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2 for 1 - Cape couples' courtships
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10

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Change of Heart

By Donna Scaglione

Cape Cod couples transform wedding traditions with their own personal touches

GO TO A WEDDING TODAY, AND CHANCES ARE YOU'LL SEE DETAILS IN THE CEREMONY, RECEPTION, MUSIC AND EVEN CAKE THAT YOU PROBABLY HAVEN'T SEEN OR HEARD DURING A NUPTIAL CELEBRATION BEFORE.

SOME COUPLES ADD A UNIQUE SIDE CEREMONY WITHIN THE CEREMONY THAT SYMBOLIZES THEIR UNION IN A PERSONAL WAY. OTHERS OPT FOR A WEDDING CAKE ADORNED WITH WRITING — THE NAMES OF PEOPLE AND PLACES SPECIAL TO THEM — RATHER THAN THE TRADITIONAL BUTTERCREAM ROSES. AND SOME INCLUDE THEIR PETS IN THE WALK DOWN THE AISLE.

"Everybody has their own vision," says Rick Lang, who has been in the wedding-planning business for nineteen years and is catering sales manager for the Chatham Bars Inn. "Everybody is looking for a point of differentiation. People don't want to be in the cookie-cutter situation."

As a wedding planner on Cape Cod for the past nine years, Allison Wildes Liset of Sandwich sees – and oversees – an array of personal matrimonial touches. One such accent a client recently added was a sand ceremony, in which sand from the opposite coasts – in this case, a California beach, where the bride was from, and Old Silver Beach in Falmouth, where the groom was from – was poured from separate vessels into one. The gesture celebrated the coupling and put a different spin on the traditional unity candle.

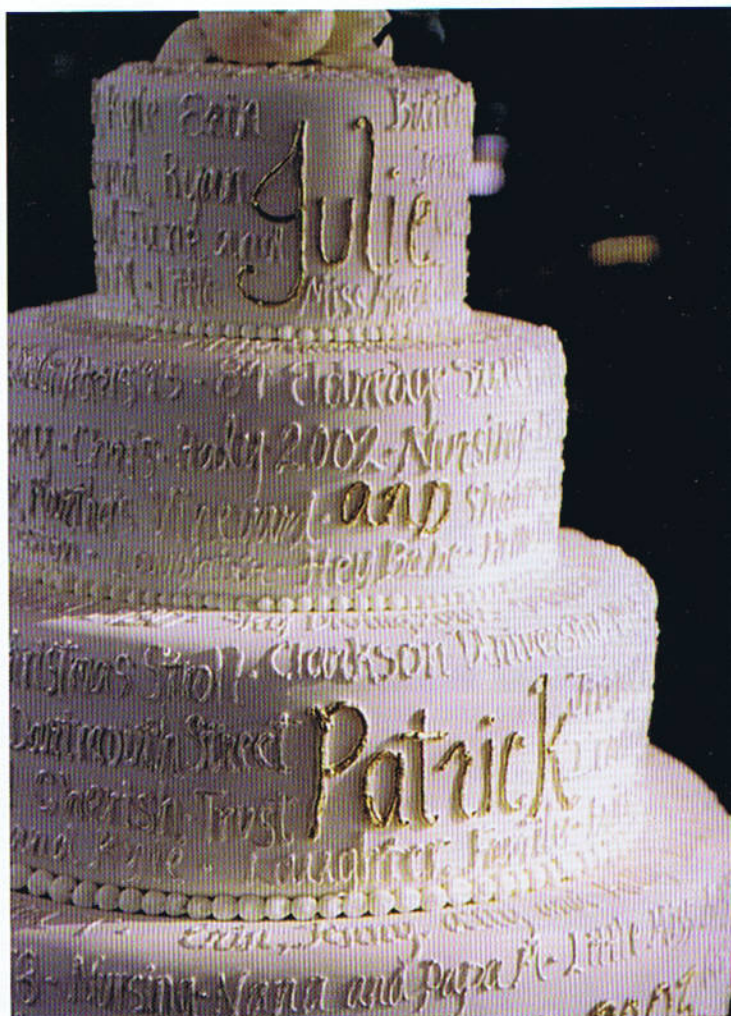
"It can be very meaningful if they apply the right text and explain to people what is happening," Liset says of the idea. "It's very charming and Capey, and it's just a cute way to incorporate the Cape in a beachie way."

Another gesture that seems to have become popular in recent years is the inclusion of pets – particularly dogs – in weddings. Some couples have their dogs serve as ring bearers or simply walk down the aisle as members of the wedding party. Web sites featuring formal doggie wedding attire, including satin "tuxedos," frilly bows and ring-bearer pillows with ribbons to tie around Fido's middle have sprung up to make sure the furry family member is suitably dressed for the big day.

But a couple's dream addition to their nuptials can be ulcer-inducing for a wedding planner.

"It's always risky," Liset says. "We had [a dog] who had just gone swimming, so then it was wet and smelly and I didn't want it near the bride. Adding pets adds room for more mishaps."

At Chatham Bars, where state health regulations prevent animals from participating in ceremonies inside the hotel, a Bernese Mountain Dog helped his



Some couples are expressing themselves by putting the names of people, places or words that are important to them on their wedding cake, as on this one by Delicious Desserts in East Falmouth.

Photo by Alternate Angles Photography

The Cape is a wedding site even for off-Cape couples who are looking for water views, as at the Chatham Bars Inn. Photo by Jamie Bohlin



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owners celebrate their wedding during an outdoor ceremony, with the groom walking down the aisle with his beloved canine.

"They were going to dress him in a little tux," Lang recalls. "He wore it but he didn't like it. So they said, 'forget it' at the last minute. He probably never had anything on him in his life, and he was handsome enough without it."

Despite the potential for problems that adding a canine can bring, Liset says she understands why the idea is so meaningful to pet lovers.

"A lot of these couples have lived together, and this is their child," she says. "This is their common link. It's their first joint venture, if you will, and a lot of times it becomes: 'We want him involved.'"

Including canines on the big day is part of a bigger trend some planners see: an effort to make the day as special as possible by having smaller weddings with shorter guest lists featuring only people – and sometimes animals – who are particularly significant in the couple's life.

"It seems like there's a lot of money being spent on the important people," Liset says. "It's almost been since 9/11 that people have wanted to be with that core group."

While the weddings themselves might be smaller, couples are holding other events throughout the wedding weekend so they can spend more time with loved ones. Many plan a Friday night clambake or barbecue on the beach or a boat cruise out of Hyannis Harbor. On Saturday, it might be a golf game for the men and spa visit and lunch for the women.

"They are spending the same money but on fewer guests," observes Liset, whose own wedding included 32 guests at the Aqua Grille in Sandwich during the dead calm of winter. "They are inviting their inner circle but treating them to three events over the weekend rather than one."

Many couples getting married on Cape Cod do not call it home – in nine years Liset has never had a local bride

Dress rehearsal

Fine dining for pre-wedding party

A Cape Cod wedding is often a "destination" event, says wedding planner Allison Wildes Liset, at which the bride and groom are bringing together their inner circles for the first time. That's why the rehearsal dinner takes on added importance, she says, as an opportunity to provide a "safe, inclusive and relaxed" environment where people can really connect prior to the big day.

If at all possible, says Liset, the guest count should not exceed fifty and, depending on the mood the couple wants to set, there are venues across the Cape that range from elegant to clambake casual.

If you're going for posh, think of the Cape's grandest inns – the Coonamessett in Falmouth, and the Dan'l Webster and the Belfry in Sandwich. Chatham's Wequassett Inn offers a glorious water view from its open-air terrace, the Outer Bar and Grille, and from the private dining room and veranda deck which are part of the inn's exquisite restaurant, 28 Atlantic.

Award-winning chef Heather Allen says she offers couples "a departure from the usual function-room feel" in brand new Restaurant Heather in Mashpee. Her private dining room, with stylish, contemporary décor, sits well apart from the main dining room and comfortably seats forty guests.

Chillingsworth in Brewster can accommodate rehearsal dinner parties ranging from small groups up to one hundred. And you can reserve the Roadhouse Café's entire Back Door Bistro, a congenial spot with great steak dinners, a piano bar and room for a live jazz ensemble.

If the bridal party wants to go with Italian, Alberto's Ristorante in Hyannis has several private dining rooms, and Siena at Mashpee Commons offers a warm and spacious private space on its second floor.

Nautical atmosphere and a water view can be had at the Flying Bridge, which overlooks bustling Falmouth Harbor, and at the Aqua Grille located in Sandwich, right on the shore of the Cape Cod Canal. Both cater to wedding groups. Very casual, and also in Sandwich, is Hemisphere, which offers a private function room right at beach level.

The ultimate Cape Cod experience, however, is the classic clambake, which may be the liveliest and best party option of all, says Liset. She often works with Treat's Catering owner Brad Boyd, who can stage a clambake at the charming Dennis Inn, inside the inn or on the grounds, or can take a clambake with all the trimmings on the road, to any special destination.

For more information, contact Allison Wildes Liset at Elegant Engagements, www.capeweddingplanner.com, or consult www.weddingsoncape-cod.com, a good resource directory.

—Terry Ward Libby

as a client – and neither do most of the guests, so the wedding becomes a sort of family reunion. "So [the couples] say, 'All these people are flying in; we want to spend as much time with them as we can,'" she says. "So it's creating these perimeter events so that people can cluster."

Couples are also putting their special mark on their day in smaller ways, such as naming guest tables rather than numbering them, Lang has observed. Instead of sitting at table number seven, guests might find themselves at Four Seas Ice Cream or the Chatham Coast Guard Station.

"It could be places they grew up, places they met," Lang says. "It could be a variety of things."

Another way to personalize is through the wedding cake. Lisa Raffael, owner of Delicious Desserts of East Falmouth, says some clients are going beyond the edible seashell cake – a mainstay of many Cape Cod weddings – and expressing themselves in frosted writing. They are asking Raf-

fael to write their lives on their cake – names of people, places and activities with special meaning to them, as well as dates and romantic statements, such as "from this day forward" and "to have and to hold."

"I've been trying to do it for a couple of years now, but now I feel people are more open to it," says Raffael, who makes cakes for about 200 to 250 weddings a year and is in her fifteenth season.

One couple, both English teachers, are lovers of books and writing and want to incorporate that into their cake. While the design is in its early stages, they know they want to capture the idea of writing different chapters of their lives or feature the titles of books to which they relate.

"More and more people are looking for something different," Raffael says.

A desire for less formal photography extends that theme of wanting something unique for the day. Liset says her clients seek pictures that are more candid and have a journalistic quality to



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them. Some are even opting for black and white photography.

"I think they want it to be: 'I just want to enjoy the party,'" she says. "Capture the real stuff instead of creating [it]."

Some of Melissa Bouchard's clients at the Coonamessett Inn in Falmouth take that idea very seriously. Instead of having the photos of the wedding party taken while guests are enjoying the cocktail hour, as is traditionally done, they are having them shot before the wedding ceremony. While this means the bride and groom see each other before the ceremony - considered bad luck by matrimonial purists - this allows them to enjoy pre-dinner time with guests.

"Somebody who is not superstitious and does not have that concern might want to do that," says Bouchard, the inn's assistant manager. "It's not for everyone."

As members of a generation raised with many visual gadgets, younger couples are taking advantage of to-



Tables with names instead of numbers add a personal touch. Photo by Jamie Bohlin

day's technology and putting on a bit of a show at their reception, Bouchard adds. Some are setting up screens near the disc jockey's table to play back recently shot tape of their ceremony and of people dancing at the party.

To keep the energy level of those dancers up (as if the cake didn't supply enough sweetness), some weddings, such as those at the Coonamessett Inn, offer guests a candy station - a buffet of penny candy, such as caramels, chocolate malt balls, Tootsie Rolls and more



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– with bags for carrying the delectable stash back to the table. For even more sugary goodness, couples also offer guests chocolate fountains with fruit, cookies, pretzels, marshmallows and biscotti for dipping.

"We set that up at the beginning of the reception and it's so eye-appealing and yummy," Bouchard says.

The idea has caught on. The Coonamessett Inn, owned by Cape Cod Restaurants, originally rented a fountain three years ago, Bouchard says. Now it owns one that is used among the company's several wedding sites about twice a month, she says.


All those confectionary treats are certainly not for everyone. Same goes for the purple, gold or spangled linen Lang has seen some brides choose for their Chatham Bars weddings. How the couple's selections sit with the wedding planners – or even guests – doesn't really matter.

"As long as the bride's happy," Lang says, "that's all that matters to me." ♦



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