

APRIL 2011

FOOD ARTS

AT THE RESTAURANT AND HOTEL FOREFRONT

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TABLE
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HOW

Green IS MY Wedding

CATERING CURRENTS MORE AND MORE
HOTELS AND CATERERS ARE MINING GOLD
IN ECO-FRIENDLY WEDDINGS AND RECEPTIONS.
CLINT BROWNFIELD REPORTS.





Opposite: Rockefeller Center's 620 Loft & Garden gets a green makeover by Great Performances at this late summer reception. Above: Bride photo by Michael Diehl/Westend61/Corbis.

Approximately two million couples are married in the United States each year. And even though there isn't a tote board on Times Square counting them, it's safe to say that "green" weddings are growing in popularity. Patricia Canole, editor-in-chief of *For the Bride* magazine, has this to say: "During the last few years, I've noticed a greater emphasis on weddings that are mindful of the environment. Various bridal fairs that I've attended feature more and more products that are eco-friendly—from invitations to cakes, and everything in between." Enter: savvy caterers, event planners, and venues with attractive and delicious alternatives to a conspicuous consumption that could help wreck the planet.



Planners agree that the priority is to arrive at a time, date, and venue for the wedding and reception. Once this is accomplished, the rest can begin to fall into place. It's not uncommon for popular places to be booked a year in advance, including venues like parks, botanical gardens, and arboretums that have a built-in green vibe. The fees charged go into sustaining these eco-friendly places, and very little needs to be added in the way of decorations.

There are also growing numbers of green commercial places, such as the first platinum certified LEED hotel in the country, **Proximity Hotel**, in Greensboro, North Carolina, where couples can be married and host their reception in the same location, cutting down on the carbon footprint left by people driving from one location to another. Carbon dioxide emissions equal carbon footprints. CEO **Dennis Quaintance**, who opened the hotel in January 2008, has watched his wedding reception business grow

from zero to nearly 70 in 2010, with about 30 couples electing to both get married and hold their receptions at Proximity.

Daytime weddings and receptions also lessen energy use, and Proximity's garden is pretty enough that only a few extra myrtle branches—cut from the property and completely renewable—are needed to complete the decor. To further the eco theme, it's recommended that acoustic music be used to reduce electricity use.

Food served at Proximity is locally sourced seasonally, and measures are taken in the kitchen and at dinners to further reduce the carbon footprint, including offering a locally produced chèvre from Goat Lady Dairy, which in turn sells the waste



product of the cheese (whey) to another local farmer, who feeds it to his hogs, creating the natural pork served at Proximity. Two whole cows are purchased each week from a local vendor, and all parts of the animal are used—no waste. Executive chefs travel to local farmers markets four days a week to reap the freshest locally grown fruits and vegetables—a bushel of local in-season tomatoes is a lot cheaper than a bushel flown in during the winter. The kitchen is 30 percent smaller than the average restaurant kitchen, including walk-ins and dry storage. Their goal is to reduce waste from the outset versus recycling at the back end—it takes energy to recycle. Buffets and displays are offered in smaller portions and are frequently replenished to reduce waste. Soy candles from a local vendor are used throughout the hotel and restaurant. Soy is a renewable resource.

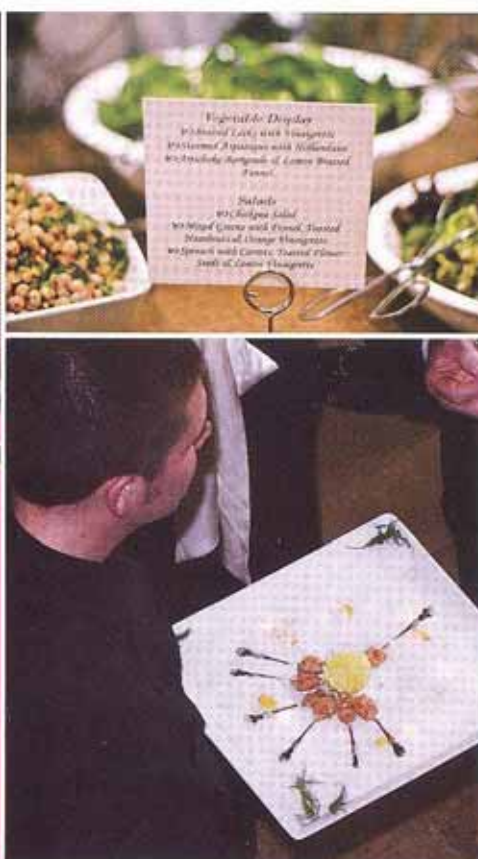
Dan Barber's Westchester County, New York, **Blue Hill at**

Stone Barns—and Blue Hill restaurant in New York City—also fit into this idea. On-site events director **Danielle Harrity** says: “Location, menu, and style of service make our restaurants a natural location for couples who are committed to sustainable ingredients that are locally sourced. There is a “soft” education that takes place when guests visit the farm; this is not insignificant. Tours of the farm prior to the ceremony and discussions with farmers and livestock managers allow guests to experience how the wedding meal has been raised and grown and highlight the couple’s dedication to ensuring a healthy food system for future generations.”

Because of the year-round beauty of Stone Barns Center for

30 years, and strives to use sources that are no more than a day’s drive to the final destination. She caters around 30 weddings (approximately one-third of her business) each year out of her headquarters in Manhattan’s Chelsea Market, where she was a charter tenant. Her sustainable eatery and wine bar, **The Green Table**, is in the front of her catering operation. Cleaver is about as green as it gets, but even she says: “Few brides want to have a wedding dinner or reception without some form of chocolate. And since none is produced near New York, we use naturally produced, fairly traded chocolate, grown outside our area.”

She adds: “A wedding is often the first large investment a cou-



Food and Agriculture’s fields and pastures, many couples feel that they can limit additional décor—a significant financial and environmental savings. However, if couples are looking for suggestions about responsible choices they could make about other wedding details, here are a few ideas that Harrity suggests: “Explore using potted flowers or plants for table decor instead of cut flowers; make a donation to Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture (or other nonprofit) in lieu of wedding favors; provide group transportation for guests to/from the wedding and consider using a transportation company that offers fuel-efficient vehicles. Menus are developed as close to the event as possible in order not to disappoint couples; for example, raspberries or tomatoes might be out of season.”

Also in New York City is eco/green caterer **Mary Cleaver**, who has been involved with sustainable and renewable food for

ple makes together. It’s a terrific opportunity for them to make positive choices that reflect their shared values, which I think is a key ingredient in a successful marriage. I’m heartened to see many more couples choosing sustainable food and decor options. Eating can—and should—be a positive force for social change. Every time we eat, our choices can make a difference to our economy and the environment, locally and around the world.”

“For more than 30 years, we’ve always done business in a sustainable eco-friendly way, whether or not the client was

From left: Blue Hill at Stone Barns’ bucolic setting and Dan Barber’s signature organic vegetables on the fence. Vegetable photo by Thomas Schauer. At Proximity Hotel, guests blow bubbles as a more eco-friendly option and soy candles lend renewable refinement to complement the locally sourced vegetable salads and salmon tartare demitasse spoons illuminated by LEDs beneath the rock wall. Photos by Natalie Carter Hyde.



Guests feast their eyes on Angel Orensanz Synagogue in New York City while dining on Mary Cleaver's green spread that includes frisée and pomegranate salad with carrots and miniature chicken potpies, all grown or raised within a day's drive of New York City. Synagogue photo by Laurie Rhodes.

aware. Over the past three years, we've been seeing a major increase in clients who come to us specifically because they want their event to be as sustainable as possible and they know that's the way we operate. It's a very positive trend.

"Serving a bit less animal protein and more vegetables and grains is a good approach to working in a more sustainable way. If it must be beef, buying a whole steer for the wedding feast and serving a variety of dishes that highlight the different cuts is a better choice than paying top dollar for tenderloin. It's less wasteful, more economical, and more creative."

Her company provides dishes that demonstrate a commitment to seasonal cuisine, and Cleaver relies heavily on such local purveyors as Satur Farms on Long Island's East End, Flying Pigs Farm in Washington County, New York, and Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard in the Finger Lakes. And on any given morning, you will find her at the Greenmarket in Union Square purchasing fruit, vegetables, and flowers from local farmers.

Great Performances, another environmentally conscious caterer in New York City, has come up with its own "100-mile" menu—using as much food as possible that is grown and pro-



Great Performances uses centerpieces made of wheat grass and sunflowers, with nametags made from plantable wildflower seed paper, all atop recycled/reclaimed farm tables. Vibrant cucumber and watermelon waters add a Technicolor touch.

duced within that radius. It also owns Katchkie Farm in upstate New York, which produces naturally grown produce and fruit for the operation. And, as founder and CEO **Liz Neumark** points out: "You don't have to go all-organic to serve natural, eco-friendly food at your wedding. Local farmers can be a good choice even if they aren't 'organic': some companies practice sustainable farming but haven't gone through the process to get the necessary certification." **Stella Rankin**, senior event and wedding director at Great Performances, says, "It's very gratifying to work with couples who want to begin their lives together in an environmentally conscious way and to help them achieve their goals." One of Great Performance's signatures is to create beautiful centerpieces out of fresh fruits and vegetables that are given away to the guests in biodegradable/reusable bags.

Many of the most successful caterers and venues are able to provide a growing list of eco/green practices that reduce energy use, including an array of tips for weddings and receptions, starting with the invitation. Many couples are not sending out traditional heavy-stock, five-piece extravaganzas and are instead using e-mail, which would probably not thrill *Emily Post* but definitely cuts down on the carbon footprint. Couples can also create their own custom-designed Web sites to provide directions, keep track of RSVPs, inform guests about eco-friendly gifts they would like to receive, or skip presents entirely and ask that donations be made to environmental causes. If paper invitations are used, there is a variety of products using biodegradable papers and inks, with or without seeds that can be planted after the wedding.

The selection of wedding gowns also comes into play. Brides are electing to wear dresses worn by their mothers or grandmothers or buying recycled dresses from resale shops. Even top designers such as Vera Wang are offering dresses made from eco-friendly fabrics. Before this, the brides' only alternatives were dresses made out of cotton or hemp, sometimes giving them the

appearance of a cross between Ophelia and a Druid high priestess.

When it comes to destination weddings and honeymoons, entire hotel groups are jumping on the green bandwagon, such as **RockResorts**, which was founded in 1956 by environmental pioneer Laurance Rockefeller. Continuing in that mode today, the resort group offers weddings where couples can say "I do" without saying "I don't" to Mother Nature, through the resort's Iconic Weddings program, where planners help couples achieve an "Environmentally Engaged" wedding. Specialists work with the bride and groom to incorporate more personal sustainability practices that go far beyond simply recycling the cans from the "Just Married" sign, such as: indigenous spa treatments

for the wedding party, stylists who use natural/organic cosmetics and health care products, photographers who solely use hi-res digital cameras, soy candles, organic centerpieces, organic wines and beers, and eco-friendly wedding favors.

This green trend also applies to **Hotel Matilda** in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico—a 32 room boutique hotel that opened in September 2010. Chef **Bernie McDonough** partners with a local farm, Via Organica, to grow produce for Hotel Matilda, making it possible for the organic farm to hire a full-time person. A colony of bees produce varietal honey that is paired with local aged cheeses served at receptions and dinners, photovoltaic panels produce up to 30 percent of the electricity needs, solar panels heat water for guest rooms and the pool, and a lighting system automatically dims and shuts off lights to reduce energy use. Only plants indigenous to the region are used in landscaping the grounds.

And farther south, **Inkaterra**, a small eco-friendly luxury hotel group, has a sumptuous outpost at the foot of Machu Picchu, which is marking its centennial this year. It was "discovered" by Hiram Bingham in 1911. The pueblo-style 85 cottage boutique resort goes to great lengths to do nothing that would upset the environment, including growing and processing coffee and tea for the dining room. Add local produce and fruit from the Sacred Valley and the stunning views of the Citadel and you'd have trouble finding a more eco-friendly, sustainable, and romantic honeymoon.

Whether using soy candles and biodegradable invitations will save the planet, or not, is anybody's guess, although every little bit helps. But these successful leaders in the field have found that they can do well by doing good whether or not they're 100 percent pure.

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