach.co.uk

Situated in more than 15 acres of breathtaking countryside and manicured gardens is The Glyn Clydach. The property boasts a large glass terrace that offers panoramic views of Neath Valley and modern bedrooms.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

Couples can say "I do" in The Abbey Suite. A modern space full of natural light with space for 250 loved ones. The room can be split into two to accommodate more intimate celebrations if needed.

WE LOVE...

Newlyweds will receive a complimentary bridal suite on the night of the wedding.

THE ANGEL HOTEL, NP7 5EN

01873 857 121 | angelabergavenny.com

The Angel Hotel is located on the Welsh and English border and offers ample opportunities to take those big-day snaps. The Grade II listed property is situated in the charming town of Abergavenny, which offers a wide variety of shops and restaurants to explore. The hotel also has 35 bedrooms for guests to choose from.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

Lovebirds can get married in the 19th-century Chapel. Located around the corner from the hotel, it's capable of holding 150 friends and family.

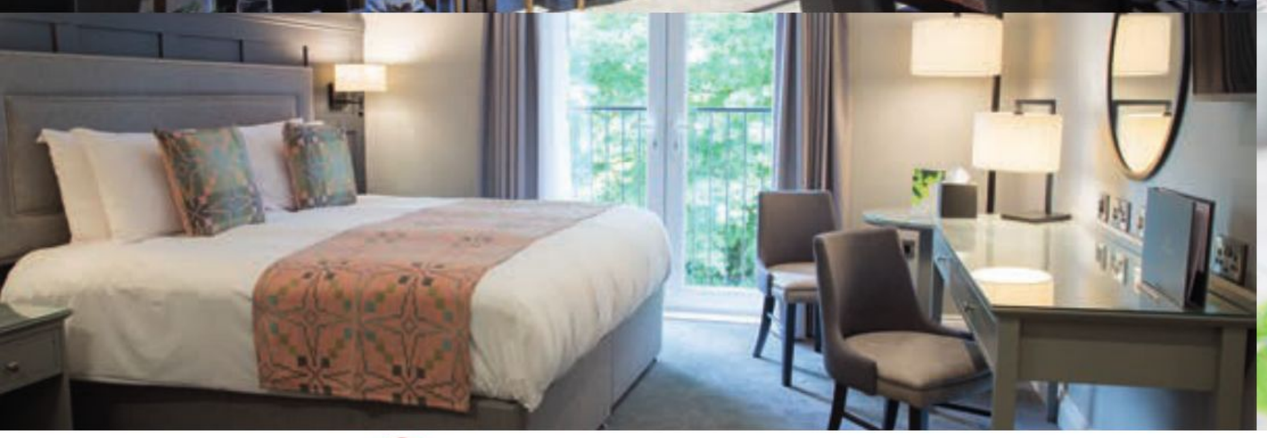
Alternatively, The Ballroom, with original ceilings, Italian crystal chandeliers, elegant alcoves, a private bar and grand windows, is available. The room has space for 150 loved ones for the ceremony, 144 for the wedding breakfast and 200 for the reception.

The Brecon Room, with space for 45 nearest and dearest for the vows and 30 for the meal, is ideal for more intimate nuptials.

The Cellar can also be used. This unusual area can hold 15 guests and is available for hen parties and cocktail masterclasses.

WE LOVE...

Couples will receive a free menu tasting and a four-poster bedroom on the night of the wedding.



Glorious gardens

Melissa Barker reviews the charming Llechwen Hall Hotel

01443 742 050 | llechwen.co.uk

When I was invited to visit Llechwen Hall Hotel, the January blues had well and truly kicked in, so I jumped at the chance for some well-needed R&R.

After a four hour drive from Essex, my partner and I couldn't wait to see the property and take in the sights. We ascended the hill-top drive, and the country house came into view. We stopped to look at the breathtaking views of the surrounding Cynon Valley and take some pictures.

The venue was transformed into a hotel in 1990 and has recently been expanded to include a two-storey wing and 24 additional high-end bedrooms. After hearing about all the hard work that had gone into transforming the property, I couldn't wait to see our room.

Once we'd checked in, we ventured upstairs, and it's safe to say the space went beyond our expectations, with a king-sized bed, a TV, a sofa, tea and windows that overlooked the sprawling Welsh countryside. Just when we thought it couldn't get any better, we discovered the bathroom, complete with a grand bath, heated towel rails, gorgeous décor and complimentary toiletries, it was more than we could have asked for.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

After a delightful bath and a cup of much-needed tea, it was time for dinner. The AA Rosette restaurant is located in the Oak Beam Orangery, which overlooks the terrace and lawns and is full of natural light. It can be used for weddings and has space for 60 loved ones for the vows, while larger celebrations of 300 can take place in the marquee.

We were escorted to our table by a friendly member of staff who provided us with the menu. To start, I went for the seasonal homemade soup. It was delicious and perfect on a cold winter's night. For the main course, I opted for one of my favourites dishes, pan-fried chicken chasseur, and to finish I had a Halen môn salted treacle tart. The staff were very attentive and went above and beyond to ensure we had the best meal possible.

Once we'd finished, we made our way to the on-site bar. This charming space had a cosy and relaxed atmosphere – a must-visit if you're staying at the hotel.

A few hours later, we wearily climbed the staircase to our room, and I fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

A DAY IN THE CITY

The next morning we awoke feeling relaxed and ready to explore. We once again visited the Oak Beam Orangery ready to try the hotel's delicious breakfast. I opted for the continental option, and my partner had a scrumptious Welsh breakfast accompanied by a wonderful cup of tea.

The hotel is located just 30 minutes from Cardiff, so we decided to spend the day at some of the local attractions. We visited Cardiff Castle, the National Museum of Wales and the oh-so-fabulous shopping district.

After a long day of walking, we couldn't wait to get back to the hotel. The hours just seemed to fade away, and I awoke the next day feeling completely relaxed. Once we'd forced ourselves out of bed, we headed downstairs for breakfast. On display was a selection of juices, teas, cereals and tasty pastries as well as cooked options. We choose the English muffin with scrambled egg, at first I was a little apprehensive as I can be fussy when it comes to how my eggs are cooked, but I'm happy to say they came out perfect!

After such an amazing stay, I was sad to be leaving this little gem. The hotel is such a lovely place, and we will definitely be going back soon!

LH

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THE LOVE OF *my life*

Rhian and Craig declared their love for one another with a romantic celebration

Images courtesy of Lucy Parker Photography

Rhian and Craig met through a mutual friend. "One of my bridesmaids, Sophie, set us up," says Rhian. "I told her I wasn't interested in dating, but little did I know she'd already given Craig, one of her fiancée's friends, my number. Within half an hour Craig had messaged me, and when I finally built up the courage to respond we talked non-stop. He asked if I'd like to go on a date and the rest is history."

Craig popped the question during a trip to Las Vegas. "We were on holiday travelling around New York and Las Vegas," shares the bride. "He was planning to propose in New York but got too nervous and ended up carrying the ring around in his pocket for five days. When we landed in Las Vegas, he waited until we were at Bellagio Fountains to ask. It was a big surprise, and the day was incredibly romantic."

Here she shares some of her favourite moments from their big day...

I attended a friend's wedding at Oldwalls Gower and knew I wanted to get married there. It was perfect, and everything flowed nicely.

I decorated the venue with lots of personal touches, including lanterns and gin bottles.

Amelia's Dream Bakes provided our big-day cake. It was three tiers and made up of lemon, chocolate, raspberry and white chocolate.

My great auntie, Jen, made the bridesmaids' beautiful posies.

Quaint Hearted Weddings – by Rebecca Caddy did our stationery. She created a table plan that linked in with our rose gold and slate colour scheme. She also made our table names and welcome board that looked amazing.

Our centrepieces, my bouquet and the moongate were provided by Ruth Milton Jones. She is incredible and so talented at what she does. Ruth listened to what we wanted and created arrangements that looked fabulous.

My dress was an Eddy K design from Eva Ashley Bridal Lounge in Swansea. I fell in love with it as soon as I saw it. It had illusion lace on the shoulders and suited me really well.

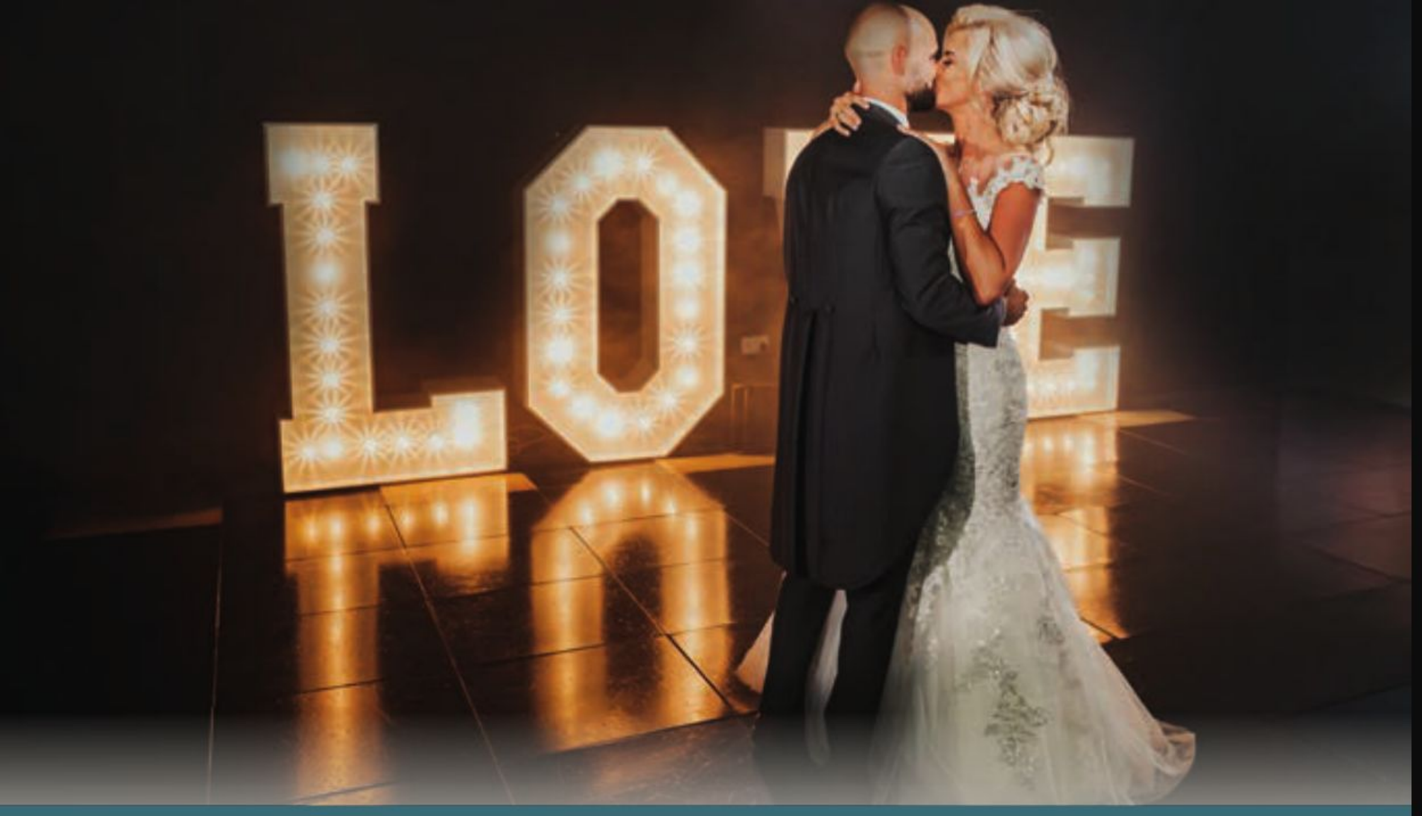
Craig and his groomsmen wore tail suits from Dyfed Menswear. He liked the more traditional look, and that his father wore the same style at his wedding 36 years ago. Craig opted for a different coloured waistcoat and a pocket square to help him stand out.

The bridesmaids chose multi-way gowns from Victoria Lou Bridal. The dresses looked perfect and fit everyone really well.

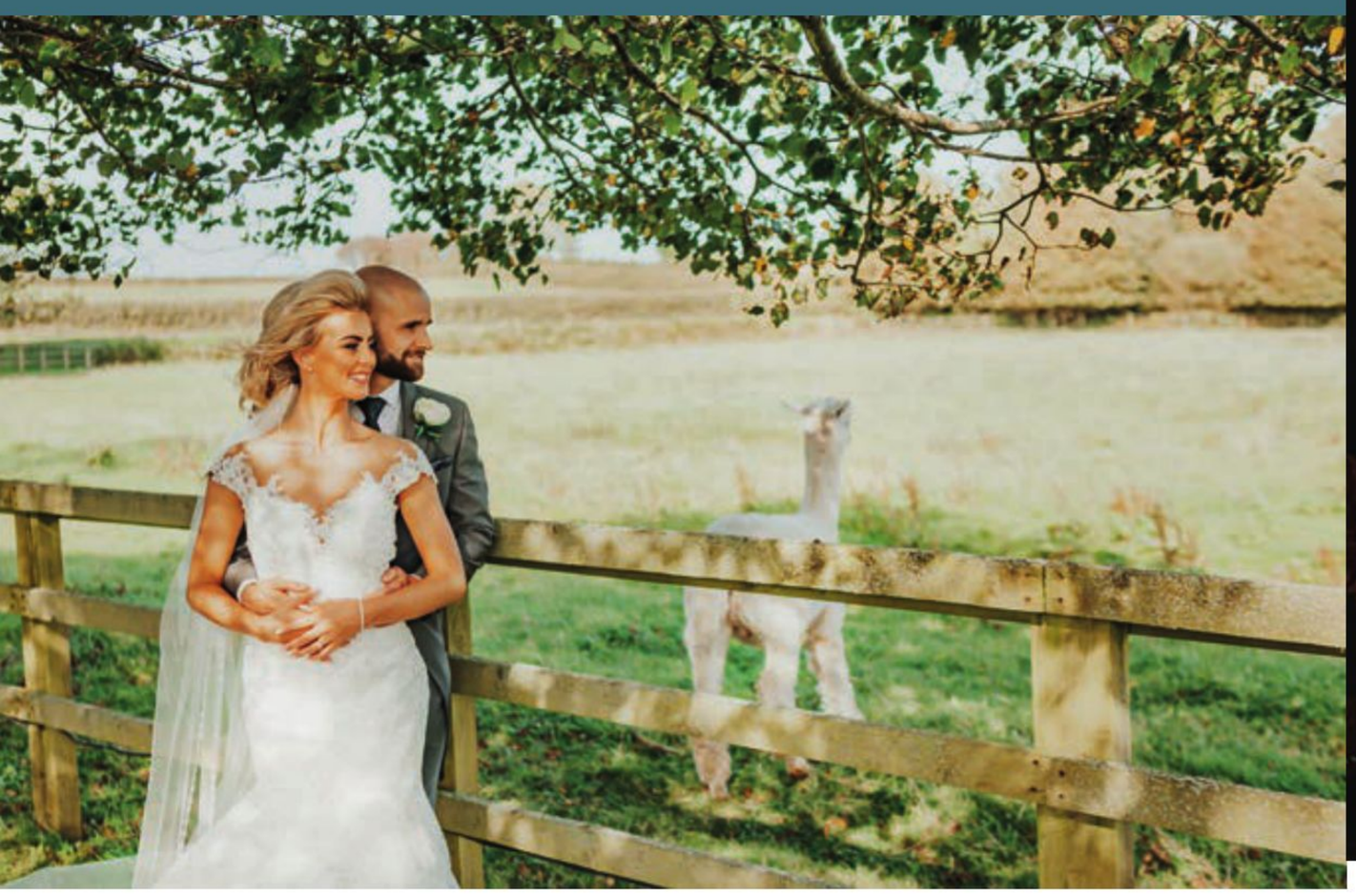
To keep our guests entertained, we hired a magician called Phil Jay. He was phenomenal and was followed by a DJ provided by Oldwalls Gower.

Craig's speech was the funniest part of the day. It was also my maid-of-honour's birthday, so we presented her with a birthday cake during the speeches.

One of our friend's partners walked into a glass door when he was trying to make his way outside for a cigarette. He thought the door was open and walked straight into it!



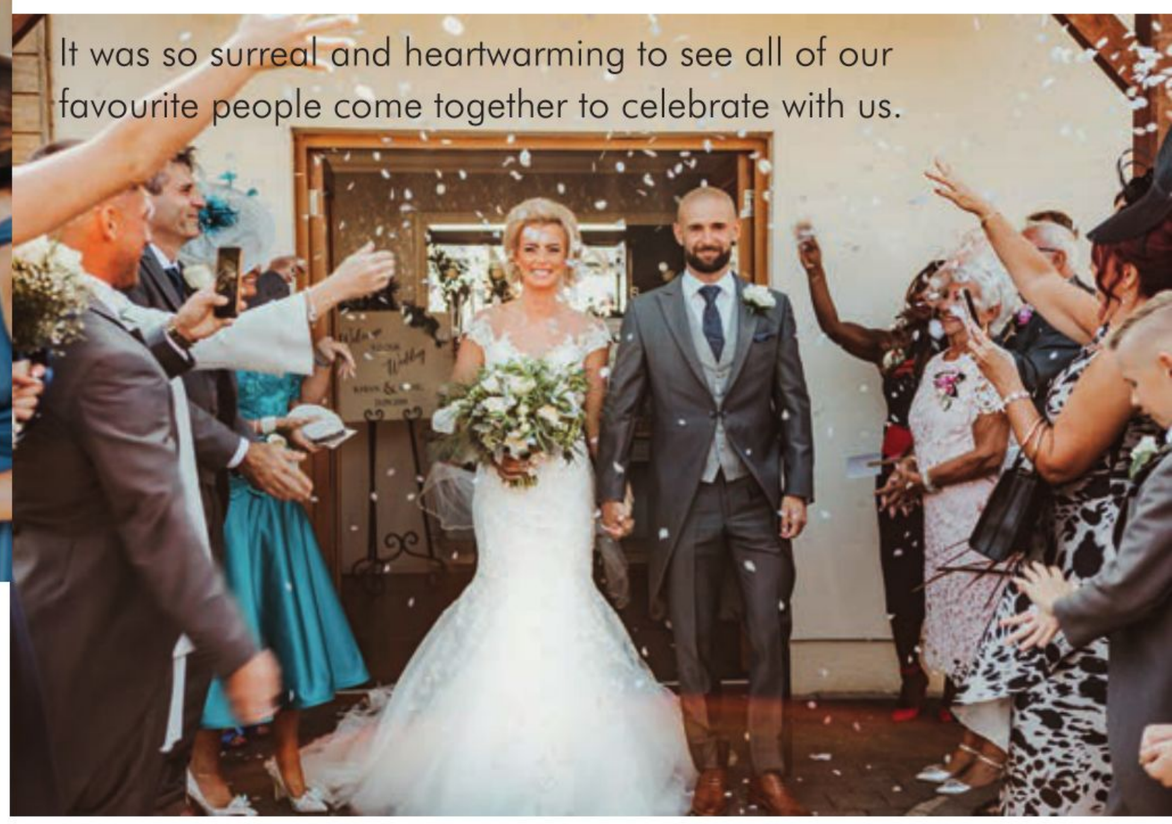
Our first dance was wonderful. We both loved the song, and it flowed perfectly.



On the morning of the wedding, we were both very emotional, happy and overwhelmed.

My older brother, Nathan, walked me down the aisle after I lost my dad suddenly a few years ago. It was very emotional, but I was really pleased he was there.

We couldn't believe how perfect the day was. From having the most amazing guests to fantastic food and service, everything was wonderful. We must also thank Lucy Parker Photography and Paul Harries Wedding Films for capturing everything on camera!



It was so surreal and heartwarming to see all of our favourite people come together to celebrate with us.

RHIAN AND CRAIG'S CONTACTS

Venue and catering, Oldwalls Gower, oldwallsgower.com | **Photographer**, Lucy Parker Photography, lucyparkerphotography.co.uk **Videographer**, Paul Harries Wedding Films, phweddingfilms.com | **Bride's dress**, Eva Ashley Bridal Lounge, evaashley.com | **Bride's accessories**, Debenhams, debenhams.com | **Hair stylist,** Pimped Up Pins, facebook.com/pimpeduppins | **Make-up artist**, Melissa Beatrup-Smith and Saima Ali | **Groom's and groomsmen's suits**, Dyfed Menswear, dyfedmenswear.co.uk | **Bridesmaids' dresses**, Victoria Lou Bridal, victorialou.co.uk | **Cake**, Amelia's Dream Bakes, facebook.com/ameliasdreambakes | **Flowers**, Ruth Milton Jones, ruthmiltonjones.com | **Transport**, Sinclair Audi, 01792 621 665| **Stationery**, Quaint Hearted Weddings – by Rebecca Caddy, facebook.com/quaintheartedweddings | **Entertainment**, Phil Jay, philjaymagic.com

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One FINE DAY

Laura and Bart had a beautiful wedding at voco St David's Cardiff

Images courtesy of Chris Francis Photography

Laura and Bart met at a party. "He doesn't remember meeting me," says Laura. "I was living in London at the time and had gone to visit a friend in Antwerp for the weekend. We went to an after-work party, and while I was there, I noticed this guy with the craziest dance moves. I thought he was quite funny and we started talking. When we left the bar I gave him my number, and he called me a few days later. I didn't answer because I thought it was too direct so I text him asking who it was, little did I know he took that to mean I'd given him a fake number! I messaged him again, and we hit it off. Two weeks later, he came to London to see me and there was an instant connection. By the end of the weekend, we agreed to try a long-distance relationship. One year later, I moved to Antwerp to start a new job and live with him."

Bart popped the question in 2018. "I'd just returned from a work trip to Rome," shares the bride. "I went for dinner with some of my friends, and after the meal, we decided to go to a bar across the square. As we were crossing, I noticed Bart standing there. He walked towards me and asked me to turn around. As I did, I noticed under the arches of the building were 14 of our friends and family holding up a letter each that spelt out 'will you marry me?' It was a massive surprise, and I couldn't have asked for a better proposal."

SETTING THE SCENE

"We wanted to get married in a church, so we thought what better place than where my parents got married?" explains Laura. "We even had the same priest! For the reception, we wanted a property near the water. We looked at a few venues, but nothing stood out like voco St David's Cardiff. We loved the outdoor terrace, floor-to-ceiling windows and were blown away by the décor. That combined with the professionalism of the events team, it was the obvious choice. On the day we were incredibly lucky with the weather, and everything worked out wonderfully."

The happy couple decided to give their guests Welsh cakes as favours. "Fabulous Welshcakes made beautiful heart-shaped versions in almost every flavour imaginable," adds the bride. "We chose white chocolate, lemon and traditional fillings. They were definitely fabulous!"

"We thought we would stress about the seating plan, but it was actually an easy process thanks to an amazing planner I bought from Paperchase," says Laura. "We added personal touches to the décor, including disposable cameras and pictures of our guests."

For their flowers, the couple turned to Laura's mum and aunt. "I knew I wanted white peonies as they're my favourites," explains the bride. "I asked my mum and auntie to include roses and greenery to match our green theme, and they looked amazing. The blooms were ordered individually from Tesco, but for the greenery, my auntie went foraging in forests and fields. For our centrepieces, I wanted to keep things quite simple, so we chose milk churns which made great gifts after the wedding. We also had love letters from Written in Lights that looked beautiful next to the dancefloor."

Laura and Bart opted for a rose gold cake. "My auntie made it for us," says Laura. "It included hand-made sugar peonies and the attention to detail was overwhelming. The lace even matched my dress perfectly. It was simple but fantastically elegant."

Bart surprised Laura with a Volkswagon Campervan to transport her on the morning of the wedding. "It's been my dream car for a long time, but it was a total surprise," shares the bride. "It was the perfect start to the day, and I couldn't have picked a better car."

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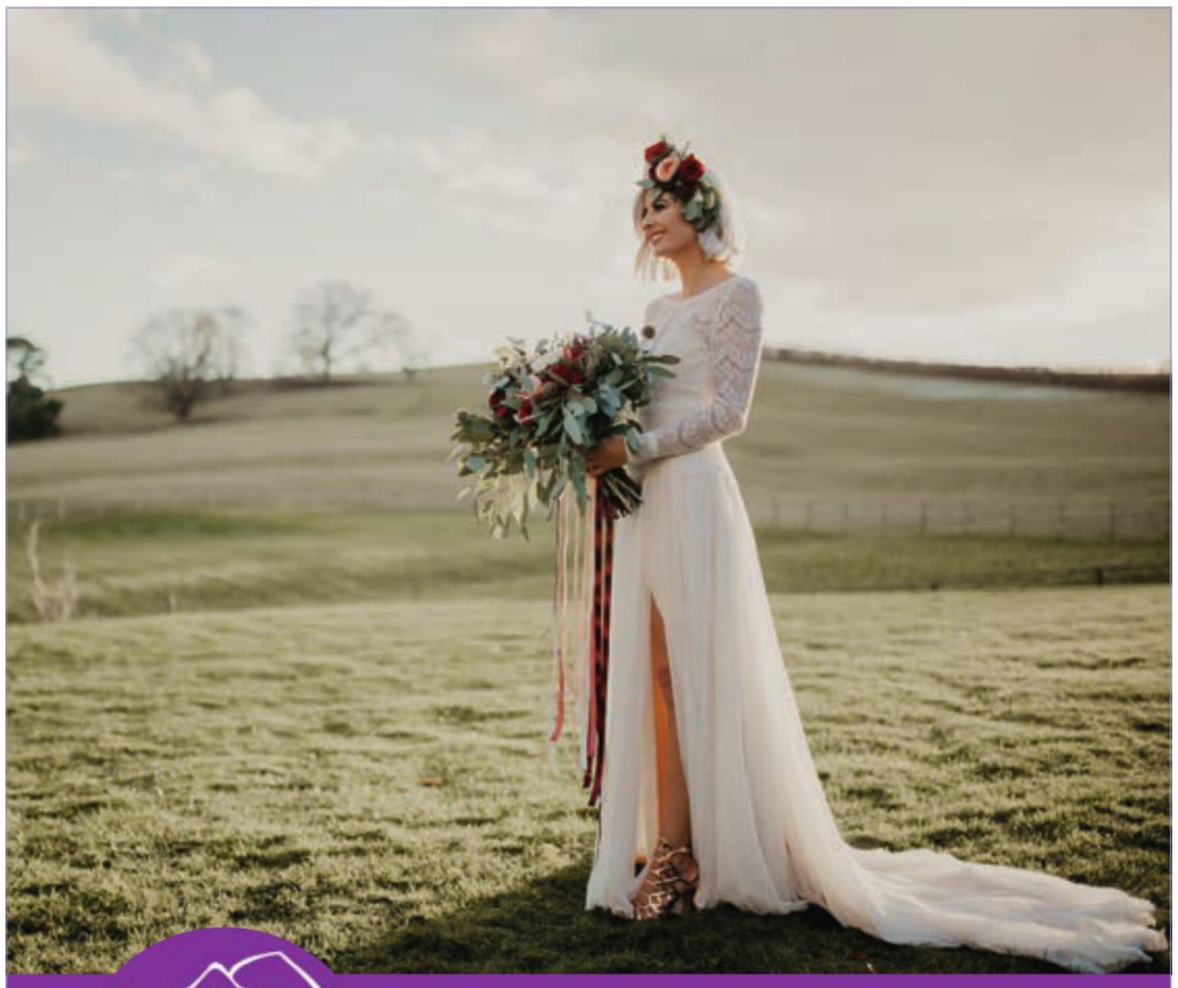

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DRESSED TO IMPRESS

Laura chose a Stella York gown called *6701* from Laura May Bridal. "It was the first dress I tried on," shares Laura. "I looked at eight others but kept coming back to it. It made me feel beautiful and was the exact material I wanted. I initially thought I wanted sleeves, but this style made me feel confident without them. The girls at Laura May Bridal were great at helping me choose something that perfect for me. I accessorised with a stone bracelet from Monica Vinader that was engraved with our wedding date on the back."

Bart wore a green suit from Suitsupply. "We wanted him to stand out, so he chose a different colour to the groomsmen," explains the bride. "He was very happy with it, and it made him feel comfortable and confident."

The bridesmaids wore rose gold dresses from Monsoon. "We wanted something that the girls would feel sexy in, and the plunging neckline definitely had that effect," Laura adds. "The girls were happy with them and would wear them again for another occasion."

TIME TO CELEBRATE

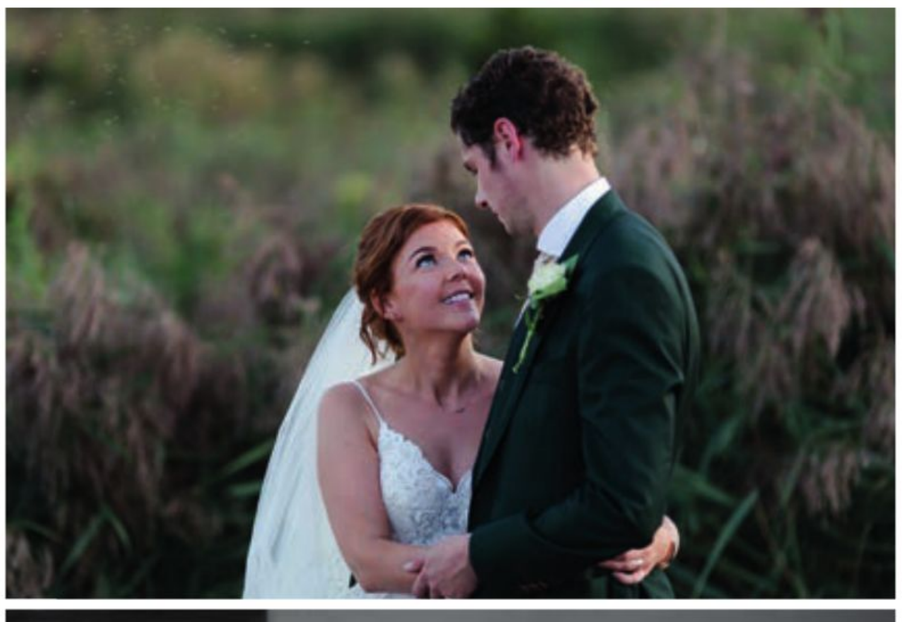
"In the church, some of friends and family sang as I walked down the aisle and during the service," says Laura. "At the reception we had a DJ perform. We asked everyone to rsvp with a song that they promised to dance to, we then gave these to our DJ who ensured people danced the night away. It worked quite well, even if mum did choose *My Boy Lollipop*! Our DJ also had some wonderful ideas, for example when we left the party he made everyone who was still there dance in a circle. It was an incredible way to end what was a really perfect day."

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

"I didn't feel anxious until I was at the church," shares the bride. "I started to panic that I'd slip over or my dad would step on my dress, but thankfully I made it safe and sound. The minute I was next to Bart, I felt secure and reassured."

The day was full of memorable moments. "The first dance was one of my favourite parts of the day," Laura explains. "We hired a dance teacher and choreographer to help us. I think there were a lot of wet eyes after we finished, we really enjoyed it, and it was nice to know we had such an impact on our guests. After our first weekend together, Bart told his sister that he'd fallen in love with me. He had always denied that it was true, but during his speech, he finally admitted it. Bart also did a dance battle with my 10-year-old cousin. The whole crowd got involved, and it was a special moment to watch."

The couple couldn't be more grateful to the suppliers involved. "Our photographer, Chris Francis Photography, went above and beyond on the day," says the bride. "We chose him as he had a documentary-style approach which was a little more informal and exactly what we wanted. When we spoke to other photographers and asked them when they leave, they said after the first dance, but Chris said when the story is over. We loved his approach so much and couldn't have been happier with his service. My auntie, Jan, also deserves a special mention. She put so much time, and effort into the cake and flowers, it just wouldn't have been the same without her special touch."



LAURA AND BART'S CONTACTS

Ceremony venue, St Peter's Church, stpeters-roath.co.uk | **Reception venue and catering,** voco St David's Cardiff, ihg.com | **Photographer**, Chris Francis Photography, ffotos.co.uk | **Bride's dress**, Laura May Bridal, lauramaybridal.co.uk | **Alterations**, Rhiannon J Ltd – Cardiff Alterations, cardiffalterations.com | **Bride's accessories**, Monica Vinader, monicavinader.com | **Hair and make-up artist**, Beau Bridal Hair & Makeup Cardiff, beaubridalmakeup.co.uk | **Groom's suit**, Suitsupply, suitsupply.com | **Groomsmen's suits**, Slater Menswear, slaters.co.uk | **Bridesmaids' dresses**, Monsoon, monsoon.co.uk | **Stationery**, Paperchase, paperchase.com **Favours**, Fabulous Welshcakes, fabulouswelshcakes.co.uk | **Love letters**, Written in Lights, writteninlights.co.uk **Transport**, Envoy Chauffeurs, envoychauffeurs.com | **Entertainment**, Fraser Lawson Events, fraserlawson.co.uk

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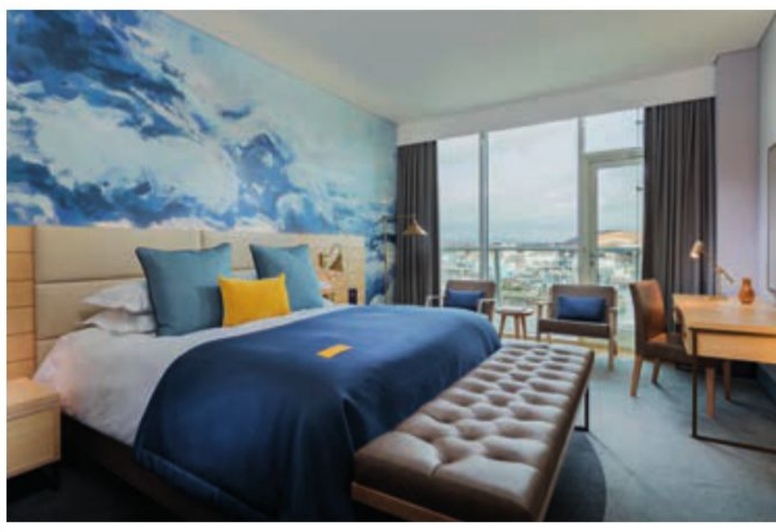

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Lucinda and Matthew met eight years ago while working at a jewellery shop in Cardiff. "We were both in relationships at the time," says Lucinda. "It wasn't until two years later when we were both single that we went on our first date."

Matthew proposed during a trip to Castle Hill in Tenby. "It's my favourite place in the world," shares the bride. "It was pouring with rain when Matt presented me with a trainer box, inside was a pair of Yeezys with a ring box inside, it was a total surprise, and our parents joined us in the evening to celebrate."

Here she shares some of her favourite moments from their big day...

IN THE *wilderness*

Lucinda and Matthew tied the knot at Fforest Weddings

Images courtesy of Eve Ash Photography

We didn't want a traditional wedding reception and wanted somewhere that everyone could stay for the weekend and make a real occasion of it. When we visited Fforest Weddings, we liked how rustic it was and the outdoor space. We loved the idea of not being stuck in the same room all day, and that people could relax by the firepits or in the pub if they wanted, all while being just a short walk from their accommodation. The venue is proud of their food, and they have every right to be. Everyone commented on our incredible barbecued lamb, it was being cooked outside on the barbecue when we all arrived, and everyone could help themselves.

My table plan was handmade by my dad. It was a gold frame with mirrors hanging down with handwritten names.

Our colour scheme was burgundy, forest green and gold. We had long table runners and crystal places names that were hand-written by Ellie at Flossie & Blossom. We had a huge hexagon as a backdrop for our photo pod which my dad made and is now available to hire from Flossie & Blossom.

As we had long tables, we decided to purchase small green bottles for our centrepieces with single flowers in.

I make cakes for a living, so the only other person I trusted for the job was Baked By Becks. We've since become great friends and are so pleased she attended our wedding.

Urban Flower Studio created so many displays for us that we placed around the venue, including a massive halo structure that we hung from the ceiling.

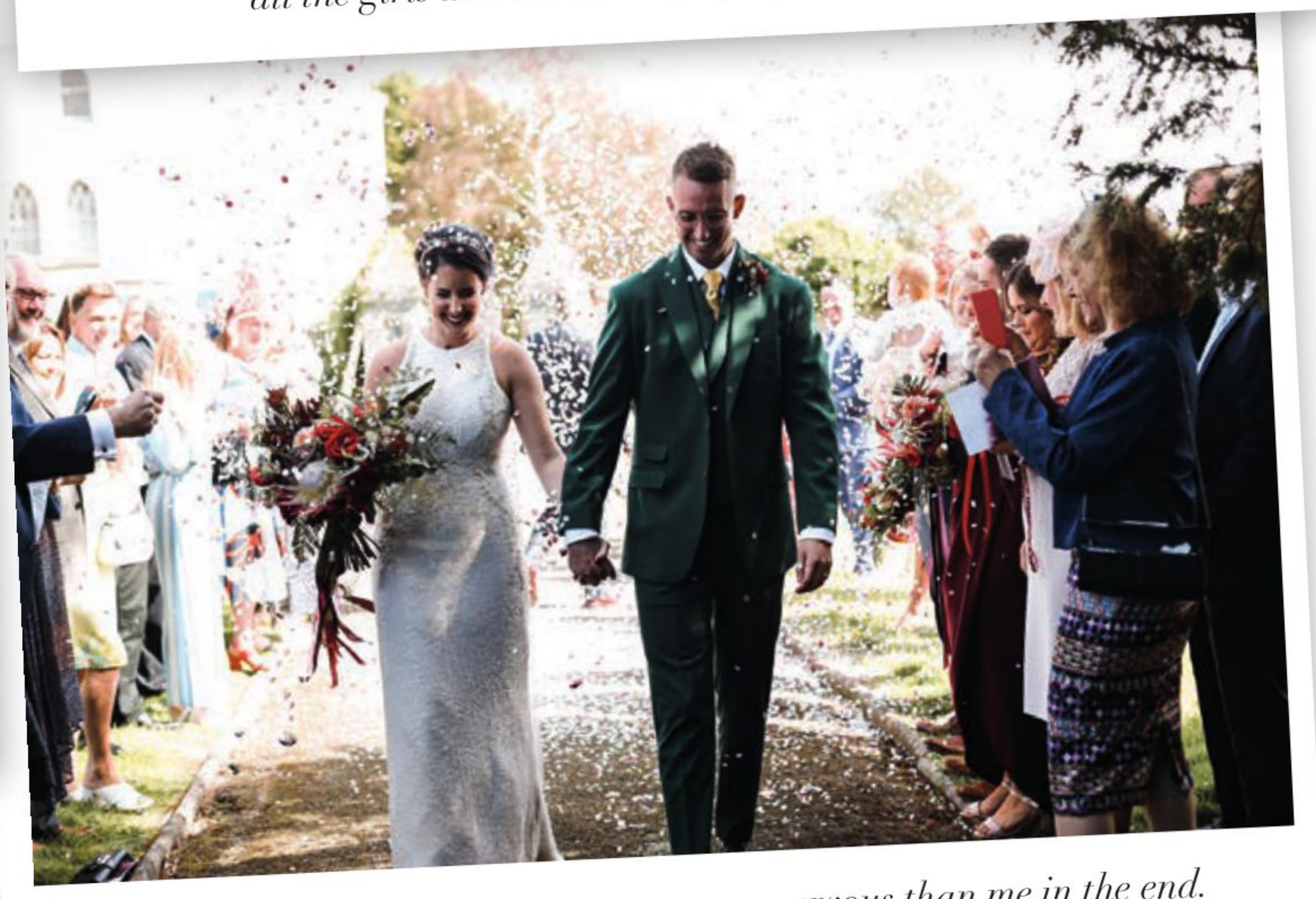
We hired a red Morgan in honour of my late grandfather. He never got to drive his Morgan as he became too ill by the time he got it. Our original transport company cancelled the booking three days before the wedding, but luckily we found Morgan Motor Company who stepped in.

I had a dress made for me by the super talented Amy at Amy Mair Couture. I had tried on lots of gowns that I had saved on my Instagram over the years, but they didn't suit me. Amy took all the features that I liked and combined them to create the perfect design.

Matt had his suit made for him by Francis & Francis. He wanted a green outfit to go with our theme, but we struggled to find anything he liked. Francis & Francis let him pick every aspect of the suit, including how many pockets and buttons he wanted.

The bridesmaids' dresses were from an Australian website called Shona Joy. I organised for them to go to my friend's mother's house in Australia and he kindly went and collected when he was there visiting. They suited all the girls and the colour fit perfectly with our theme.

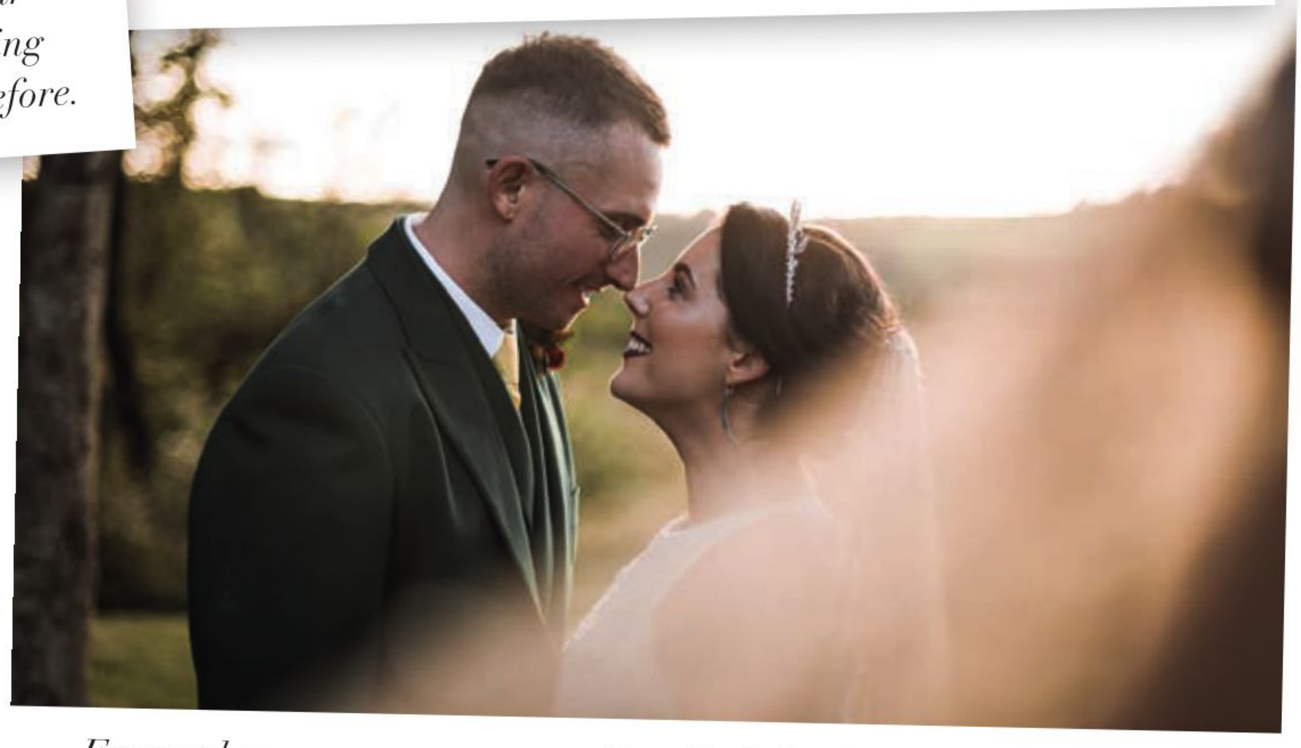
In the evening, we had an amazing DJ called Matt Hayes-Lissack, who kept our guests entertained. He played all of the songs we requested and ensured everyone had a great time. We also had karaoke from Karaoke Hire, which was a massive hit after a few drinks.



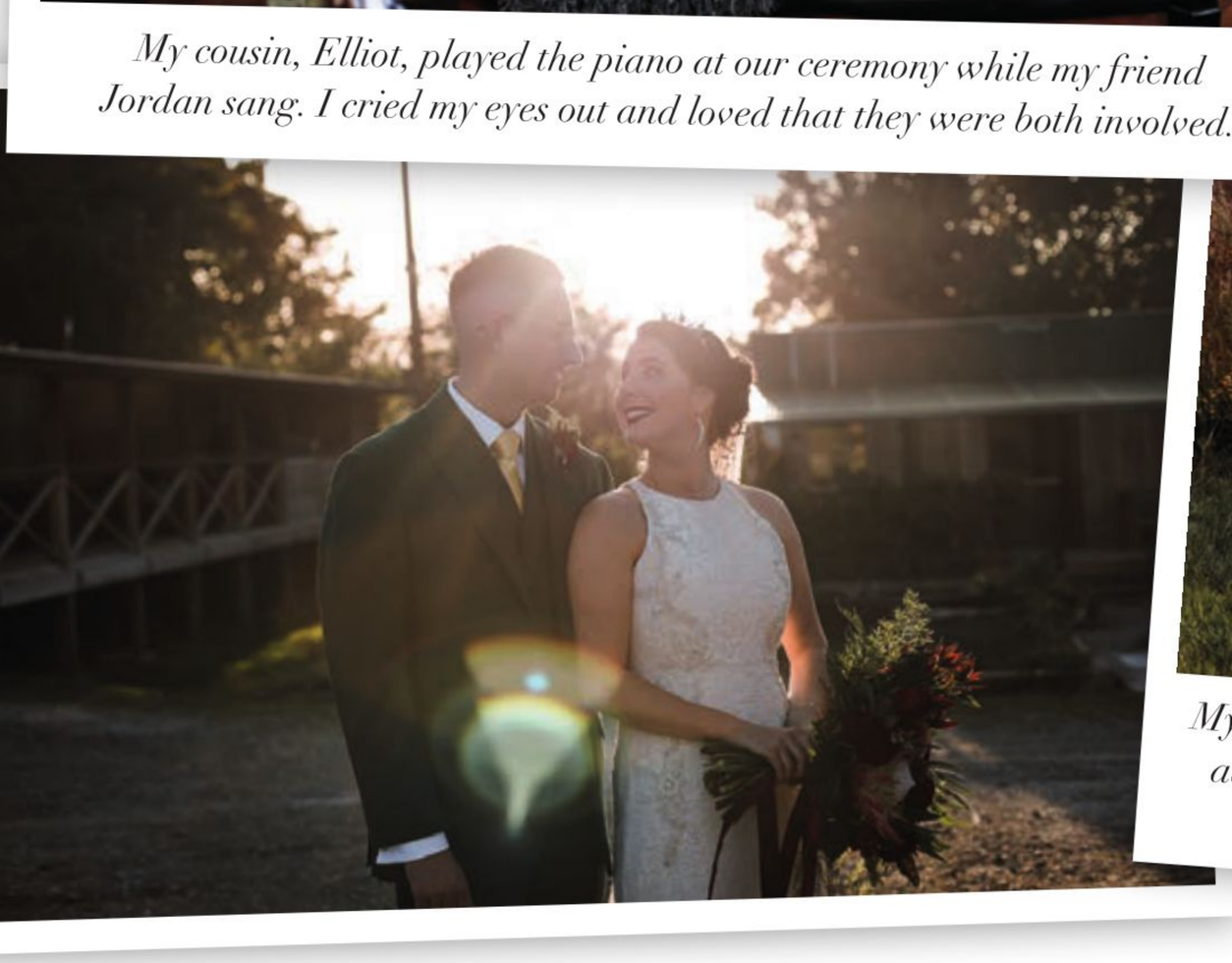
I felt calm on the day, and Matt was more nervous than me in the end. We were both super excited and couldn't wait to celebrate with our friends and family.

The sun finally came out as we were singing our final hymn in the church. We couldn't have wished for better weather and loved having all our guests staying on-site with us. Especially at breakfast the next morning when we were all nursing hangovers and reminiscing about the day before.

My cousin, Elliot, played the piano at our ceremony while my friend Jordan sang. I cried my eyes out and loved that they were both involved.



For our honeymoon, we went to New York for five nights and then onto Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando for two weeks. We went eight weeks after our wedding to give us something to look forward to.



My top tip for any couple would be don't book all your suppliers too far in advance. Take recommendations from people you trust and try and use small, local businesses.

LUCINDA AND MATTHEW'S CONTACTS

Venue and catering, Fforest Weddings, fforestweddings.co.uk | **Photographer**, Eve Ash Photography, eveashphotography.co.uk **Videographer**, LeeLea Films, leeleafilms.com | **Bride's dress**, Amy Mair Couture, amymaircouture.co.uk | **Bride's shoes**, Jimmy Choo, jimmychoo.com | **Bride's headpiece**, Etsy, etsy.com | **Bride's jewellery**, Thomas Sabo, thomassabo.com | **Bride's nails and bridesmaids' make-up**, J.E.M Nails & Beauty, instagram.com/j.e.m_nails | **Hair stylist**, Roots, 01239 615 902 | **Make-up artist**, Ellie-May James Makeup Artist, instagram.com/elliemay_makeupartist | **Bridesmaids' dresses**, Shona Joy, shonajoy.com | **Groom's suit**, Francis & Francis, francisandfrancis.wales | **Cake**, Baked By Becks, facebook.com/bakedbybecksj | **Flowers**, Urban Flower Studio, urbanflowerstudio.com | **Decorations**, Flossie & Blossom, flossieandblossomevents.co.uk | **Stationery**, Said With Notes, facebook.com/saidwithnotes | **Transport**, Morgan Motor Company, morgan-motor.com | **Entertainment**, Karaoke Hire, hirekaraoke.co.uk

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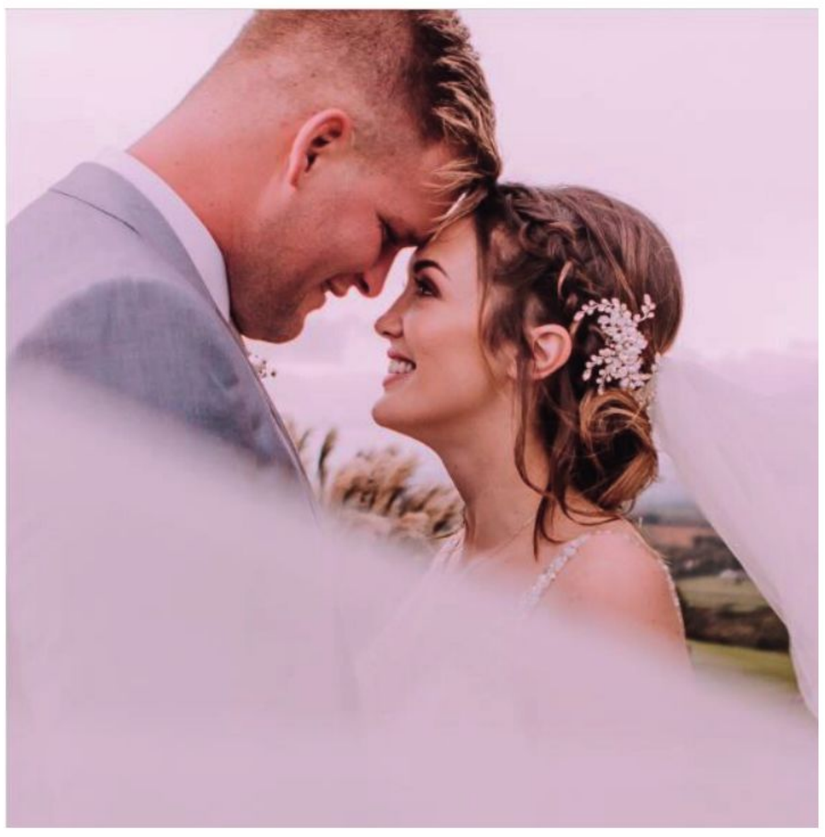

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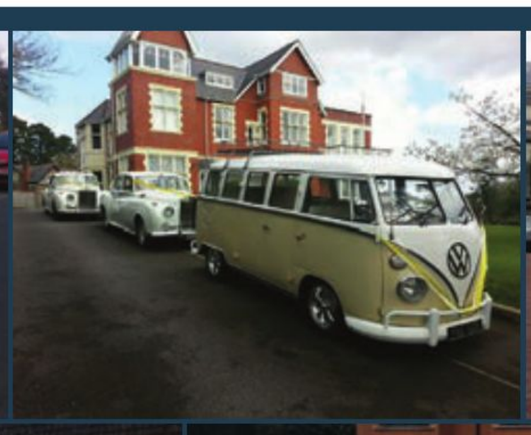
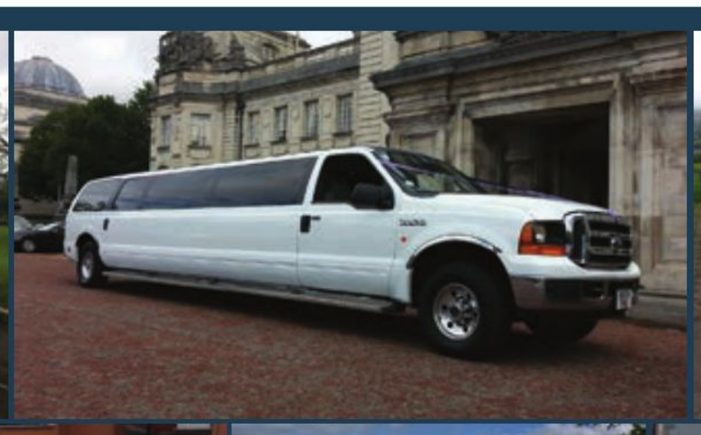
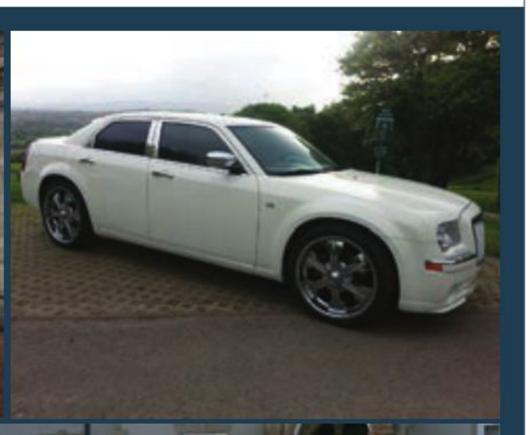

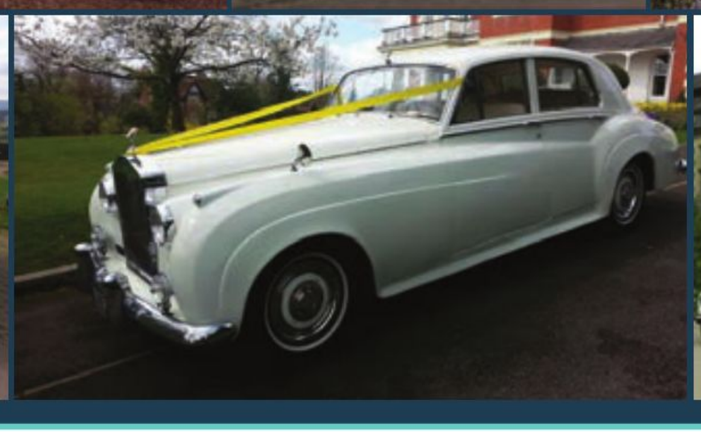

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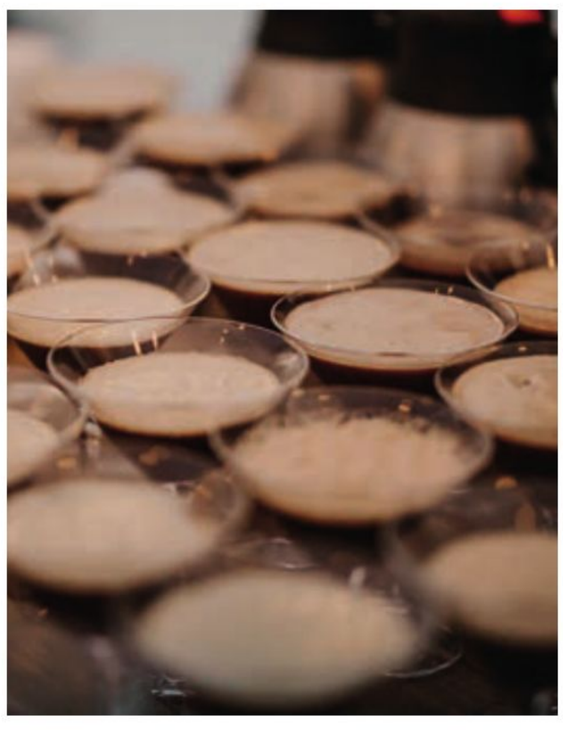

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NATURAL *beauty*

Laura and Matthew celebrated their nuptials at Temple of Peace and Insole Court

Images courtesy of Artisan X Wedding Photography

Laura and Matthew met at university. "We were both involved with the film society," says Laura. "We hit it off right away and have been together ever since."

Matthew popped the question during a trip to Norway. "I'd always wanted to see the Northern Lights, so for our 10th anniversary we decided to go," shares the bride. "We were hiking up a mountain overlooking Tromsø when Matt got down on one knee and proposed."

Here she shares some of her favourite moments from their big day...

We chose the Temple of Peace for our ceremony. It's really dramatic, and we got some really beautiful photographs thanks to our photographer, Chris.

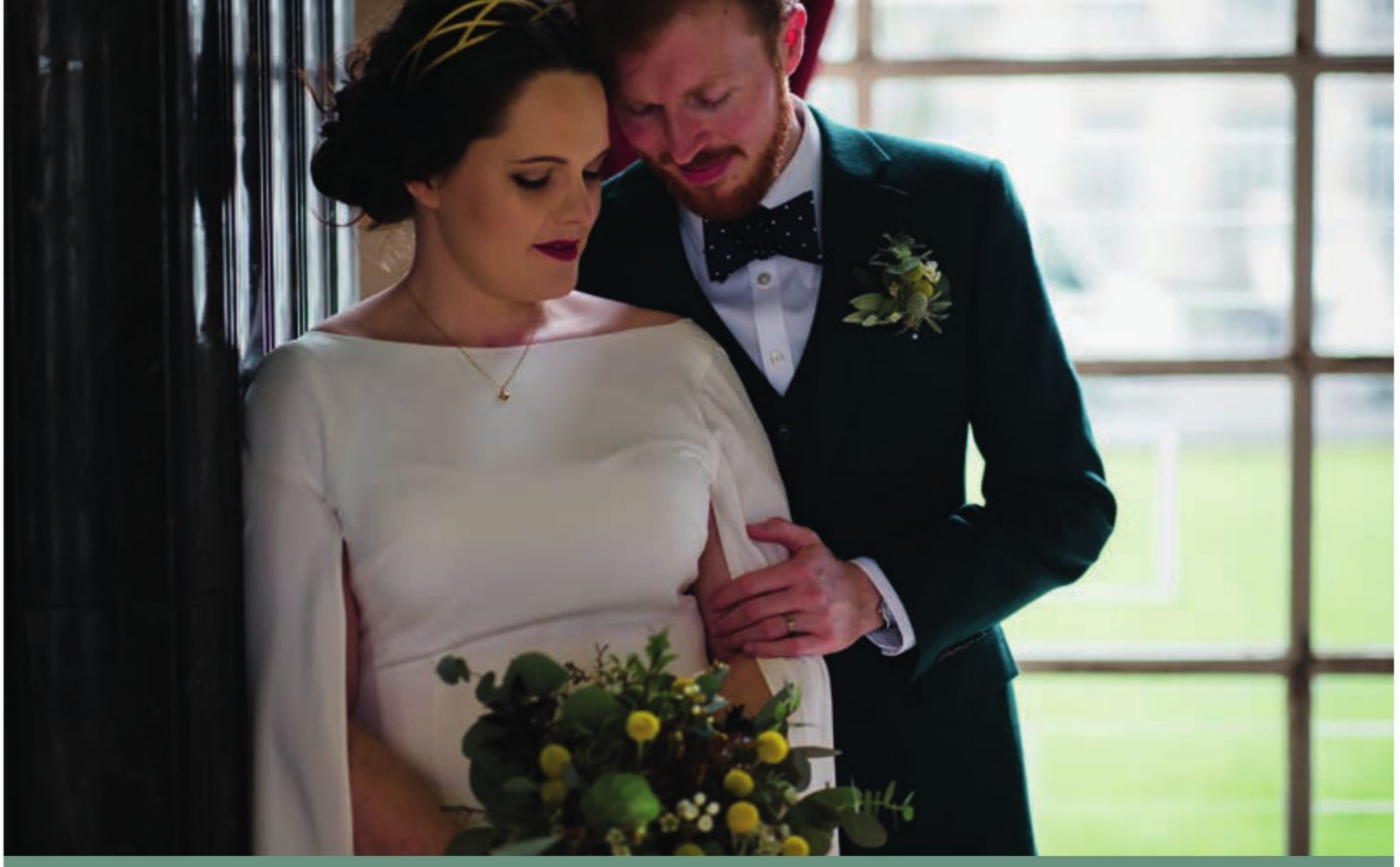
The cake came from Marks and Spencer and was made up of white and milk chocolate. We chose Mario and Princess Peach Amiibo as our cake-toppers.

Our reception venue, Insole Court, is a beautiful historic house with a great atmosphere. Both Insole Court and the Temple of Peace are charities, so it was wonderful being able to contribute to a worthy cause. It chucked it down all day, but the inside of both venues was so lovely that it didn't matter.

For our centrepieces, we chose peace lilies from Amanda French Flowers. The arrangements looked beautiful and were a good size so that our guests could see over them.

Matt and I hired a food van which everyone loved. We served poutine, a Canadian food, which is chips, gravy and cheese curds. It was the perfect party food, and everyone agreed that the chips were amazing. We actually went on honeymoon to Vancouver Island and didn't have poutine as good as the one served at our wedding.

I wore an Amy Mair dress from Rachel Burgess Bridal Boutique. I really wanted a plain dress and cape as I'm not a fan of lace or fuss. It was comfortable, and the cape blew behind me when I walked, which felt amazing. Rachel was incredible, I'd had so many bad experiences at big bridal stores, but her whole shop was full of beautiful gowns, all of which were made in Wales.



Matt wanted to wear something a bit different, so we went to several tailors looking for a green suit. Beggars Run did a lovely fabric in the same shade as the bridesmaids' dresses that looks amazing. He also wanted a bow tie, and we must have gone through 50 before he found the perfect one.

The bridesmaids chose their dresses as I wanted everyone to be comfortable and happy with the decision.

We chose to walk down the aisle together, and it was one of the best decisions we made. I lost my father a few years ago, and although I don't believe in brides being given away, it felt wrong to replace my dad. We walked in together to The Rolling Stones, one of my dad's favourites.

The day of the wedding was also Wales' final match in the Six Nationals Rugby against Ireland. We knew this might cause traffic, but the bus driving Matt and the guests to the venue went the wrong way into town and ended up getting stuck in road closures near the Millenium Stadium. They were almost an hour late! The groom and his groomsmen ended up running through Bute Park, and because he was wearing a green suit, everyone assumed he was Irish and gave him grief! Thankfully the registrars didn't have any other weddings that day, and it just added to the fun. Just as the speeches were finished, we heard that Wales had won the tournament and everyone burst into the national anthem.

Our mums and my maid-of-honour gave beautiful speeches. We didn't want it to seem like the only people allowed to give speeches were men. There were lots of traditions that we felt were old fashioned or sexist, so we decided not to include them. Heledd, the wedding coordinator at Insole Court, was absolutely incredible. She was such a safe pair of hands and the day ran like clockwork.

Chris, our photographer, was so efficient that even after the rugby delays, he managed to get the day back on track. He took all of the photos that we asked for and more.

LAURA AND MATTHEW'S CONTACTS

Ceremony venue, Temple of Peace, templeofpeace.wales | **Reception venue,** Insole Court, insolecourt.org | **Photographer**, Artisan X Wedding Photography, artisanxphotography.co.uk | **Bride's dress**, Rachel Burgess Bridal Boutique, rachelburgessbridalboutique.com | **Bride's accessories**, Etsy, etsy.com | **Hair and make-up artist**, Minxies, minxiesbeauty.com | **Jeweller**, Jordan Jewellery Design, jordanjewellerydesign.co.uk | **Groom's suit**, Beggars Run, beggarsrun.com | **Cake**, Marks and Spencer, marksandspencer.com | **Flowers**, Amanda French Flowers, amandafrenchflowers.co.uk | **Entertainment**, Wedding DJ Cardiff, wedding-dj-cardiff.com | **Catering**, EJ Catering, ejcatering.wales; Puckin' Poutine, facebook.com/puckin-poutine-833793716768456

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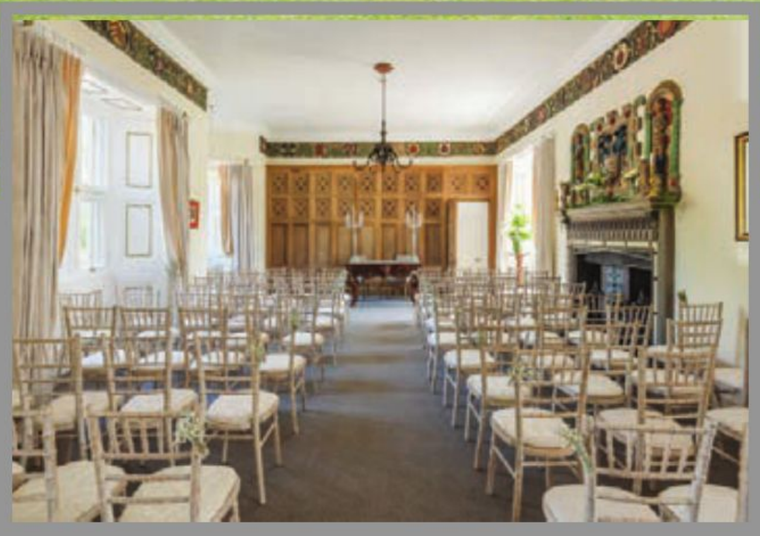

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MEET THE ENTERTAINERS

Get to know local suppliers

When you're organising your wedding budget, entertainment is definitely something that's going to take a large share. Nothing brings people together more than laughter and shared experiences, so it's essential you hire a supplier who will keep your guests smiling throughout the day. To help inspire you, we've asked some of the best local suppliers more about their companies.

MEET MARTIN GODDARD FROM MUSIC HQ

01554 770 152 | musichq.co.uk

What do you offer couples for the big day?

We help couples create unforgettable parties by providing the very best professional live bands in South Wales.

What should couples expect when booking your services?

Hiring a band through Music HQ will give couples the peace of mind that they are booking a professional live music service. All of our acts are managed exclusively by us. Unlike traditional agencies, which simply list and promote acts for a fee, we have created and developed each of our bands with a unique purpose – to bring clients the very best wedding musicians this country has to offer.

How long before the wedding should couples book?

Our bands have fast become the most sought after wedding entertainment in South Wales. As a result, they get booked up very quickly. We're already taking bookings for 2023.

What's your favourite wedding you've worked at?

I played a wedding last year at Fairyhill where the groom had booked Abz Love from the 90s pop band 5ive as a surprise for his bride. The crowd were ecstatic! We got to perform alongside Abz on the night and *Keep on Moving* has been in our set ever since.

What are your top tips for brides-to-be?

We see that many couples are still making the mistake of leaving their entertainment until last. If you don't book early enough, it can end up draining the fun out of your evening in a big way. We urge brides and grooms-to-be to think of their guests. Some of the most memorable moments happen on the dancefloor after all.

MEET ALAN MATTHEWS FROM CARDIFF WEDDING DISCO

02920 777 591 | cardiffweddingdisco.co.uk

What do you offer couples for the big day?

I offer music throughout the ceremony, wedding breakfast and evening disco and uplighting packages.

What should couples expect when booking your services?

Good communication, professional service, prompt response, sensible prices and an extensive playlist.

How long before the wedding should couples book?

As early as possible to avoid disappointment. I'm already taking booking for 2021.

What's your favourite wedding you've worked at?

There were so many great weddings last year, but I would have to say Pearl and David's African/Welsh wedding at Garth Uchaf Farm. It had an amazing and diverse playlist with lots of dancing. The thing that stuck with me was Pearl's attention to detail, she made most, if not all, of the decorations herself and all the rustic woodwork was created by her husband and colleagues.

What are your top tips for brides-to-be?

Have it your way, it's your wedding, so try and make it as personal as possible and let your personalities shine through. Relax and enjoy yourselves, the day will inevitably run late, but that's fine! Your friends and family are there for you, and they love and care about you, and that's all that matters, so have fun!

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MEET JUNE GOULD (DJ JUNE CECILIA) FROM SGDJ AND SG DISCOS

07779 657 983 | sgdjweddings.com

What do you offer couples for the big day?

We offer DJ services, sound and lighting, master of ceremonies, optional recording of your speeches, PA, music and sound support. We also provide two optional extras, a selfie wizard, which is a fun photo sharing experience that your guests can actively participate in, and the funkiest dancefloor ever! Couples can book us for part of the day or for a full-day.

What should couples expect when booking your services?

A meeting preferably at your venue so we can see how we'll fit in the space available and discuss in person your wishes. Couples can expect flexible payment terms and peace of mind. Many people have had bad experiences and often know what they don't want as much as what they do. Knowing that your musical preferences will be listened to, the quality of sound will be what it should and sound levels are appropriate are all things that you should expect and will help you relax on the day.

How long before the wedding should couples book?

Bookings can be made up to two years in advance, but most people book six to 12 months ahead. The shortest notice we've had was two weeks before and luckily we had the dates free.

What's your favourite wedding you've worked at?

I have loved seeing the joy in happy couples on their day. Sometimes there's wild and crazy dancing, sometimes it's all quite dignified, and musical tastes can be quite varied. One of the greatest things is just meeting and getting to know some lovely people.

What are your top tips for brides-to-be?

Don't drink too much on the day! You have looked forward to this special day for months or years, so it's important you savour each moment and remember it all before it's gone. Don't book buses for your guests before the end of the night. Have a good ending and take some time for proper goodbyes. If things don't go exactly as planned – it's okay! You can still enjoy the day and have a unforgettable positive experience. Do plenty of planning and delegating in advance, so you're not too exhausted to enjoy the day.

oakfieldphotography.net

The dancefloor can also be used as an aisle.

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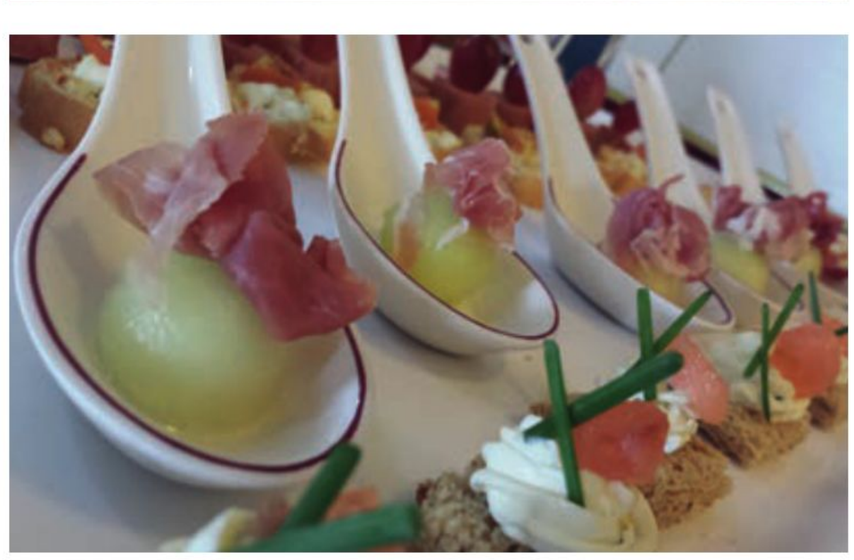

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A little bit of history - according to Welsh folklore, love spoons were traditionally made from a single piece of wood and ornately carved by gentlemen as a gift of love to show their affection for their sweetheart.

We pride ourselves on using local companies in South Wales for the manufacture of our love spoons and all our Welsh cake ingredients.

Email: info@welshcakehut.com for more information

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PLANNED TO PERFECTION

My wife-to-be and I are getting married next spring, and the only thing we've booked is our venue. What should we book next, and how do we know a supplier is trustworthy?

If you've already booked your venue, hopefully, you'll have thought about the sort of day you want and how much you're prepared to spend. With the average wedding costing upwards of £20K, you need to make sure that you're prioritising, especially if you're on a tight budget.

- ❤ Half of your budget will go on your venue, food and drink, so make sure you're keeping enough aside for everything else.
- ❤ The best suppliers can get booked up quickly, so it's important to be organised.
- ❤ Photographers should come first. Make sure you meet a few and go with someone you feel super comfortable with.
- ❤ Flowers are central to making your day look amazing, so that should be your next priority. Again, meet a few and go with a supplier who understands your vision and inspires you with ideas.
- ❤ Next, go and see cake makers. Your big-day bake will be a focal point for your theme, and the tasting session is one of the best parts of planning.
- ❤ Always do your research! Ask for testimonials, check out their feedback on social media and don't book the first company you come across.
- ❤ My podcast *The Icing on the Cake* will guide you through the planning process step-by-step, making sure you ask the right questions and consider everything before committing.

Zoë Marie Binning
Wedding planner
weddingsbyzoe.co.uk

CAPTURING MEMORIES

We're getting married next spring and would like some shots that reflect the season. Do you have any suggestions?

Firstly, it might be useful to research places near your venue that you want to take photographs at. Mention them to your photographer, so they can go and visit before the big day. Don't be afraid to tell your chosen supplier your ideas and the look you want to achieve. Look for locations with beautiful spring flowers that are beginning to blossom, parks, fields and beaches with sand dunes. I encourage my couples to think of their favourite place that they may want to visit during the day.

I love all things natural, so I get my couples outside to make the most of the weather – even if it's a rainy day. I have a clear brolly in my car at all times so we can make the most of every situation.

Incorporate spring into your theme with pastel bouquets, seasonal favours and flowers. It's always fun to get your bridesmaids involved and get some cute outdoor photos.

Lucy Parker
Photographer
lucyparkerphotography.co.uk

mybigdayphotos.co.uk

IT'S SHOWTIME

We're getting ready to book our entertainment, but we're not sure where to start or what we should be asking suppliers. Do you have any suggestions?

With so many options to choose from, it can be a tricky task. Once you've decided on the type of entertainment you want, it's important to stay in touch with your provider in the lead up to the wedding. Make sure you run your plans by them at least once, whether it's to advise them on any intricate ideas you have or just to let them know the basic schedule for the day. Creating fun is an essential part of entertainment etiquette, so if you have anything in mind, just run it by them.

Ask your chosen supplier if your wedding date is available? Is it possible to meet before booking? Have you performed at the venue before? How much do you charge and what's included? How much deposit do you require and do you have a payment plan?

Most professionals will have answered these questions hundreds of times before, so you shouldn't feel bad about getting in touch, even if it's for the simplest thing. They will always be glad to hear from you, especially if it's for something that will make your entertainment better than you could have imagined.

Martin Goddard
Entertainment specialist
musichq.co.uk

carmelteresamccabe.co.uk

LOVE THROUGH A LENS

We're looking for a wedding photographer, but we're a bit worried about booking someone online that we've never met. Do you have any suggestions?

Photographers should never have a problem meeting in person before the big day. I believe it's important that you gel with your chosen supplier, after all, you don't want to share one of the most important days of your life with a stranger.

- ❤ Never be afraid to ask questions before committing. Ask if and how long your photographer will provisionally hold your date and if they offer a no-obligation consultation before booking.
- ❤ Most importantly read the reviews from past couples to get a better insight into the company.

Carmel Teresa McCabe
Photographer
carmelteresamccabe.co.uk

SCRUMDIDDLYUMPTIOUS

We want to incorporate our Welsh heritage into our big day, do you have any suggestions?

Welsh cakes would make perfect wedding favours while also adding a touch of your heritage to the day. Here at Welsh Cake Hut, every order is bespoke, you can choose the flavour, shape, add ribbons and tags.

Love spoons are also a great idea. According to Welsh folklore, they were traditionally made from a single piece of wood and ornately carved by men as a gift to show his affection for his sweetheart.

Melanie Hall
Welsh cake specialist
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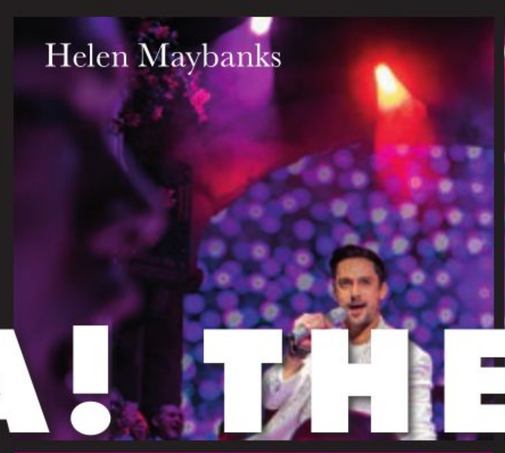
PARTY IN THE CAPITAL

We put two London hen dos to the test

Whatever your taste, there's not much that the capital can't offer in terms of hen do celebrations. Hannah Faulder got to check out two of the best experiences – oh, the hardship – one you can invite your nan along to and the other, well, maybe not…

Helen Maybanks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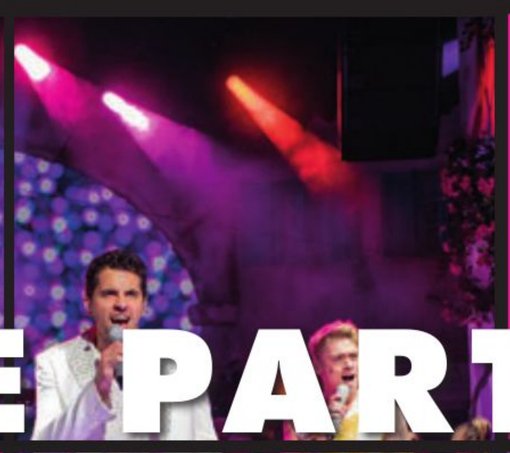

MAMMA MIA! THE PARTY

I'm a firm believer that there are two types of people in this world: people who love ABBA and people who won't admit they love ABBA. I am well and truly in the first camp – in fact, obsessed is probably the correct term for my adoration of the Swedish fab four – so my expectations were very high for this event.

Billed as an immersive entertainment experience that puts guests at the heart of the action, I couldn't quite picture how this was going to pan out and all I knew was that we would be getting dinner while watching a *Mamma Mia*-inspired show. Arriving at the O2 with my sister (another ABBA nut), we walked through the big blue doors and suddenly we were on a Greek island in a pretty courtyard complete with fountain, olive trees and walls draped in bougainvillea, instead of London on a dreary Monday night. From the moment we took our seats in Nikos' Taverna, that was it; I was swept up in the brilliant and slightly ridiculous magic of it all. The free-flowing wine probably helped.

Everyone was so into the show that they probably could've got away with mediocre food, but in truth it was delicious. The four-course gourmet meal of tasty Mediterranean fare was incredible – the bread and olives alone were to die for. And as for the show, it was just one huge incredible party – we all laughed, cried and sang along with our new found friends – and we weren't just observing, everyone was part of the action. I challenge anyone to not start dancing; we were up mid-mouthful at many points if *Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!* or *Dancing Queen* were somehow shoehorned into the plot. The joyous atmosphere was totally infectious.

At the end of the show, they roll out a huge stage and a disco starts up. My sister and I were devastated to leave but we had to get the last train home, which we soon found out had been cancelled, and with that we were back down to earth with a thud. If you don't like ABBA, the price tag may terrify you. If you do, it's worth every penny.

Visit the website mammamiatheparty.com

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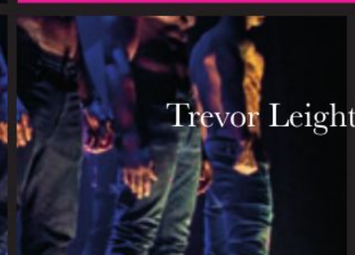
Trevor Leighton

When I told people I was going to see Magic Mike Live I got a lot of giggles and some funny looks. If you're a millennial woman, there's a good chance you've seen the film (or at least, fast-forwarded to the good bits), so you probably have an idea of what the live show will entail. What Channing Tatum's extravaganza actually provides though is a somewhat more friendly experience. I won't give the premise away (although let's face it, we're not here for the story), but let's just say that the female MC is very much in charge of the situation, and we as audience members are reaping the benefits of a more feminist approach to a traditional strip show.

We arrived at the Hippodrome Casino, which is perfectly located in Leicester Square for those who want a night on the town afterwards, and are directed to the venue and order a drink right to our seats. The show is around an hour and a half, but it goes by in a flash of tanned skin and oiled muscles. The dance moves range from a bit saucy to one routine with a female dancer that verges on indecent, but the general feel-good vibe of the evening and the comedic styling of the host stop it from careering into tacky.

I have to say, I haven't laughed so much in a long time. My friend and I were screaming and whooping along to the show – and this was a school night! I can just imagine a Saturday night with a group of your best girls and you could bring the house down. I have to mention the audience participation, as it is a big part of the show. I was slightly terrified at the prospect of this beforehand, but when you're in the moment the nerves go out the window. My friend even sat on a piano and had a hunky man serenade her! It feels like a totally safe and inclusive environment, but if you're really not up for a lap dance, just say the safe word "unicorn" and you'll be passed by. Not that we saw many people using the safe word, except for a very embarrassed looking Alex Jones from *The One Show*. All in all, this is riotous, naughty fun best consumed with copious cocktails and your best friends by your side.

Visit magicmikelondon.co.uk

TOP 10

10 tips for planning your dream sustainable wedding

Celia Gaze is the founder of The Wellbeing Farm, and says, "As we're getting more conscious about our environment and how we can protect it, the idea is also flooding the wedding market, as brides are looking for a lush wedding day that doesn't cost the planet. As a venue that has always had a green centre, here are our 10 top tips if you're planning a sustainable wedding..."

1

DITCH THE PALM BEACH WEDDING IN FAVOUR OF SOMETHING LOCAL

This may be an obvious one, but it's a good starting point. As nice as those pictures of destination weddings look, think of all the air miles to fly everyone over, and then transport from the airport... that's a lot of CO2 emissions. With that in mind, if your venue is accessible by public transport, even better.

2

PLAN A VEGETARIAN OR VEGAN MENU

One of the biggest trends is cutting out a lot of meat and other animal products from your diet. Whilst your wedding has been considered the one day you can indulge, this now doesn't mean that you can't splurge on taste without cutting out the meat. Even as an omnivore, some of the nicest food I have had is vegetarian and vegan. If your menu is seasonal, organic, or uses fair trade ingredients, or a mixture of all three, even better!

3

SPEAKING OF SEASONAL, KEEP YOUR FLOWERS SEASONAL TOO

Seasonal flowers save the air miles, there's no need to import tulips from Holland in the middle of September. Also start thinking about what you are going to do with the flowers afterwards, and if your florist avoids using foam in their arrangements, that's a big fat green thumbs up. If they are also supplying confetti, look at a kind that is bio-degradable.

4

Think about transport

If your venue isn't easy to get to via public transport, instead of a million cars arriving at your venue, think about hiring a coach from a suitable meeting point e.g. the hotel your guests are staying at; this will hopefully cut down a lot of emissions even before your big day starts.

5 USE RECYCLABLE MATERIALS OR SECOND-HAND PROPS FOR YOUR DÉCOR

One of our biggest features for our brides is our Prop Shed, which holds every kind of decorative prop you can imagine: saving time, money and the planet as everything is reused from couple to couple. Some brides like to use bits they've picked up themselves – afterwards, think about donating to other brides for their day.

6 ASK YOUR VENUE ABOUT ITS GREEN POLICY

A big note when looking around venues is looking at its bar – if they are still using plastic straws, that's a big no-no! Do they recycle everything on-site, use local suppliers, grow their own produce and have they cracked down on single-use plastic, among many other measures.

7 *Find local suppliers*

From your cake to your DJ, using suppliers who are local to you/ your venue is key to making your wedding sustainable and keeping your wedding's carbon footprint down. Venues should have a list of recommended suppliers on their websites, who are all local to the property.

8 CONSIDER SUSTAINABLE FAVOURS

Think about not just what you want them to be, but also how they are packaged. Stay away from the plastic toys and trinkets, and cellophane wrapping that cannot be recycled. If there is an animal, environmental or sustainability charity that means something to you and your partner, a donation favour to that charity would be a good choice.

9 DRESS UPCYCLE

Why not donate your dress to a charity shop to make an impact long after the big day – this also applies to the bridesmaids' dresses too if you're looking for a green wedding! Also, keep away from silk and other materials that come from animals.

10 IS YOUR STATIONERY SUSTAINABLE?

As pretty as the save-the-date invitations and other stationery looks, think about using invites made from an ethically sourced or recycled material.

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Shoes by Dune London, pink dress by Phase Eight and ivory dress by Warehouse.

HIGH STREET HOT LIST

Fashion favourites Warehouse has announced the launch of an exclusive bridal edit for the new season. The 19-piece collection offers a range of silhouettes in soft chiffon and satin fabrics using a muted colour palette of baby pink, navy, and ivory. They feature simple yet chic details, with vintage-inspired dresses, floral prints, fluted sleeves and back details. Prices range from £79 to £89. To shop, visit warehouse.co.uk warehouseuk

Phase Eight has revealed a new capsule bridal collection consisting of luxury designs with affordable price tags all under £500. There's a nod to the glamorous era of the 1920s with an ivory fringed dress, and this pretty blush tulle style, plus coordinating hats and fascinators. To shop, visit phase-eight.com phaseeight

Shoe experts Dune London unveil the new 20-piece footwear collection alongside an exclusive range of matching clutch bags. Brides will love the jewel trims, ribbon ankle ties and sparkling details. Prices start from £130 for shoes and from £60 for bags. To shop, visit dunelondon.com dune_london

SAY 'YES' TO THE DRESS

Contemporary fashion brand KITRI has launched its debut bridal collection, a nine-piece selection of fun, feminine dresses and jumpsuits. Prices start from £195 for this *Fontana* style, and range up to £245. The pieces feature draped hems, exaggerated sleeves and cascading ruffles. There's choices for an engagement party or pre-wedding dinner too, and bridesmaids will also love the fashionable styles.

Designer, founder and creative director of the brand Haeni Kim says, "We received requests for playful, wearable and affordable bridalwear from our customers since the launch of the brand so I'm very excited about our capsule bridal collection. We have designed a selection of dresses and jumpsuits that will be perfect for many occasions surrounding a modern wedding. It's such an honour to be a part of someone's wedding and we can't wait to see how our customers will wear them."

To shop, visit kitristudio.com kitristudio

FASHION *focus*

Fashion editor Claire Ridley reveals the latest bridal news, buys and launches

EDITOR'S PICK

This dusky pink ribbon and lace bodysuit is from the new Muse by Coco de Mer collection and is the perfect pick for your wedding night and honeymoon. Prices range from £20 for a thong to £120 for a slip, and pieces are available in sizes 30D-F to 36B-F. To shop, visit coco-de-mer.com cocodemeruk

Sisterhood

Kate Halfpenny, the talented designer behind the luxury Halfpenny London bridal brand has launched Sister, a bridesmaid collection with prices ranging from £70 to £295. Multiple styles are available in soft fabrics and three colourways – pink, pewter and navy. Kate says, "The Sister collection has something for everyone – from my signature separates to dresses and even a jumpsuit. They've all been designed to wear again and again, styled in your own way." To shop, visit halfpennylondon.com halfpennylondon

Editor's choice

Dress your little ones in the latest styles from French designer childrenswear brand Marie-Chantal.

This blue floral printed dress called *Eve* is the perfect pick for a spring wedding, and others include pretty pastels in gingham and tweed.

To shop, visit mariechantal.co.uk mariechantalchildren

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We have an impressive selection of bridesmaid, evening and prom dresses and Mother of the Bride/Groom outfits and occasion wear.

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SAY *yes* TO THE DRESS

Local bridal boutiques showcase some of their favourite gowns

When it comes to dress shopping, there's a lot of pressure to find *the one*. You want something that's going to make you feel like a bride but also complement your figure and personality. To help, we've asked some of the region's finest boutiques more about their stores.

Name: *Jayde* by Charlotte Balbier Bridal
Stand out in this colourful ballgown with a large bow on the back and sweetheart neckline.
Available from: Eva Ashley Bridal Lounge

justinharrisphotography.co.uk

"This satin fishtail gown has crystal detailing, cinching in the waist, detailed cap sleeves and beautiful back detail." – Samantha Roberts.
Available from: Samantha K's

Name: *3057* by The Dessy Group
"I love this new 2020 style from The Dessy Group. It's made of stretch charmeuse and has a soft silky feel." – Patricia Turner.
Available from: Dressed to Impress

maxinehowellsphotography.co.uk

Name: Stephanie Allin
"This Welsh gown is made using quality silk and antique French lace giving it a boho look." – Alison George.
Available from: Pritchard & Moore

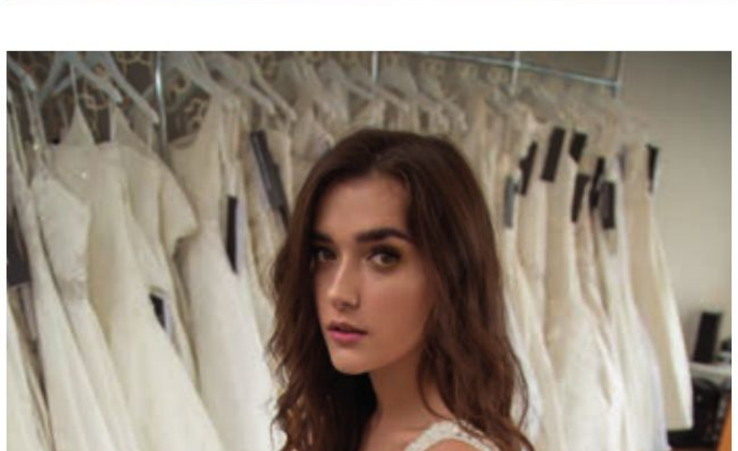
Name: *1727* by Kenneth Winston
This embroidered Venice lace, tulle gown has a detachable necklace and striking back.
Available from: Elizabeth Christie Bridalwear

Name: *Corbyn* by Wtoo Brides
"I love the simplicity of this dress and the statement bow." – Yasmine Baig Keats.
Available from: Yasmin Rose Bridal

Name: *SEK1182* by Eddy K
This showstopping gown has an elegant design with an oh-so-fabulous cape.
Available from: Eva Ashley Bridal Lounge

"New to Samantha K's, this full-length gown is dramatic yet classy. It has full-length lace sleeves, a hand-embroidered back and a grand train." – Samantha.
Available from: Samantha K's

Name: *2993* by The Dessy Group
"This beautiful sequin dress has a lovely open back with delicate spaghetti straps." – Patricia.
Available from: Dressed to Impress



Name: *Maeve* by Romantica of Devon
An ethereal A-line style, with a plunging neckline, illusion lace bodice, lace trim, a layer of polka dot tulle, finished with a v-back.
Available from: Elizabeth Christie Bridalwear

Name: *344* by Zavana
"This stunning dress is perfect for brides looking for a fitted gown. It has gorgeous straps and intricate lace." – Yasmine.
Available from: Yasmin Rose Bridal

Name: Phase Eight
"Covered in ivory sequins, this beautiful gown retains its simplicity and has a lovely low back. It holds its own against many top designer gowns I've had in the store." – Alison.
Available from: Pritchard & Moore

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www.celebrations-bridalwear.co.uk

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Kenneth Winston, Romantica, Venus, Dessy, Richards Designs.

Name: *1712* by Kenneth Winston
This ivory gown has a beautiful bow and buttons on the back with lovely pleating.
Available from: Eva Ashley Bridal Lounge

Name: *Ovalia 51330* by Madeline Gardner New York
This traditional gown has long-sleeves, a detailed bodice and a jewelled belt.
Available from: Samantha K's

Name: *FL4020* by The Dessy Group
"It's hard to choose a flowergirl dress as they're all so adorable. This little number has a ballerina tulle skirt, spaghetti straps and a satin bodice." – Patricia.
Available from: Dressed to Impress

Name: *Lisbon* by Jessica Grace from Tiffanys
Shine on your big day in this striking dress, with detailed beading and stand-out cap sleeves.
Available from: Elizabeth Christie Bridalwear

Name: *Joelle* by Wtoo Brides
"I love the delicate beaded spaghetti straps and the floral appliqué lace." – Yasmine.
Available from: Yasmin Rose Bridal

"I love this vintage gown. It's only £199 and shows you can look good on a budget. It's simple, timeless and made out of crêpe, which is the most gorgeous wedding dress fabric." – Alison.
Available from: Pritchard & Moore

CONTACT THE EXPERTS

Eva Ashley Bridal Lounge, evaashley.com | **Samantha K's**, samanthaks.co.uk | **Pritchard & Moore**, pritchardandmoore.co.uk
Dressed to Impress, dressedtoimpressonline.co.uk | **Elizabeth Christie Bridalwear,** celebrations-bridalwear.co.uk | **Yasmin Rose Bridal**, yasminrosebridal.com

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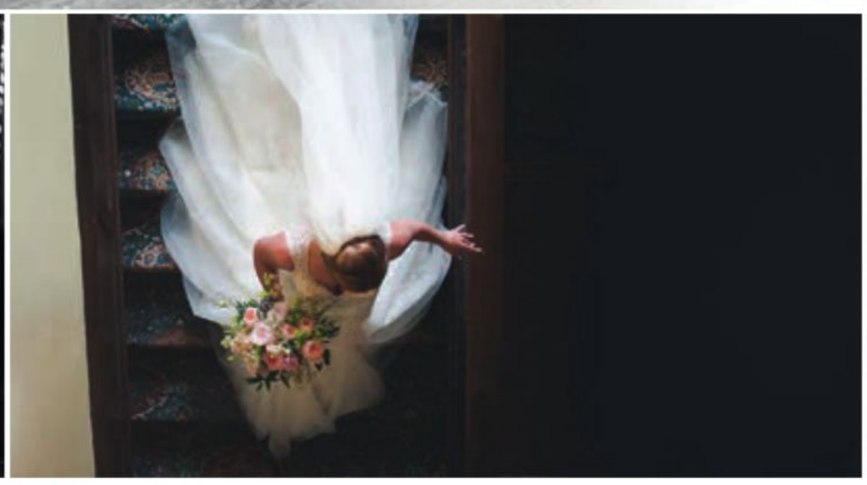

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Evening Capacity	220
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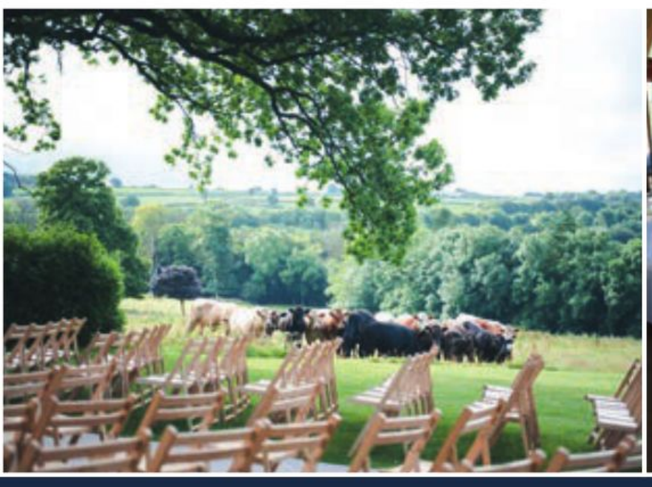
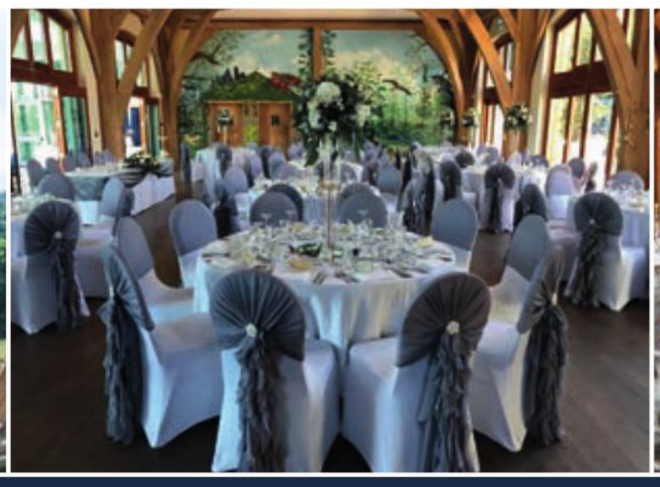
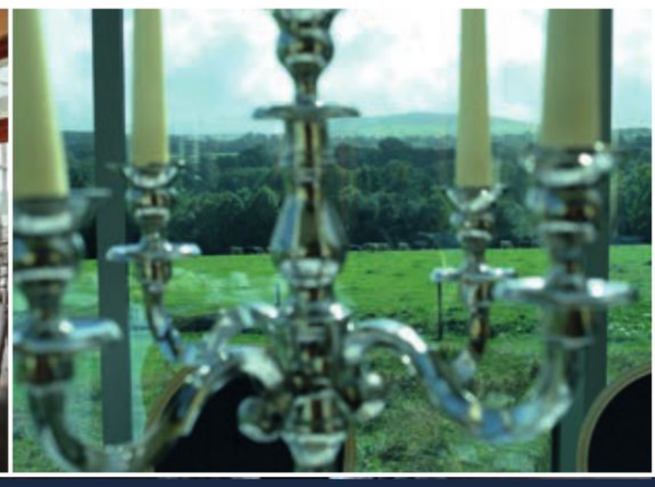
Guest Rooms	Yes
Parking	Yes
Exclusive Use	Yes
Whole Estate Hire	Yes
Day Hire	Yes







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One_shoulder

suzanneneville.com

Fun and frivolous

These flirty styles are setting the trends for 2020

Halterneck

catherineparrybridal.com

Long sleeves

adriannapapell.com

Oversized bow

alanhannah.co.uk

Short and sassy

justinalexander.com

Embellished back detail

clairepettibone.com

Vintage-inspired sleeves

kitristudio.com

Short sleeves

elbethgillis.com

Bib-front

katyakatya.co.uk

Slip dress

warehouse.co.uk

Shirt-style jumpsuit

kitristudio.com

Plunge neckline

jesuspeiro.com

Feathers

demetrios.com

Chic jumpsuit

charlottebalbier.com

Fringing

phase-eight.com

Elegant cape

jennypackham.com

Tulle detail

kelseyrose.co.uk

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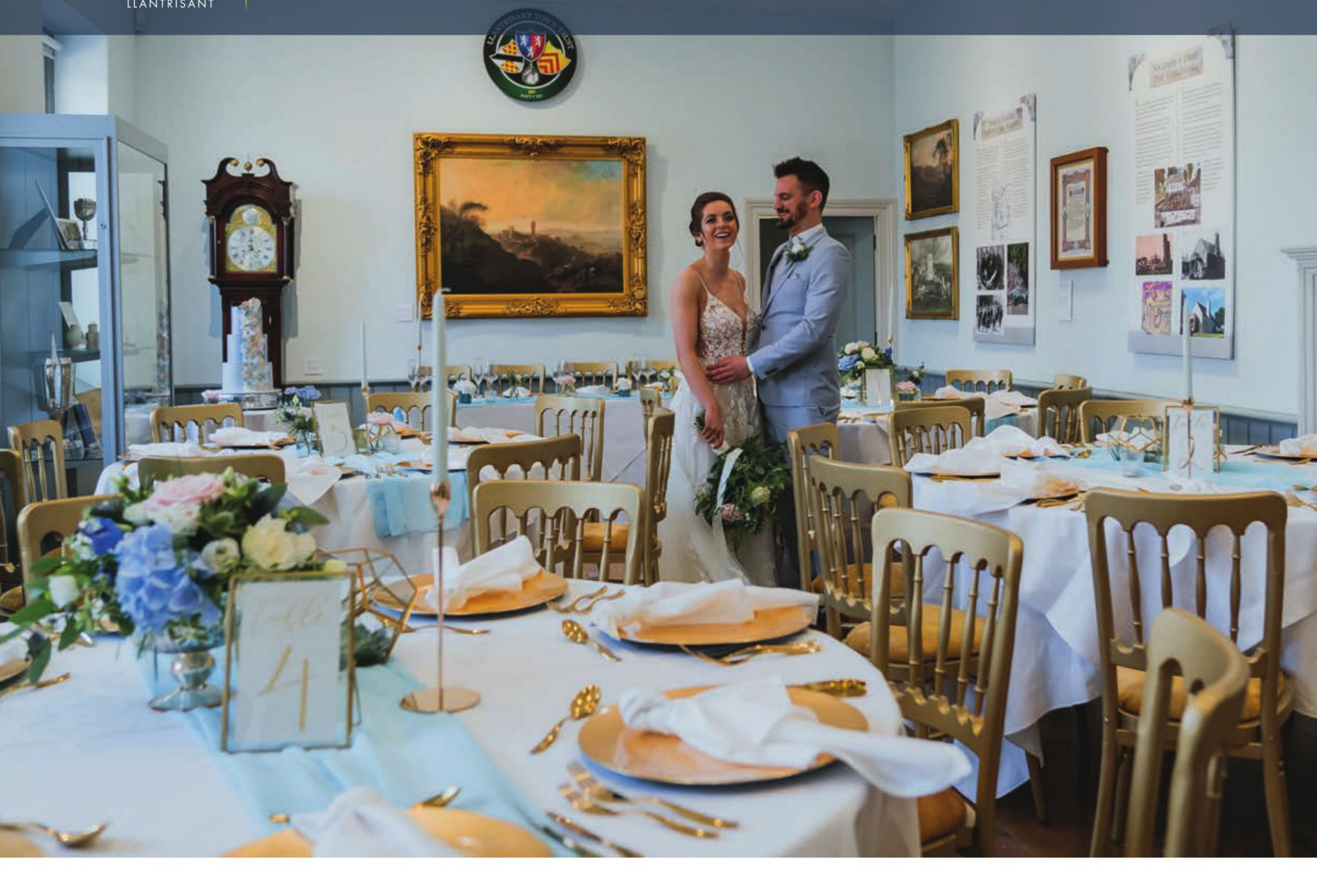

We are delighted to announce that the recently transformed Guildhall at Llantrisant, situated a short distance from Cardiff is newly available for weddings.

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GUILDHALL LLANTRISANT CASTLE GREEN LLANTRISANT CF72 8EE

These elegant styles can be worn as they are, or teamed with pretty shrugs or statement chokers for maximum impact

Madelyn dress with collar by elbethgillis.com

CHIC AND *strapless*

Aerial by charlottebalbier.com

Anais by clairepettibone.com

Style no 014 by demetrios.com

Margot by Kelly Faetanini at elliesanderson.co.uk

Bianca by jennypackham.com

Fern by alanhannah.co.uk

Style no 058 by jesuspeiro.com

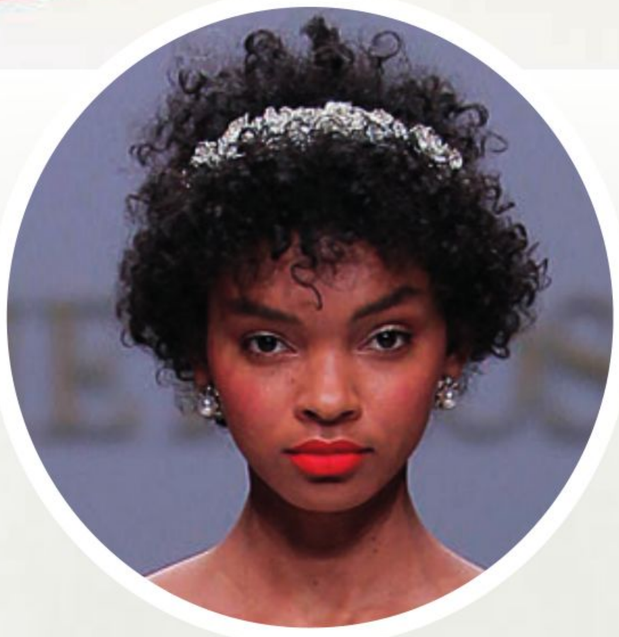
Rose by whistles.com

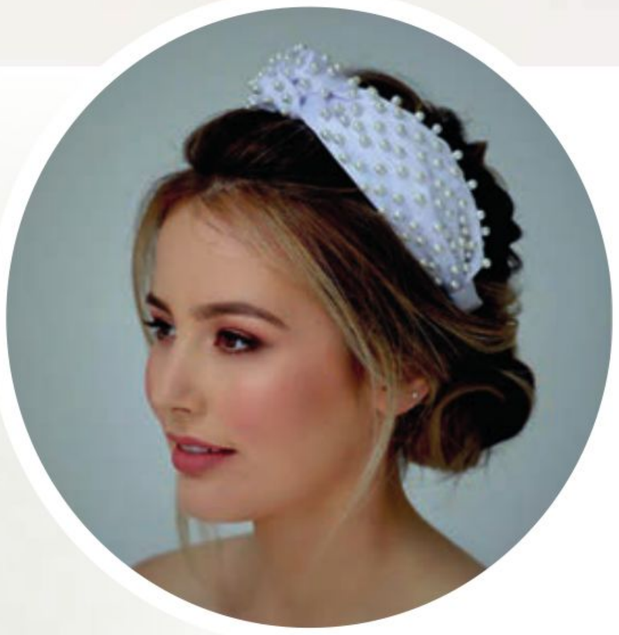
HEADLINERS

Hair clips, bands and accessories were spotted at the recent bridal catwalk shows. Get the look with our Insta-worthy selection

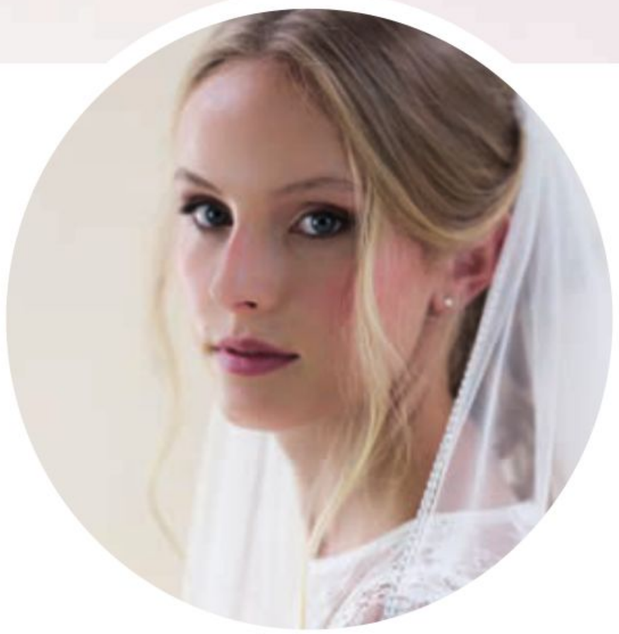
Headdress, from a selection, mervebayindir.com

Tiaras and veils spotted at demetrios.com. For similar, try richard-designs.com





White silk pearl headband, £59, aliceandblair.co.uk



Veil, £175, rainbowclub.co.uk

Pearl-encrusted headband, £23, chichiclothing.com

Fascinator with ivory flowers, £35, phase-eight.com

Hair slides, from £19 for set of four, aliceandblair.co.uk

Set of three hair slides, £15, oliverbonas.com

Cream knot headband, £4.99, newlook.com

Headband featuring large flower, from a selection, uk.accessorize.com

Pearl-effect beaded hair clips, £12 for set of two, crown-love.com

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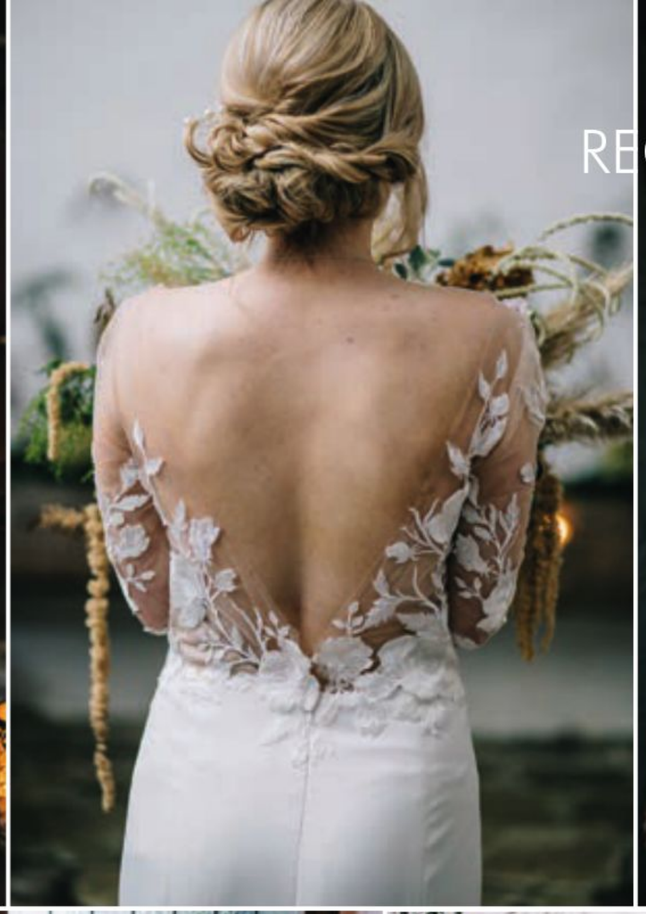
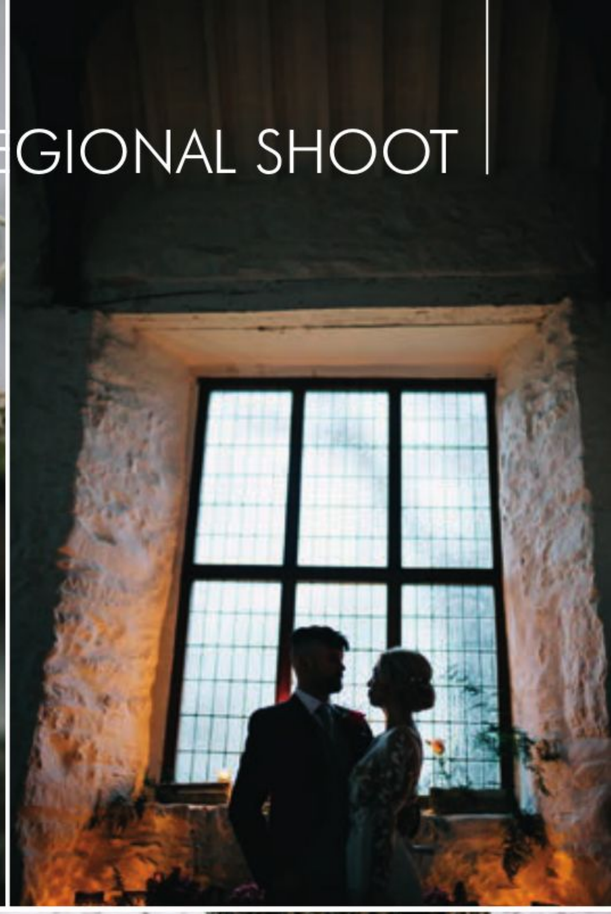
RUSTIC *romance*

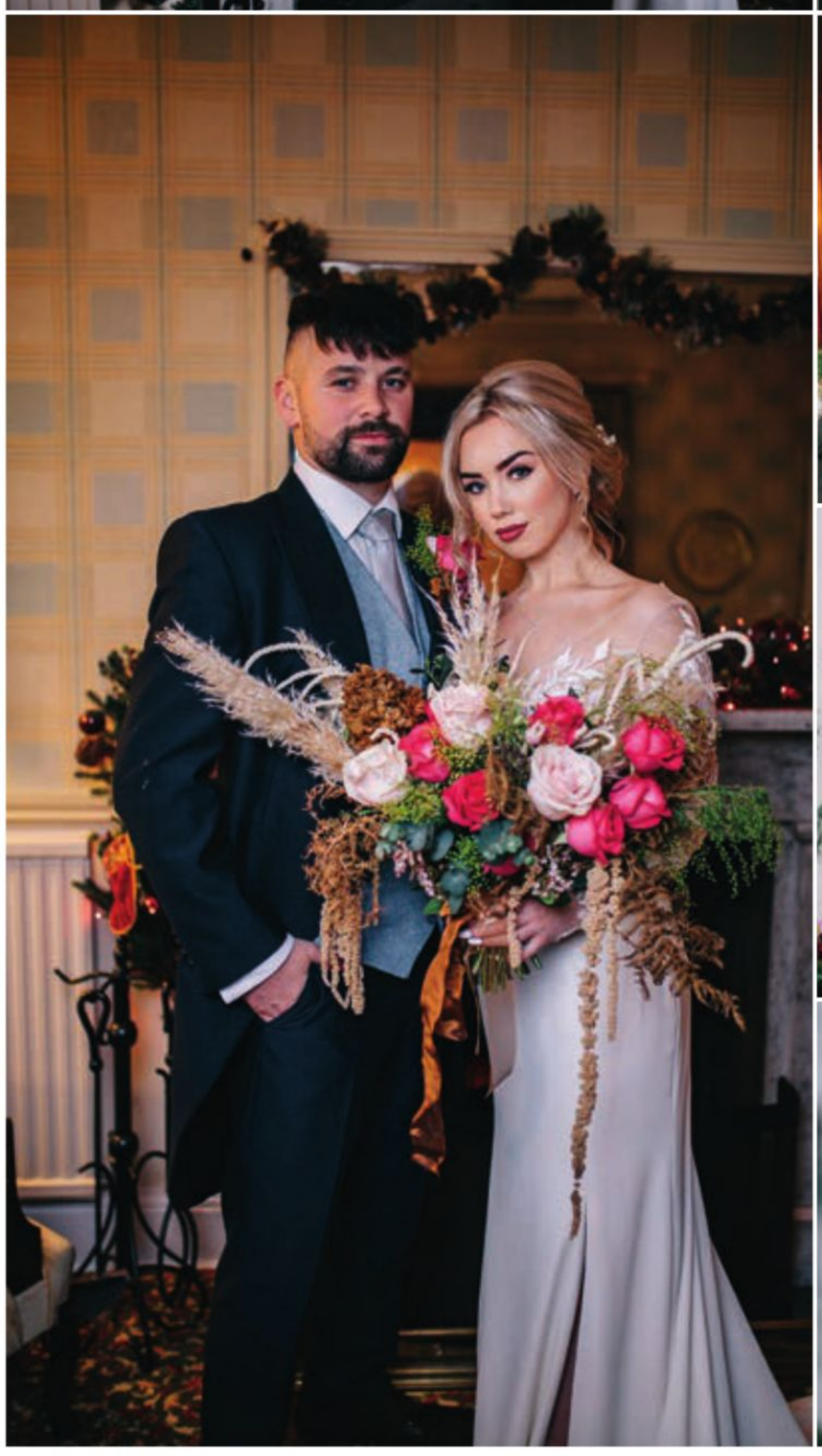
A team of local suppliers worked together to create this stunning shoot at Mynydd Ednyfed and Penarth Fawr

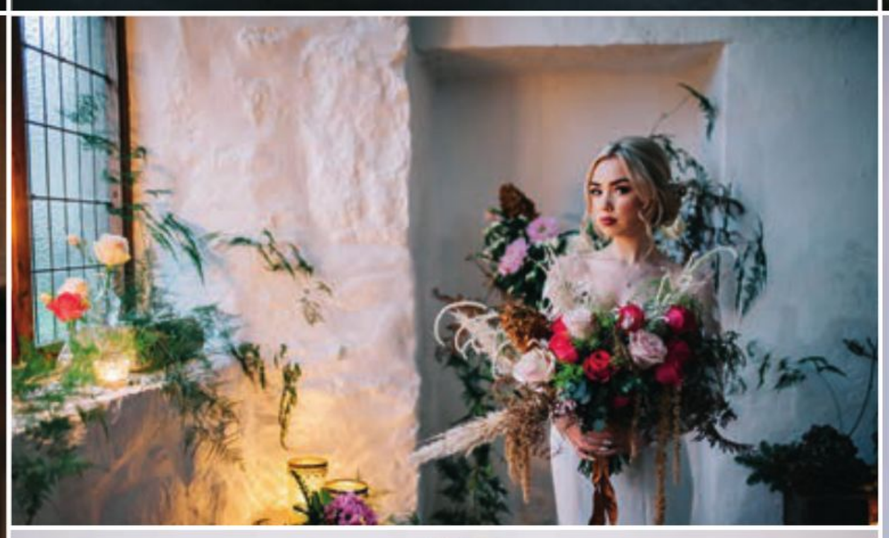
Images courtesy of Andrew Cockerill Photography

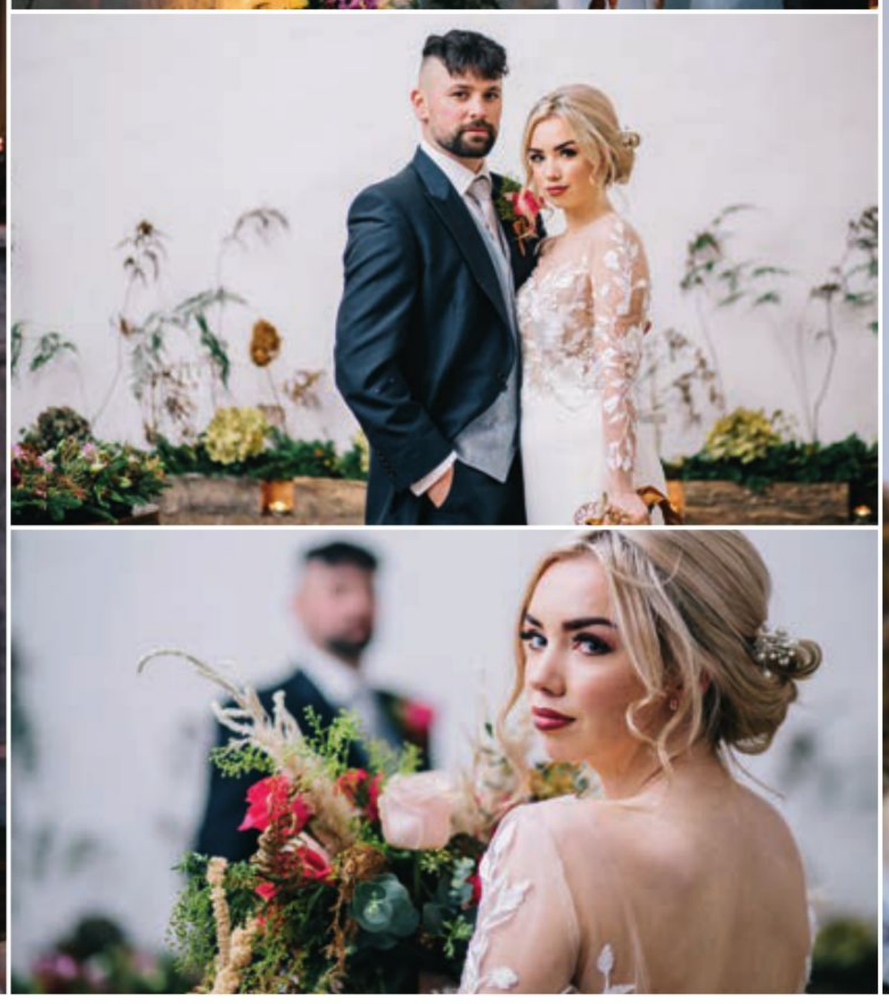
When we received this shoot, we couldn't wait to feature it and highlight some of the wonderful companies in North Wales. We spoke to Heledd from Little Welsh Wedding to find out more: "This Welsh rustic shoot is a combination of concepts in one presentation. We wanted to inspire couples and show that they can combine styles and colours to create a bespoke look."

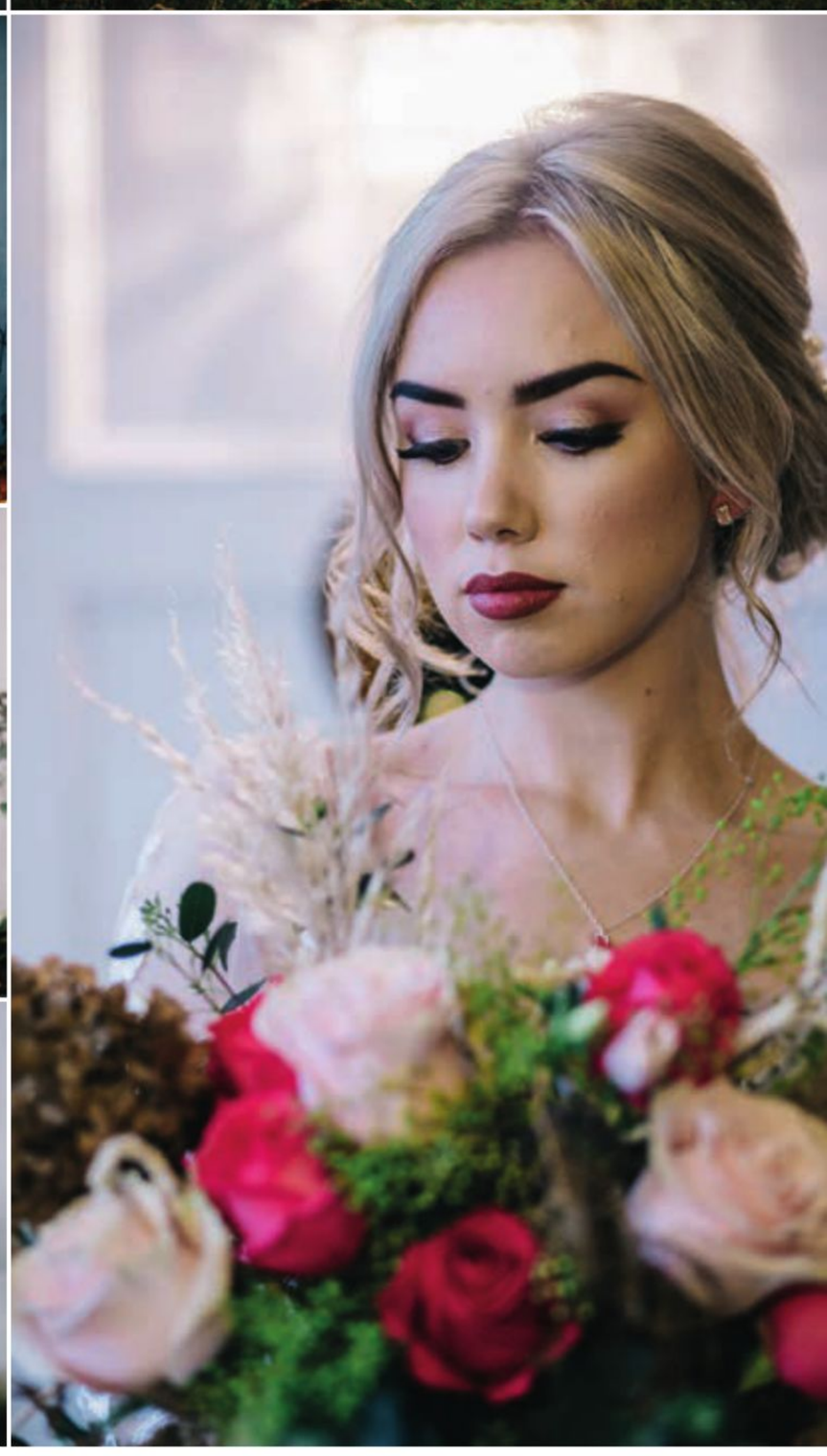












THE DREAM TEAM

Venues, Mynydd Ednyfed, mynydd-ednyfed-countryhouse.co.uk; Penarth Fawr, penarthfawr.com | **Photographer**, Andrew Cockerill Photography, andrewcockerill.com | **Videographer**, Phil Vaughan Films, philvfilms.com | **Planning and concept**, Little Welsh Wedding, priodasfachgymreig.co.uk | **Dress**, The Silk Loft, thesilkloft.co.uk | **Jewellery**, Sara Lois Jewellery, saralois.com | **Make-up artist**, Colur Gan Anest Parker Make Up Artist, facebook.com/coluranestparker | **Hair stylist**, Moncrieffe Hair & Beauty, moncrieffehair.co.uk | **Suit**, Trefor Jones, facebook.com/treforjonesltd1 | **Flowers and venue dressing**, Hen Dy Garden Flowers, hendygardenflowers.com | **Cake**, Mafon, mymafon.com | **Cake stand and Welsh signs**, Geriach Glesni, facebook.com/geriachglesni | **Models**, Shonie Leah Williams and David "Daj" Jones

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Beauty BUZZ

Beauty editor Kelly Andrews shares her latest beauty must-haves for the bride-to-be

IN PURSUIT OF WELLNESS

STILL London, the non-toxic, cruelty-free, vegan and environmentally friendly nail studio, has now launched a regenerating and protecting hand balm. With marine algae extract, lupine peptides, olive oil derived squalane, shea butter, cocoa butter and soya wax this potent formula regenerates, protects, moisturises and firms the skin.

There's also a new cuticle oil available where grape seed and evening primrose oil work seamlessly with a Norwegian algae extract, vitamin E and tea tree to asorb quickly and heal the skin naturally.

The hand balm is priced at £23 and the cuticle oil at £18. Both are available from still-london.com

Glow-givers

Blending natural extracts and cutting-edge science, Scientia Skincare utilises no less than 23 oils sourced from all around the world, including morning seed oil from Uganda, and wild carrot oil from France, which deliver maximum skin health while boosting wellbeing. The first exciting products to launch from this brand are the Dawn and Dusk Elixirs, formulated to give you your daily and nightly dose of radiance.

Priced at £32 each from scientiabeauty.com

WELL LIT

This highly-pigmented, three-in-one highlighter creates a perfectly radiant glow that will take you from ceremony to celebrations. This super-versatile micro-fine powder is easy to apply to cheeks, brow bones and décolletage for a quick all-over radiance. You can play it safe with a natural shimmer or make a statement by creating a multi-dimensional strobing effect.

This convenient make-up bag hero in Sahara is actually an ombre of Kevyn Aucoin's three best-selling highlighters, Candlelight, Starlight, and Sunlight. In this case, three is most definitely not a crowd!

Available from spacenk.com, priced at £30.

Crystal clear

If hours of traipsing around wedding shows and agonising over budgets has left you in need of a bit of R&R, this will come as music to your ears. LLIO's Crystoil helps with those little moments in life where you can finally enjoy some you-time, aiding sleep, boosting energy and enhancing the mood. You can invoke Crystoil's power in two ways: shake the bottle and add a few droplets to a bath, or massage all over before stepping into a warm bath or shower. The lush passionflower, apricot and rosehip oils make for deliciously soft nourished skin.

LLIO will be donating £1 of every sale to Winston's Wish, a charity giving hope to grieving children. Priced at £45, check out llio.love

A ROSY GLOW

Looking to achieve that natural dewy flush of colour for your wedding day? The folk at Beautaniq Beauty have just the thing. Introducing the Butter Cheek & Lip Balm. This cream blusher blends seamlessly into cheeks using nothing more than the warmth of your fingertips, and doubles up as an effortless lip colour. Crafted with 90% natural plant-based oils to nourish, condition and hydrate the skin, it simultaneously bestows a gorgeous, creamy radiance. Available at beautaniqbeauty.com it's priced at £12.50.

Sustainability, solved

Disposable face wipes are a thing of the past with the sustainable, vegan-friendly and cruelty-free Face Halo. These microfibre pads remove your make-up and lightly exfoliate the skin in just seconds. Face Halo works with water helping the clever HaloTech fibres, which are 100 times finer than human hair, to get to work on removing even the most stubborn make-up. Reusable, the Face Halo can be machine washed up to 200 times, meaning it's a cost-effective way of looking after your skin and it helps the environment. Around these parts we call that a win-win!

The Face Halo Original is priced at £17.99 and is available from Beauty Bay, Boots, Selfridges and Harrods. Check out facehalo.com

STRESSED SKIN SOLUTION

Cannabooster Detox from French holistic skincare brand Ho Karan (meaning "I love you" in Breton) is a clarifying, brightening and energising serum – a real skin saviour. Rich in potent terpenes, it helps to detoxify, clarify and create a formidable shield against the harmful effects of pollution. It's gentle on stressed skin, hydrating, nourishing and protecting.

As its name implies it contains the trending plant extract CBD, which has calming, anti-inflammatory and sebum balancing effects. So unsurprisingly this wonder-ingredient is being championed as the latest wellness hero.

Find out more at hokaran.com

FAREWELL SPLIT ENDS!

Let's be honest, a dry and damaged barnet is not the look for your wedding day, so, now's the time to banish split ends for good. Check out BondiBoost's Rapid Repair range. Start your haircare routine with Rapid Repair Shampoo (£22.50). Formulated to repair split ends, reduce breakage and seal cuticles, it delivers a boost of essential oils rich in antioxidants, vitamins and amino acids. Follow with Rapid Repair Conditioner (£22.50), which improves signs of damage. Then, finish by applying 1-2 pumps of the Rapid Repair Serum (£22.50) for softness and shine. Hey presto – damaged hair is a thing of the past. Easy. Available at boots.com

COLOUR WITH CARE

Founded by French sisters, and beauty experts, Hamida and Yasmine Smatti, L'Atelier Green is a breathable and bio-sourced polish that cares for your nails. After helping countless beauty fans to repair nails damaged by acrylics, gel manicures and toxin-filled varnishes, they saw first-hand the need for a product that not only gave the desired colour, shine and long-lasting effect, but that also nurtured nails and cuticles.

The debut Naked Nails collection boasts breathable properties, which help to bring your nails back to full health. Enriched with high-performance, organic and active ingredients, the lacquers stimulate nail growth and repair damage without sacrificing glossiness and longevity.

Priced from £15.99, see the website lateliergreen.com

Step it up

If you simply don't have time for a complicated multi-step skincare regime, help is at hand. Designed to streamline your routine in a fast-moving world, Frances Prescott's multitasking natural skincare will have your complexion big-day ready in no time. With the Tri-Balm (£46) and Tri-Spritz (£45) all you need are two simple three-in-one steps.

The luxurious facial balm cleanses, exfoliates and moisturises in one solid stick bursting with botanical oils. Meanwhile, the spritz works to aid cellular repair, protect against pollution and set make-up.

For further information see francesprescott.com

BEAUTY SLEEP

The must-have beauty accessory for flawless skin and hair is a pillowcase, but not just any. The Gingerlily Beauty Box contains a 100% silk pillowcase for the ultimate in luxury that allows you to reap beauty benefits while you sleep. Soft and seamless, the A-grade mulberry silk adjusts to the temperature of your body and is naturally hypoallergenic, ideal if you suffer with allergies or have sensitive skin. Thanks to its high protein content, this fabric doesn't absorb moisture, so it helps to prevent wrinkles, while keeping skin hydrated and hair glossy.

Available in silver grey, nude, ivory and white, they're priced at £59 each and available from gingerlily.co.uk

A CALMING *influence*

We put these soothing saviours to the test, perfect for beating wedmin stress

Sanda Aromatherapy Eye Pillow, £22, sandafeelgood.com

"I'm in love! The eye pillow is simple, yet so versatile, and great to have on hand for times when you feel like you need to stop and take a few moments. I put it through its paces and tried it warm first of all. Just 30 seconds in the microwave is plenty. The heat releases the amazing aroma (mine is rose and cardamom), which enhances the whole experience. I popped on a five-minute mindfulness meditation and shut out the world.

"The next night I tested the cold experience – 20 minutes or so in the freezer does the trick. After a tense day it calmed my head and soothed my tired, contact lense-wearing eyes. I can't wait to try it in the summer when itchy hayfever eyes kick in." – **Kelly Andrews**

Amphora Aromatics Relaxing Bath Oil 100ml, £6, amphora-aromatics.com

"I love a bath. Any excuse to get me in the tub, I'm there, and I have to say, I've tried a lot of bath oils. So, I was eager to dive right in with this Relaxing Bath Oil from Amphora Aromatics.

"I truly believe this is the best bath oil I've ever tried. It has exactly the right combination of a heavenly aroma that's not too overpowering, and nourishment, without being greasy. My skin felt instantly balmy and fragrant, which lasted throughout the following day to boot." – **Danielle Harvey**

Sanatio Naturalis Frankincense Essential Oil 10ml, £26, sanationaturalis.com

"I had to dig deep at the back of the cupboard to find my essential oil diffuser to test out Sanatio Naturalis' Frankincense Essential Oil, but I'm glad I did! Distilled from wild-growing tree resin in Somalia, it has an exotic, spicy scent. Without being overbearing, it filled my room with a deliciously heady fragrance that was the perfect backdrop to some me-time. The strong smell is brilliant for focusing the mind and it's been shown that inhaling frankincense reduces your heart rate and blood pressure – so if you're feeling the stress of wedmin, it's definitely worth a whirl." – **Hannah Faulder**

Tisserand Aromatherapy Total De-Stress MoodFix Mist 100ml, £9.45, tisserand.com

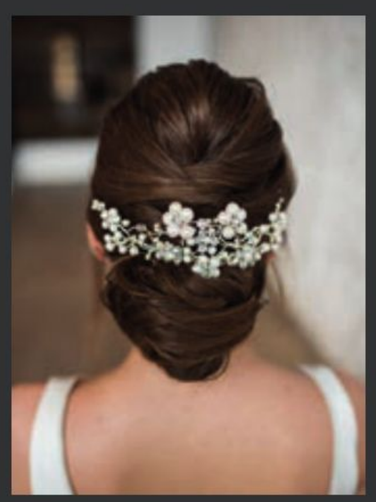
"I can't promise this handy spray will work miracles when it comes to tackling a hectic lifestyle, but what it does do is allow you to stop, if only for a minute, and just breathe. A quick squirt provides a comforting mist of calm when the going gets tough and the blend of geranium, orange and nutmeg natural pure essential oils smells great too!" – **Sarah Reeve**

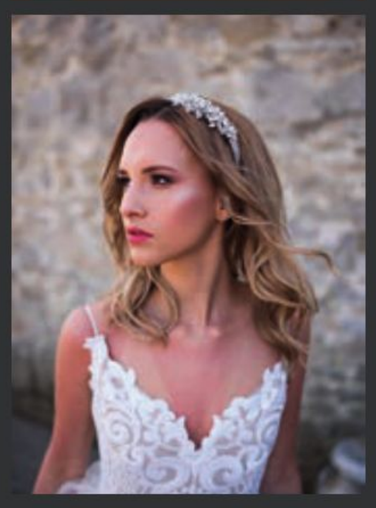
Kyushi Jasmine, Lavender & Cedarwood Face Oil 30ml, £39, kyushi.co.uk

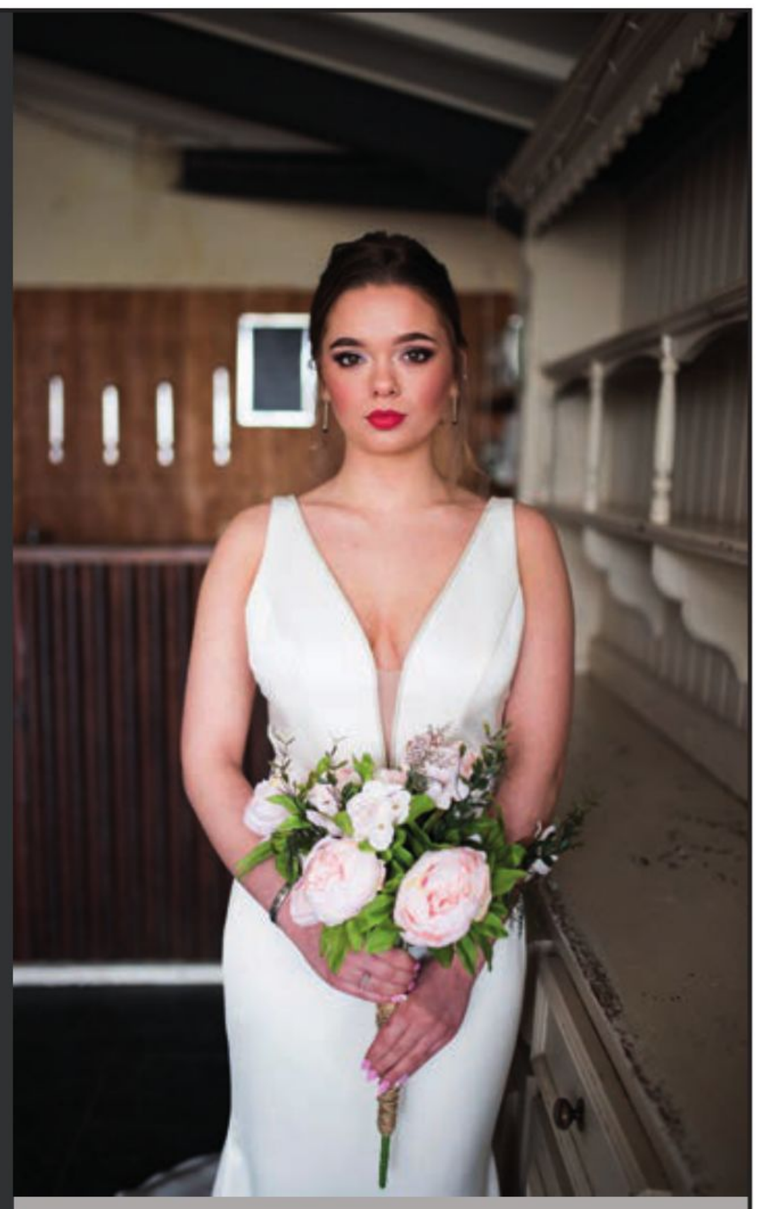
"The first thing I noticed about this face oil was the earthy smell that filled the room. Kyushi recommend placing three drops into the palms of your hands, gently rubbing them together and cupping over your nose and mouth before taking some deep breaths, as the mindful application is as important as the product itself. I did find it had a calming effect, and it smelled divine. It also made my skin feel incredibly soft and hydrated. I recommend using it before you go to bed for a long, restful sleep." – **Melissa Barker**

NGJ

make-up & hair







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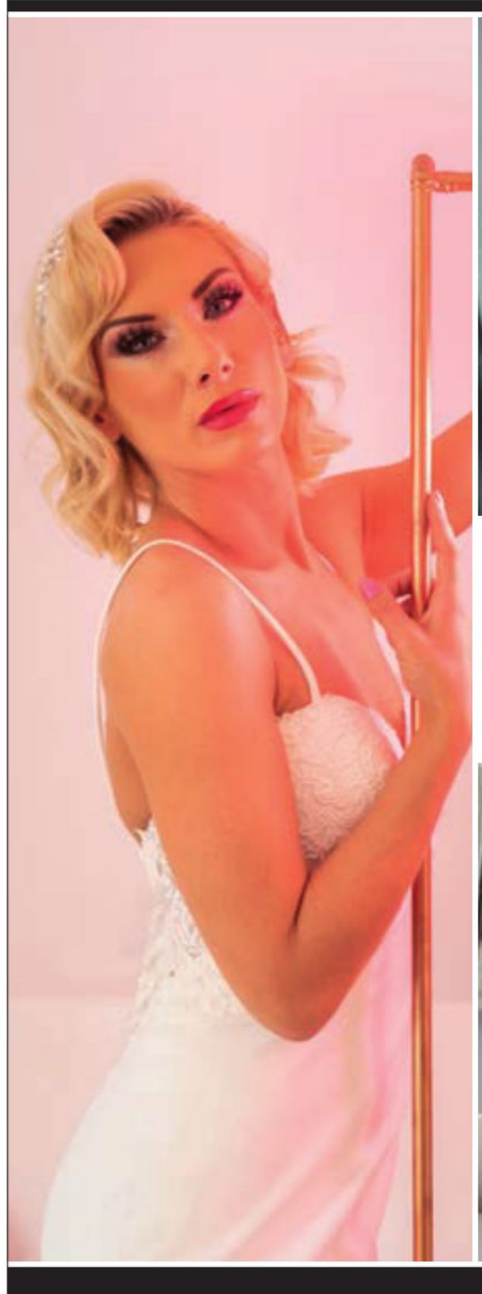
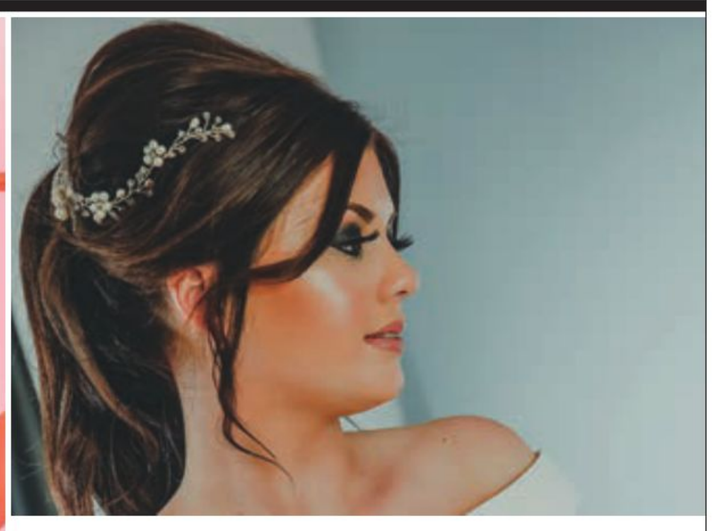
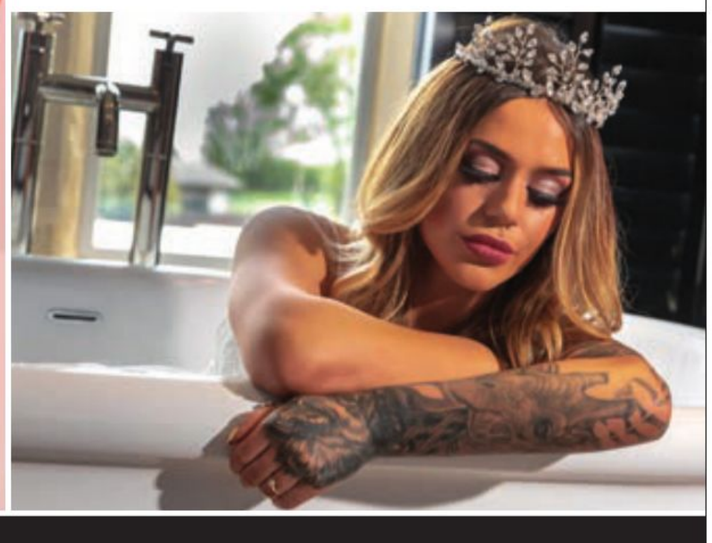
MINXIES





Award Winning

Bridal Make up & Hair



www.minxiesbeauty.com

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Fashion & Beauty Q&A

Local experts offer advice on how to look your big-day best

Hop into spring

I'm having a yellow-themed wedding, and my mum wants to wear something that will tie in with our colour scheme but still look classy. Do you have any suggestions?

Yellow is a vibrant colour that will pop in photographs. At Baroque Boutique, we always advise you look for a contrasting but complementary colour so that your mum doesn't get lost in the pictures.

Good options would be dusky blue, teal, navy or lighter shades of silver and grey. Remember, it's essential that whatever shade you choose suits your mum's complexion.

Coryn Emma
Mother-of-the-bride specialist
baroqueboutique.co.uk

A flawless appearance

I'm a very emotional person, and I know I will probably end up crying on our big day. How can I stop this ruining my make-up?

Your nuptials will fill you with excitement, emotion, peacefulness and sometimes even melancholy. If you're an emotional bride and think that you will shed a tear or two on your big day, then it's a good idea to let your make-up artist know before the wedding.

When your eyes start to get watery, simply fan them with your hand, have your bridesmaids ready with tissues and always pat the wet area on your face, never rub! Having a touch up after the ceremony is also a good way to ensure you look picture perfect.

Maya Jasinska
Make-up artist
loxushairandmakeup.com

Hair care hero

I want to do something creative with my long, straight hair, but I'm not sure what style to go for. Do you have any suggestions?

Take advantage of your long hair. I suggest you opt for an edgy high or low ponytail. The key is texture. Add waves and use some texturising products to create volume. You could weave a wire garland around the ponytail or add an oversized hair slide to create an edgy romantic look.

A wrapped bun is a classic look that you could make more creative by pulling pieces out with a texturising spray and adding in a cluster of floating pearls.

Try braids and twists in a half up and half down look. Make the rest wavy with a large curling tong and add in some texturising products for a more undone bohemian look. Pull apart and dishevel the braid and incorporate star and moon hairpins.

Glam waves are perfect for long hair. Curl all the sections in the same direction and comb it with a soft bristle brush before blending them. Tuck one side behind your ear, use a hair spray with a shine element and add in an oversized hair slide for an up-to-date look.

Lilly Evans
Hair stylist
facebook.com/bohohairdesign

Luscious locks

I want a wow-factor hairstyle for my big day, but I'm not sure what to do with my curly locks. Any suggestions?

Keep your hair natural. You could wear it up with a statement hair accessory or keep it natural with the addition of a flower crown. It all depends on what makes you feel most comfortable.

The weather is also something you need to take into consideration when choosing a style. If it rains or is very windy, then it's best to wear it up. There are so many options available, find something you like and book a trial before the big day to ensure you love it.

Alaw John
Hair stylist
gowerbridalhair.com

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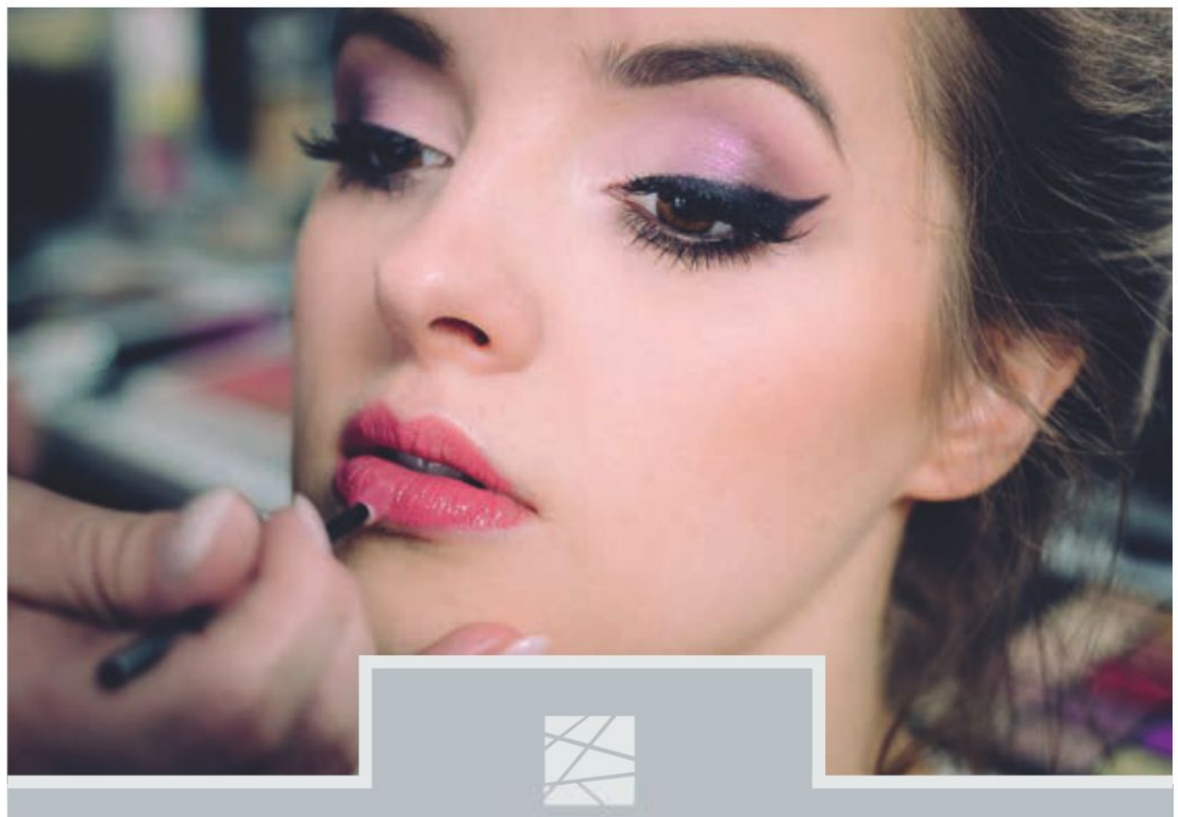

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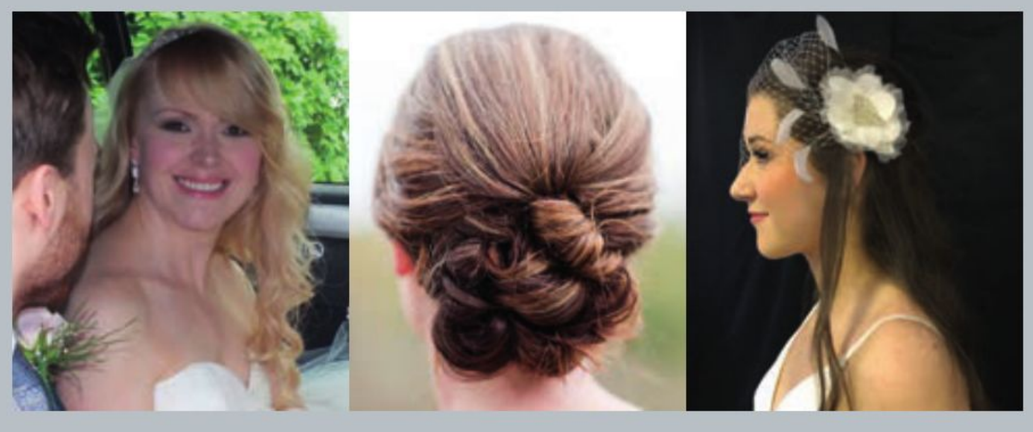

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ONLY TIME WILL TELL

BOSS Watches has launched three new products. The Vela Collection includes statement-making timepieces that were inspired by open skies, urban streets and broad horizons.

Each watch seamlessly combines aesthetics with performance and signature features such as water resistance, glow-in-the-dark markers and engraved backs. Designed to accompany grooms-to-be on the biggest day of their lives, each one has a stainless steel chronograph with a masculine bracelet.

To find out more, visit bosswatches.co.uk

DRESSED TO IMPRESS

Chester Barrie has launched a new range of men's formalwear. The AW19 Collection features old classics and new and improved accessories, including bow ties, evening suits, shirts and handkerchiefs. The semi-bespoke gentleman's tailor is located in London and offers both ready-to-wear and made-to-measure options.

To see more, visit chesterbarrie.co.uk

Read all ABOUT IT!

Grooms editor Melissa Barker shares the latest best buys and product launches

Grand plans

Award-winning suit company, Master Debonair has unveiled plans to open six new stores across the UK in 2020.

The fashion firm currently has boutiques in Bolton, London and Chesterfield and a separate showroom in Tyneside. It's become a favourite with grooms-to-be looking for stylish yet affordable suits and accessories.

Check out masterdebonair.com for more.

GOING GREEN

London-based company, Bluebuck has released a new collection of sports trunks and briefs manufactured using Seaqual – an eco-fabric made from recycled plastic waste.

The collection combines the brand's eco-sustainability mission with green fashion. The range has a sleek, sportive cut, and is designed for more adventurous men who want a durable undergarment without compromising on comfort.

Priced from £22–£29 from bluebuck.net

Oh-so handsome

We love Murdock London's latest range of gift sets. Ideal for grooms-to-be, each collection is made in England using the finest products. The range is designed to offer quality and effective daily essentials that encapsulates the heritage of Great British grooming, along with the sought-after style of the modern gentlemen.

Our favourite is the Bailey set, priced at £50, it comes with a beard shampoo, moisturiser, oil and luxurious comb.

To see more, visit murdocklondon.com

STEP INTO *spring*

We've rounded up our favourite products to help you create the ultimate seasonal look

£110, burton.co.uk

£35, foxandchave.com

£45, davidwatson.uk

£59.95, remusuomo.com

£100, joebrowns.co.uk

£99.99, tkmaxx.com

£199, newgateworld.com

£22, villageleathers.com

£24.99, gettingpersonal.co.uk

£110, dunelondon.com

TIME'S TICKING

Add the finishing touch to your big-day attire

1. £59.99, gettingpersonal.co.uk
2. £89.99, tkmaxx.com
3. £30, riverisland.com
4. £250, newgateworld.com
5. £240, thewatchhut.co.uk
6. £449, hugoboss.com
7. £690, mauricelacroix.com
8. £224.99, timex.co.uk

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PICTURE-PERFECT PARADISE

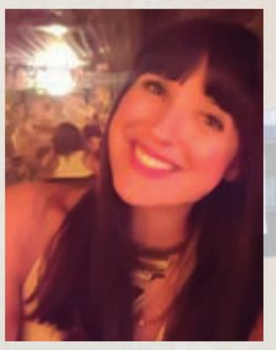
The private Maldivian-owned boutique island resort of Baros has won the title of World's Most Romantic Resort for the seventh consecutive time at the annual World Travel Awards. Voted for by industry professionals and travellers from across the globe, it certifies its places as one of the top honeymoon destinations. General manager Ibrahim Shijah says, "This award maintains Baros' status as a Maldivian legend and furthers the significant impact of the resort within the international luxury market around the world."

To highlight its romantic offerings, the resort has launched its Romantic Moments package. Including a private candlelit beach dinner, a couple's massage and a spectacular sunset cruise, it makes the ultimate honeymoon retreat. Visit baros.com

A WILD MINI-MOON

You can journey across South America, Asia and Africa at Kent's authentic safari park Port Lympne Hotel & Reserve. We love that guests can now enjoy some peace and tranquility under the stars in The Bubble, a 180-degree panoramic lodge with stunning views across the 600-acre reserve. Couples can also take their romance to new heights with a once-in-a-lifetime hot-air balloon ride over Port Lympne and the surrounding countryside. After a day exploring the reserve, why not enjoy a romantic dinner at its Moroccan Courtyard or Bear Lodge Restaurant before heading back to your quirky accommodation. For more information, head to aspinallfoundation.org

HONEYMOON

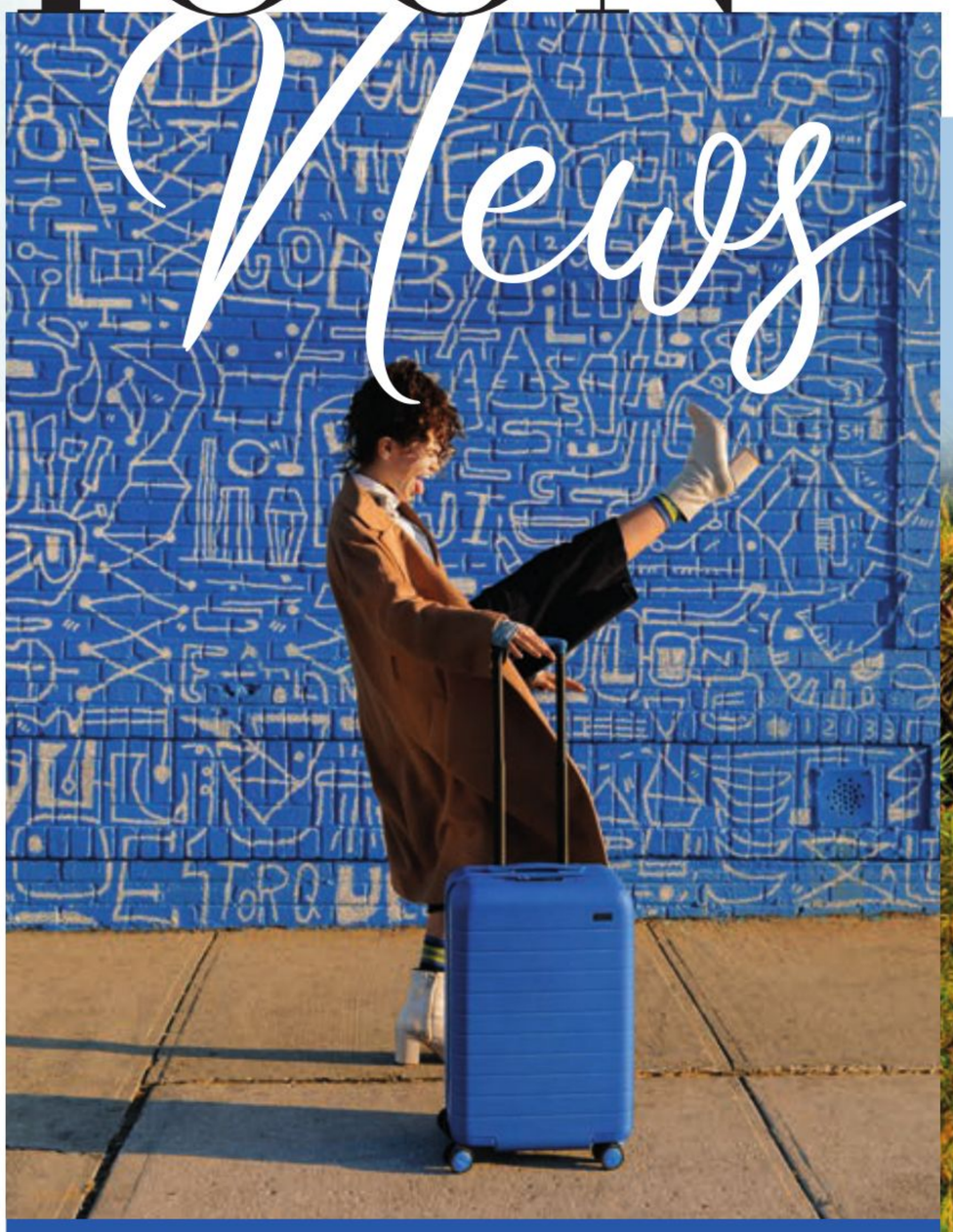


Travel editor Hannah Faulder reveals her top honeymoon destination picks and travel essentials

HOT HOTEL OPENING FOR 2020

I love a short-haul flight, so MarBella Collection's MarBella Elix on mainland Greece is a 2020 hotel opening I'm very excited about. The third hotel to join the portfolio and the first outside of Corfu, it will be perched above the beautiful Karavostasi Beach in the Parga region, looking west towards Corfu and Paxos. Couples arriving after the June 2020 launch will be able to marvel at the outstanding natural beauty, the inviting golden coastline and crystal-clear waters.

Within an hour's drive of Preveza Airport, the hotel can also arrange boat transfers from Corfu, which is ideal for those looking to twin with the MarBella Collection's two properties on the Ionian island. Book your honeymoon here, and you can expect luxurious accommodation, incredible scenery, exhilarating activities and delicious dining. Check out marbellacollection.gr



News

A classic case

Anyone else loving the 2020 Pantone Colour of the Year Classic Blue? It's evocative of vast skies and deep blue waters so it's ideal for travelling, and Away have hit the nail on the head with its limited edition Colour of the Year Collection. See the range at awaytravel.com

WINE TIME

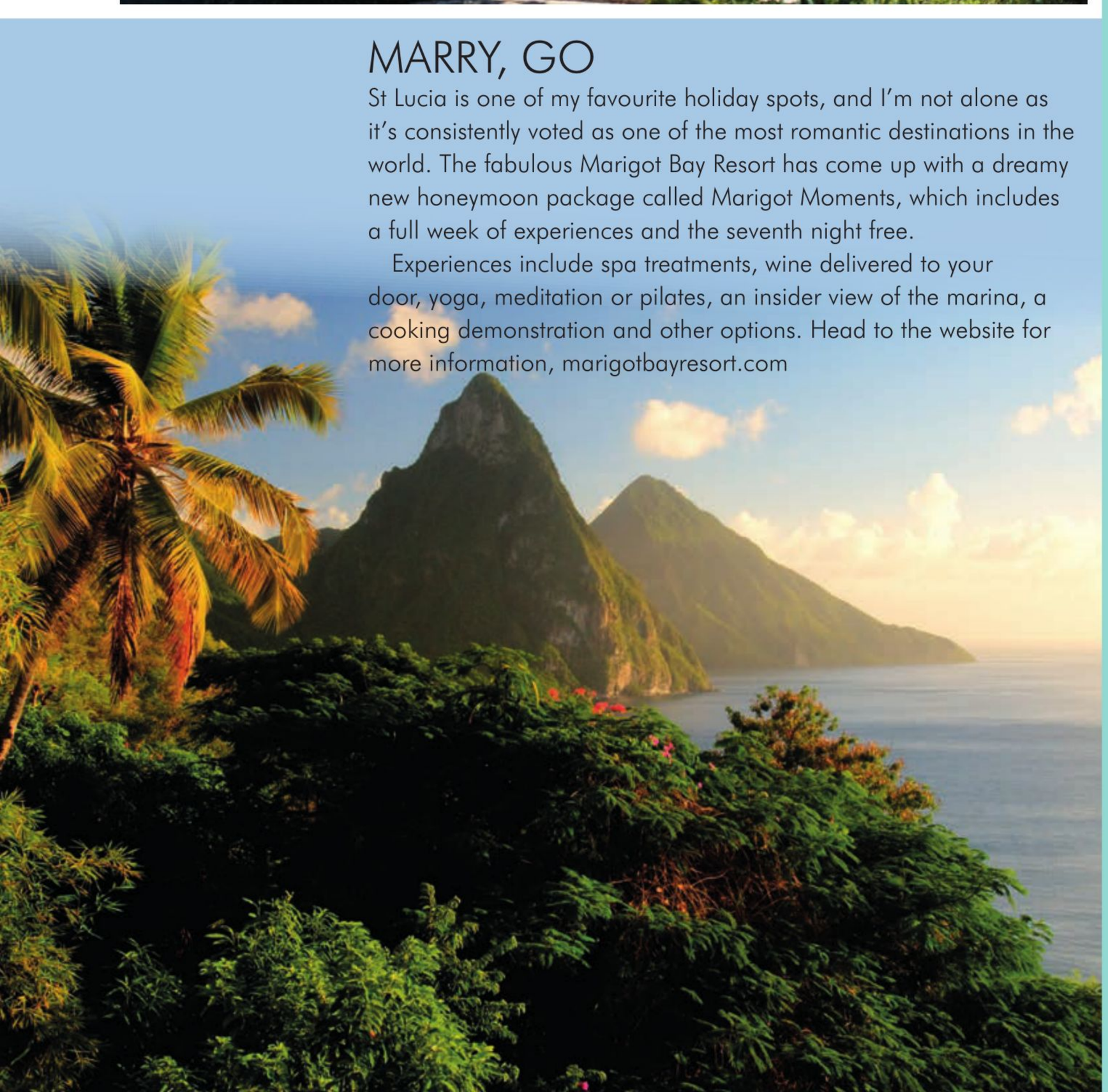
Legacy wine estate Boschendal in South Africa's Cape Winelands introduced the country's first tented wine experience in March 2020. Wine-loving honeymooners can stay in one of seven luxury serviced tents in the heart of the 4,500-acre working estate and vineyard, offering a one-of-a-kind perspective on its staggering landscape.

The property is dedicated to conserving its natural biodiversity and guests have the opportunity to become a part of the landscape that cultivates the exquisite produce found in its restaurants and wine cellar. To find out more, visit boschendal.com

MARRY, GO

St Lucia is one of my favourite holiday spots, and I'm not alone as it's consistently voted as one of the most romantic destinations in the world. The fabulous Marigot Bay Resort has come up with a dreamy new honeymoon package called Marigot Moments, which includes a full week of experiences and the seventh night free.

Experiences include spa treatments, wine delivered to your door, yoga, meditation or pilates, an insider view of the marina, a cooking demonstration and other options. Head to the website for more information, marigotbayresort.com



KEEP ON MOVING

With the Olympics just around the corner, you might be getting in the sporty mood. If you and your partner are more likely to be running on the beach than snoozing on it, then these active honeymoon picks are for you…

❤ Mountain biking in Mauritius. The Mauritius Tour Beachcomber 2020 is held 30th April to 2nd May and consists of four stages over a total distance of 195km. The challenging route allows cyclists to soak in their stunning surroundings. Book at beachcombertours.uk

❤ Running in Victoria Falls. The Victoria Falls Marathon in Zimbabwe is definitely a bucket-list event. Taking place in July, participants will be running alongside incredible scenery, amazing wildlife and one of the seven natural wonders of the world. Book at africaalbidatourism.com

❤ Diving in Fiji. Sign up for the THIRDHOME Adventure's Jean-Michel Cousteau's Fiji Island Hideaway Adventure in September to spend a week on a private island with guided diving and snorkelling alongside the world-famous oceanographic explorer and his expert marine biologist. Book at adventures.thirdhome.com

❤ Wild swimming in the Seychelles. Eager to try the wild swimming trend but the cold UK water's not for you? Dip your toes in at the five-star Hilton Seychelles Northolme Resort & Spa and swim or snorkel along the 650-metre coral trail. Book at seychelles.hilton.com

❤ Stay active at sea. The launch of Blue World Voyages in 2021 will see the world's first active lifestyle cruise take to the Mediterranean with two decks dedicated to fitness, sports and wellness. There will also be a seawater pool, which will be lowered into the ocean so guests can swim alongside the ship. Book at blueworldvoyages.com

MOROCCAN *magic*

Hannah Faulder discovers that whatever you want from your honeymoon, you can find it at Mazagan Beach and Golf Resort in Morocco

If, like me and my husband, you want to spend your holiday ticking off activities but your partner wants to lounge by the pool, then Mazagan Beach and Golf Resort in Morocco might just be your ideal honeymoon destination. Year-round sun: tick. Action-packed activities: tick. Fun with the kids: tick. Luxury: tick – there's not much this place doesn't offer. And it's not by accident. Everything is meticulously planned and designed to cater to your every need within its 250 hectares of paradise.

A snappy three-hour flight, plus a one-hour transfer from Casablanca Airport, and you'll find yourself winding down Mazagan's grand driveway and seeing the resort emerging from its lush grounds in all of its decadent Moorish glory. As the only destination of its kind in Morocco, you might just find yourself rubbing shoulders with royalty and celebrities – I'm basically BFFs with Dougie from McFly now.

You can expect to find traditional Moroccan influences alongside contemporary luxe – think ornately carved doors, colourful lanterns, textured rugs and mosaic tiles. There are 13 restaurants and bars, a huge spa, the most glamorous gym imaginable, an 18-hole golf course and North Africa's biggest casino.

STAY

It's always a little disorienting arriving somewhere after dark, and the stylish but seemingly endless corridors of Mazagan heightened the confusion. I didn't need to worry; within a couple of minutes, a friendly chap with a walkie-talkie (who had clearly been sent to find the lost Englishwoman with too much luggage) was guiding me to my room. This was the level of service I came to expect here. Once inside, I was met with the most enormous marshmallowy bed, a spacious bathroom and floor-to-ceiling windows – in

the morning, these revealed incredible views across gardens and the secluded 9km beach beyond. I was told that if you're awake early enough (I wasn't), you can watch the resort's herd of rescue horses take their morning gallop across the deserted sands. Beautiful (I imagine).

Within the walls of Mazagan, you feel untouched by the outside world. The feeling of serenity is in every corner of the resort, which is especially incredible considering there are 500 rooms here. Sometimes I could walk around for 10 minutes and not bump into another soul.

EXPERIENCE

This place goes all out when it comes to experiences and activities. I'll confess that I'm a total wuss, so looking at my itinerary and seeing quad-biking, zip-lining and horse-riding did send me into a mild panic. However, I'm pleased to report I stepped out of my comfort zone – and I'm so glad I did! First up, I was introduced to the sassy Caramel, my noble steed for the hour. We rode along the practically deserted beach in the sunshine with the sound of the waves lapping on to the shore – what an incredible moment and an absolute must-do for honeymooners.

Next up, we jumped on some quad bikes and whizzed along the beach in hot pursuit of our guide, who took us to see an incredible shipwreck protruding from the water. He was also our personal photographer, getting snaps that made my group look like the most badass girl band of all time! After this, I had caught the action bug, and flinging myself down a zip line at high speed through the trees was the next logical step.

Bringing things back to my normal pace, we wandered through the idyllic grounds to the spa, where, in a moment of madness, I decided against the planned full-body massage and instead opted for the hammam. The authentic Moroccan bathing ritual was certainly an experience! First off, you sit in an incredibly hot steam room where a lady washes you down with eucalyptus oil. Next, she showers you and lays you on a huge marble plinth and scrubs your skin with a mitt, which is akin to sandpaper. Then you're showered again, smothered in a mud mask, wrapped in a towel and left to bake on the plinth. The end result: seriously smooth skin! I felt like a newborn baby, and I've been recommending a – frankly bizarre – hammam to anyone who'll listen.

EAT

Foodies will love the choice of 13 restaurants and bars here. There are two huge buffets offering everything you could possibly want alongside high-end eateries that specialise in different cuisines. For breakfast, it's worth heading to Olives and sitting by the pool, where fresh food, soft music and elaborately served mint tea all add to the chilled-out vibe.

One evening, we opted for the elegant Sel de Mer, which serves the finest seafood. Fellow veggies, don't despair! They whipped me up a yummy quinoa stack and vegetable pasta. I'd also recommend the rustic charm of La Cave for warming French fare.

LOVE

The final evening was spent looking out at the setting sun, cocktail in hand, watching the golden rays twinkle across the waves. It was a perfectly romantic time to reflect on a trip that offered everything honeymooners could want: adventure, luxury and unadulterated romance in equal measure.

For more information, and to book your stay, visit mazaganbeachresort.com

A TASTE OF PARADISE

Editor Claire Ridley travelled to the island of Anguilla in the Caribbean to discover what this popular honeymoon destination has to offer

Enjoying #qualitytime at Curtain Bluff #curtainpics

Drinking a #coconutcocktail at da'Vida Restaurant (left), and the #infinityedgepool and #cutecampervans at Belmond Cap Juluca (right) #anguilla #beyondextraordinary

When the opportunity arose to experience what's new for 2020 on this luxurious island in the Eastern Caribbean, I packed my passport and bikini and was ready to fly! The lure of its 33 pristine beaches with powder-white sand and clear turquoise sea – regularly voted some of the best in the region – along with the promise of some winter sun had me jumping on board the Virgin Atlantic flight from London Gatwick bound for the British West Indies.

It's a good idea to break the journey with a one-night stopover in Antigua. Curtain Bluff is a spectacular all-inclusive resort set against the backdrop of not one but two palm-fringed beaches – Bay Beach and Surf Beach. I stayed in a stunning one-bedroom, split-level Bluff Suite boasting panoramic sea views from the terrace.

Honeymooners can while away the day in a hammock or snorkel around the reef to discover a rich variety of sea life. For active types, there's scuba diving, waterskiing and basketball, all included in the room rate, while those wanting something more relaxing will love the spa treatments available in the private couple's treatment room.

The Seagrape restaurant offers beachfront dining, while the plantation-style Tamarind Restaurant is located in a more secluded setting, both served by the most extensive wine cellar in the area – be sure to ask for a private tasting.

Wish you were here

Boarding the inter-island Trans Anguilla Airways flight (prepare for a very small plane!), I was excited to touch down on this small yet perfectly formed jewel of the Caribbean where I was greeted by Colwayne from the Anguilla Tourist Board and whisked off to visit the Valley Street Festival, a vibrant introduction to the local arts and crafts scene. A 20-minute massage here from Big Joe really helped me to recover from the flight and relax into island life where, as the locals say, you should 'make time to lime' (hang out!)

Next up was a scenic tour of this honeymoon hotspot pointing out areas of interest including The Valley (the capital city) and Crocus Hill (the highest point). Lunch at the Bayside Grill beach bar at da'Vida Restaurant & Spa was my first introduction to Johnny cakes – a doughnut-like savoury snack – and the local mahi-mahi fish giving me some much-needed energy for a two-hour afternoon kayaking tour from Crocus Bay to Little Bay with Liquid Glow. Through the clear-bottom kayaks I spotted tropical fish and even a turtle as we paddled along the sapphire shores, stopping for a snorkel around the cliff edge at the secluded Little Bay. Honeymooners will love the romantic night kayaking tour they offer, where you get the chance to see turtles sleeping at the bottom of the ocean.

It was soon time to check into the redesigned, award-winning CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa located on Rendezvous Bay that was to be my home for the next three nights. It's a glamorous white building with azure blue touches and a Mediterranean feel mixed with Caribbean flair (think of the architecture in Santorini and you get the idea). KazBar, the lounge area in the lobby, is a Moroccan-inspired space furnished with pops of bright colour, ideal for relaxing with rum and tapas while enjoying the live music. All 91 suites (including the Beachfront Junior Suite where I stayed), seven villas and two penthouses have been recently renovated and boast a bright coastal feel.

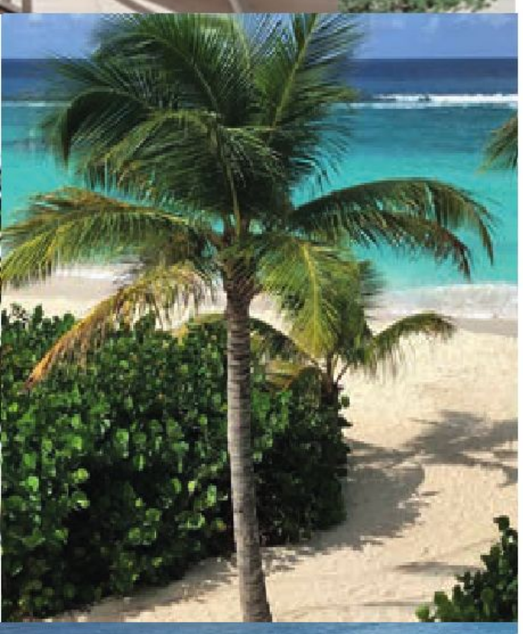
This super-stylish resort promises a gourmet-dining scene where guests can enjoy tastes from around the globe, including authentic Anguillan food created by new executive chef Juan Bochenski. He uses local ingredients and sustainable practices, and dishes include sushi and sashimi at the award-winning Japanese restaurant Tokyo Bay.

After a dip in the pool and some much-needed sunbathing time in a private cabana, it was time to get ready for dinner at Maundays Club located at dreamy resort Belmond Cap Juluca. Here, I sampled the tasty Peruvian menu including the mouth-watering Caribbean fish ceviche.

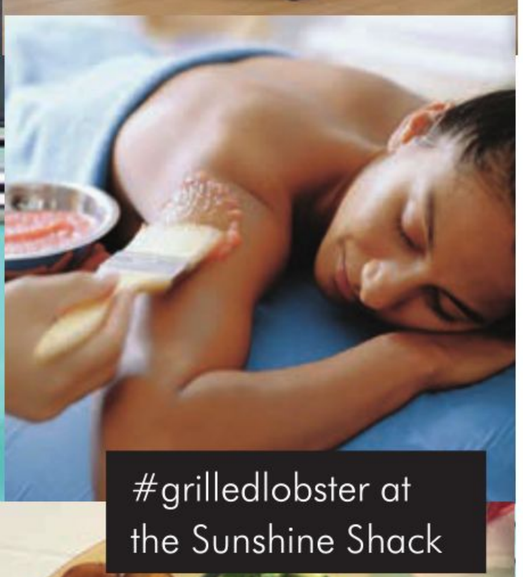
This romantic hideaway nestled on Maundays Bay offers Insta-worthy snaps at every turn and by day, the resort's turquoise VW Campervans and vintage-style bicycles allow for easy viewing of the grounds. A horse ride along the beach at Meads Bay on Tosh, proudly led by owner Zambezi, was a highlight and is suitable for riders of all levels. Check out the sunset excursions; great for honeymooners.

#horseriding on the #beach #meadsbay #belmondcapjuluca

Admiring the #seaviews and #infinitypool at Zemi Beach House Hotel & Spa and CuisinArt (left)



#donotdisturb in the #stylishrooms and #spa at CuisinArt (below)



#grilledlobster at the Sunshine Shack

Beyond the beach

Breakfast at Mosaic at CuisinArt certainly didn't disappoint, with the banana bread, coconut muffins and reviving smoothies so delicious I just had to order seconds. The restaurant features an open kitchen and wrap-around bar and is also open for dinner. After a swim in the ocean and enjoying the soft sand between my toes, it was time to be transported to the jaw-droppingly beautiful Shoal Bay East. (The easiest way to travel around the island is with Premier Taxi and Tours). This stunning stretch of sand is home to the Zemi Beach House Hotel & Spa boasting infinity pools and picturesque vistas. To say I ate well here was an understatement, with mahi-mahi tacos and hand-crafted coconut mocktails on the menu at the Zemi Beach Club. This was followed by a therapeutic massage at the zen-like Zemi Thai House Spa before enjoying the spectacular sunset that this island is well known for.

That evening, I headed for dinner at Café Celeste inside the colonial-style Malliouhana resort simply oozing with glamour and Caribbean charm, perched on the stunning Meads Bay. Highlights on the menu include red snapper, conch curry served with coconut dumplings and yummy plantain fritters.

Another day in paradise

Fully immersed in island life, I enjoyed an early morning yoga and meditation session followed by a refreshing dip in the healing waters pool in the Spa by CuisinArt. This tranquil spot is home to 16 treatment rooms, including a couple's suite featuring an outdoor Jacuzzi, where a heated bamboo massage and aqua massage are on the menu. The Scrub Blend Bar experience isn't to be missed, giving guests the option to make their own spa product to take home with them, and other more adventurous activities include aquatic kickboxing, stand-up paddleboard yoga and tennis (with lessons available). There's also a fun cookery class to learn how to make Portuguese petiscos and a rum and cocktail-making lesson.

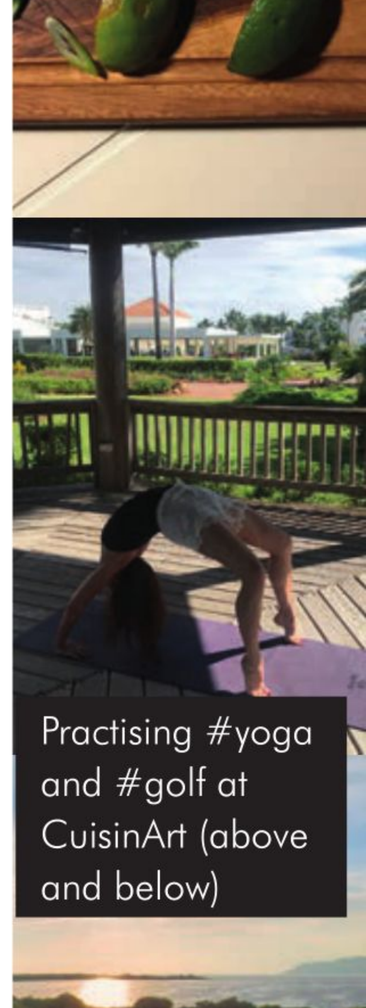
Golf enthusiasts will love the 18-hole Greg Norman Signature Design Championship course, the only one on the island, situated close by on the resort's sister property, The Reef by CuisinArt. This oceanfront boutique hotel boasts 80 rooms and suites built across four beachfront buildings and an open-air lobby. Foodies will love The Yacht Club Restaurant, opening on to the feature pool, serving breakfast and dinner while Breezes Beachfront Restaurant & Bar offers a lounge-style atmosphere for lunch and dinner. Sundowners are a must-try at Santorini at the Clubhouse, also open for lunch.

There's a cool party vibe at this hotel with regular live DJ sets around the pool and poolside treatments available to book through Spa to You.

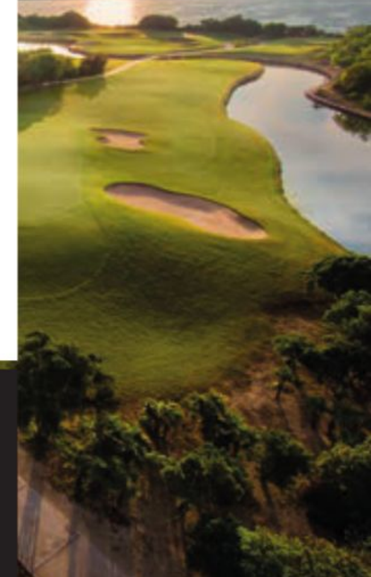
Next up was a visit to the colourful Arts & Crafts Center in the West End, a treasure trove of island trinkets including conch shells to take home. From here, I headed to the Sunshine Shack beach bar and grill perched on Rendezvous Bay, a short stroll along the beach from CuisinArt, where I tucked into the delicious grilled lobster accompanied by the local Carib lager. It's well worth the walk and you're encouraged to scribble a message with your name on the shack before you leave.

Coming to the end of my magical trip, as the sun went down, the wonderful team at CuisinArt arranged for me to experience some private dining at the water's edge at the Beach Bar & Grill where I enjoyed an amazing array of food and live music. I departed Clayton J. Lloyd International Airport with a smile on my face that lasted the entire way home – this tropical paradise, one of the best-kept secrets in the Caribbean, will always hold a special place in my heart ♥

#freshseafood and a #romantic ambience at Café Celeste (above and below)



Practising #yoga and #golf at CuisinArt (above and below)



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Romantic GETAWAY

Olivia Gibson reviews the Castle Hotel Windsor

I didn't quite realise how incredible my stay would be at the Castle Hotel Windsor, throughout the trip my partner and I created amazing memories full of happiness, laughter and relaxation. Maybe it was the charming décor, impeccable service or the fact that Windsor Castle is nestled right opposite the hotel – creating the perfect backdrop.

When the chance to visit the establishment first arose, I immediately jumped at the opportunity. For a while, it's been on my bucket list to visit the UK town but something would always come up. But not this time, the stars aligned and next thing I know, my bags are packed and I'm on my way.

The hotel was first built in 1528 and was previously known as The Mermaid Inn serving as a bar for the town's 1,000 residents and is now one of the oldest buildings in the area.
After being lovingly restored, the hotel still boasts elegance of its rich and fascinating history left behind.

Throughout the hotel, many features highlight the venue's story such as the Pennington Penny which was an in-house token issued by George Pennington back in 1656. I loved how the authentic essence of the venue has been kept and highlighted with some original features, when you look closely stories start to come alive.

PURE INDULGENCE

When stepping through the doors for the first time – and thinking how amazing everything looked – friendly staff quickly greeted us and took their time to explain the local area with the best places to see – they couldn't have been more helpful!

With 108 rooms available ranging from suites, superior and the classic rooms, there's something for everyone. Inside our room we found a 40-inch flat-screen TV, White Company toiletries, minibar and iron. After a long week, I was very excited to try out the queen size bed which was covered with Egyptian cotton. It was so comfortable that I ended up having a nap! Once I had awoken from my slumber, we headed off for a romantic walk around the area and discovered plenty of independent boutiques, clothes shops and cafes – we walked around in comfortable silence just enjoying each others' company. As we visited in winter, the night drew in early leaving the dark streets beautifully lit.

TO DINE FOR

We couldn't fault our dining experience at The Marco Pierre White restaurant located in the hotel and I must say, it's one of the best meals I've ever had – and I'm not exaggerating! The service was faultless and I have told everyone about it. For starter I had Mr White's Scotch Egg which tasted divine, the egg inside was cooked to perfection. For main I opted for The Governor's Fried Haddock and Triple Cooked Chips, a simple dish which is my personal favourite and I wasn't disappointed.

After dinner we headed off to the bar where we enjoyed plenty of cocktails, my favourite was the classic daiquiri and spent our time relaxing on the comfortable chairs, it was so lovely to be able to spend time together without any distractions.

After having a lovely rest, we started our day with a great breakfast. It was a buffet-style set-up with choices of hot foods or continental. My partner says the blueberry muffin was his favourite, I would have loved to try some but I was so full-up!

While eating, guests could watch the changing of the guards right outside the window, it was impressive and there was an excited buzz all around – it was like a movie scene!

It was sadly time to leave; we both loved this hotel so much and will be booking our next trip back later this year!

Discover more about the venue here: castlehotelwindsor.com

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23RD FEBRUARY
MANOR PARK COUNTRY HOUSE
Clydach, Swansea, SA6 5NR

1ST MARCH
MERCURE SWANSEA HOTEL
Phoenix Way, Swansea, SA7 9EG

1ST MARCH
SHAPPELLES
Ystrad Mynach, CF82 7ED

8TH MARCH
LLANHILLETH INSTITUTE
Meadow St, Llanhilleth, Abertillery NP13 2JT

15TH MARCH
PARC Y SCARLETS
Parc Pemberton, Llanelli, SA14 9UZ

15TH MARCH
GREEN MEADOW GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB
Croesyceiliog, Cwmbran, NP44 2BZ

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THE TOWERS HOTEL & SPA
Jersey Marine, Swansea, SA10 6JL

5TH APRIL
VILLAGE HOTEL, CARDIFF
Coryton, Cardiff, CF14 7EF

19TH APRIL
PLAS Y RHOSYN
Celtic Minor Golf Club, Lower Cwmtwrch, Swansea, SA9 2QQ

19TH APRIL
CRAIG Y NOS CASTLE
Brecon Rd, Pen-y-cae, Swansea SA9 1GL

26TH APRIL
COPTHORNE HOTEL CARDIFF
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26TH APRIL
THE ORANGERY (MARGAM)
Margam Country Park, Port Talbot SA13 2TJ

10TH MAY
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Landore, Swansea SA1 2FA

17TH MAY
LLANCAIACH FAWR MANOR
Nelson, Treharris, CF46 6ER

17TH MAY
MERCURE SWANSEA HOTEL
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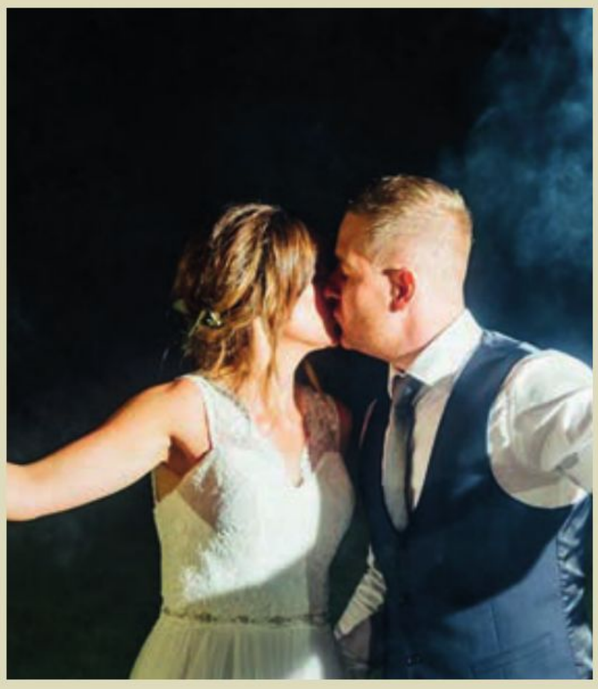

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