

# *The* PLANNER



## INSPIRATION POINT

A destination, a décor detail, even the weather you're hoping for can serve as the starting point for your wedding plans. Here, three couples reveal the one not-so-random element that led to the celebration of their dreams.

TEXT BY LEIGH CRANDALL

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## THE INSPIRATION

## SNOW

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 “I’ve always wanted a winter wedding,” says Kaela Shaw. “I love the monochrome of snow, the way it all blends together—it’s so peaceful.”

## SETTING THE SCENE

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 Kaela and fiancé Chris Pinard chose January 2 for their wedding at Langdon Hall Country House Hotel & Spa, in Cambridge, Ontario. “We wanted a beautiful property so that if the snow fell we could take outdoor shots against the white landscape.” The winter weather inspired the décor, too. “We wanted inside to feel cozy, since outside would be cold and snowy. We used antique gold accents on tables and lots of candlelight.”

## WEATHER REPORT

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 Surprisingly, “there was no snow all winter! I checked the forecast a million times a day. Luckily, it started as we drove to the venue for our rehearsal, so we had fresh snow for the wedding.”

## PHOTO FINISH

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 “We took our photos before the ceremony because we wanted daylight. The girls wore snow boots beneath their dresses, and the venue brought us blankets that we used as wraps.”

## TAKE-AWAY TIP

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 Swap pricier fresh flowers for less costly greenery, which feels festive in winter. “It’s a time of year when that type of arrangement is expected, and it looks great with a snowy landscape.”



## THE INSPIRATION

## FLOWERS

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 “I’m such a flower snob,” jokes Holly Knudsen. “I had to have all the best spring has to offer.”

## PICKING THE DATE

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 Holly and her fiancé, John Knudsen IV, secured the Fort Worth Zoo, in Texas, for April 25. “So many of my favorite blooms are at their peak in April.”

## DESIGNER DETAILS

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 “I booked my florist, Maxine Owens of the Southern Table, 15 months out. I loved her bold, wild style and her ability to incorporate tons of textures and colors into her work.”

## CREATING A BACKDROP

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 “I knew the flowers would be bright, so we went with a neutral palette for other elements, like gray and blush-colored linens. I also had the bridesmaids wear black so their bouquets would really stand out.”

## BEST FLORAL MOMENT

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 “My bouquet had all of my very favorite blooms: peonies, sweet peas, poppies, ranunculus, fritillaria, and garden roses.”

## TAKE-AWAY TIP

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 Trust your florist to make the call about where to spend. “I had a budget to stay within, but I let Maxine move money around without having to make multiple line-item updates to the invoice.”

See more photos and read about another couple’s planning process at [marthastewartweddings.com/inspiration-point](http://marthastewartweddings.com/inspiration-point).

## THE INSPIRATION

## AN ISLAND

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 “I was born and raised on St. Thomas and never really considered getting married anywhere else,” says Rachel Walker Whitlow.

## FINDING THEIR SPOT

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 Rachel and her groom, Matthew Whitlow, wanted water views, “but we’d invited more than 300 people, so most island venues were too small.” Eventually they toured Coral World Ocean Park, the island’s marine park. “We loved its indoor/outdoor spaces, and there was a beach for photos!”

## ISLE STYLE

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 The waterside venue was stunning on its own, so they stuck with simple, elegant island décor like shells, candles, and lights strung throughout the property’s palm trees. They also hired a *moko jumbie*, a stilt walker who performs in the island’s carnival, to get dancing started.

## ISLAND TIME

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 Many of the guests were visiting St. Thomas for the first time, so



the couple planned a host of activities in addition to the wedding, including a catamaran sail, a welcome dinner at Rachel’s uncle’s home overlooking the harbor, and a barbecue at Magens Bay beach the day after.

## TAKE-AWAY TIP

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 Social media works well when people are traveling. “We created a private Facebook group to keep everyone updated about activities. It was easy and effective!”

## 27

The median age of a woman in the U.S. the first time she walks down the aisle (for men, it’s 29).

—Pew Research Center



## SHIRA SAYS

“Gathering inspiration and using it as a planning tool is equal parts visual and verbal. Gather images, but also jot down words that evoke the feeling you want. Be specific—*vintage* can mean a lot of eras, and even *pink* can be a range of hues.”  
 —Shira Savada, real weddings editor

# WHAT ARE WE ALL WEARING?

Three experts share new ways to dress your 'maids.

TEXT BY AMY PREISER



## Theme Party

More parties are dressing in a unifying theme rather than just a color palette—think “glamorous, formal garden party” (above) or “beachy boho,” says Yifat Oren of Oren Cove Event Production, in L.A. and NYC. To pull it off seamlessly, Oren suggests creating Pinterest boards of dresses attendants can use as inspiration, or working with a department-store stylist who can help each woman pick her best look.

## Everything's All White

One of the oldest traditions, a bridal party all in white, is new again. “It harkens back to a time when the bridesmaids were supposed to dress like the bride to trick evil spirits—it looks incredibly chic,” says Xochitl Gonzalez of Brooklyn’s AaB Creates. Your 'maids can pick their own dresses, as long as everyone is on the same page about the formality requirements.



## In the Shade

For a look that's pretty and easy, senior fashion editor Jessica King suggests “each woman wear a different shade of the same color.” Arrange bridesmaids so shades alternate between pale and dark. Or, for an ombré effect, dress shades can transition across the spectrum. If you do opt for ombré, “the dresses should be similar fabrics and length, so the evolution of color is more impactful.”



## ADVICE FROM ANTHONY PICKING YOUR PARTY PEOPLE

*Special projects editor Anthony Luscio offers tips for selecting and asking—and dressing—a modern wedding party.*

“In today’s weddings, it’s more and more common to have men and women mixed in on either side of the aisle. So don’t focus on gender—the most important thing is to pick people who have always stood up for you. When you do ask friends and family to be in your wedding, don’t just email or call. Take the time to write a note explaining how important they are to you, and include a personalized gift, like a sweet treat both of you loved in college, or a bottle of wine from the year you met or graduated. And when it comes to dressing a mixed group, it’s important to respect people’s individuality while also having everyone look cohesive. A few easy ways to do this: Coordinate men’s ties with the color of women’s dresses, or mix and match patterns via accessories like pocket squares or ties for the men, and wraps or shoes for the ladies.”



## THE GRAND TOUR

If you fancy the feel of a European destination wedding without the transatlantic trip, these awe-inspiring venues provide the dramatic impact of a villa or castle abroad—no passport required. **TEXT BY SARAH HORNE GROSE**



↑ **If you love the Scottish Highlands**  
**TRY The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay, in California**

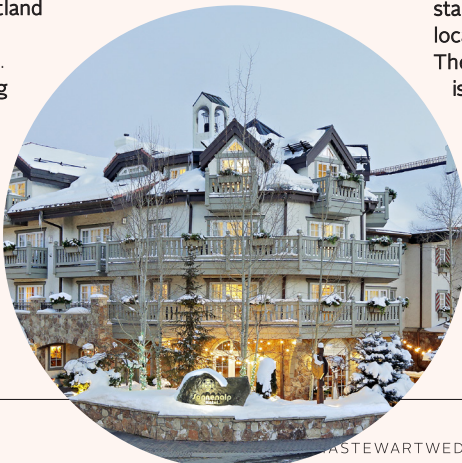
With a setting fit for *Outlander*, this five-star sleep perched above the Pacific offers dramatic scenery akin to Scotland's coast, as well as two world-class golf courses along the water (you won't even miss St. Andrews's famous links). Take in the scenery with a cozy post-rehearsal evening roasting marshmallows around the resort's fire pits, then plan for an outdoor wedding at sunset atop the bluffs. For full effect, welcome guests with a rendition of "Scotland the Brave," performed by the resort's bagpiper. **PARTY TIP:** For an outing your friends and family won't soon forget, organize a group cruise around Half Moon Bay to spot gray whales. *Site fees from \$6,000; ritzcarlton.com.*

**If you love Venice** →  
**TRY Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, in Miami**

When farm-equipment magnate James Deering built his Florida estate in 1916, he modeled the lavish Biscayne Bay-fronting property on the Old World villas of Italy, celebrating its completion with gondola rides and revelers dressed as Italian peasants. It's now home to an art museum surrounded by formal tropical gardens where wedding ceremonies can be held, while grand waterfront terraces can accommodate up to 300 for a seated dinner and dancing. **PARTY TIP:** Plan extra time for portraits—the images captured along Vizcaya's winding paths and secluded courtyards are sure to be stunning. *Venue rental from \$7,500; vizcaya.org.*

↓ **If you love the Alps**  
**TRY Sonnenalp Hotel, in Vail, Colorado**

A family of German hoteliers built Vail's Sonnenalp as an homage to their sister resort in Bavaria. Its regal beauty is particularly striking in winter, when Vail Village becomes a snowy wonderland surrounded by 5,289 pristine acres of some of the country's best ski trails. After an elegant reception in the resort's glass-covered atrium, couples can escape to the



property's chalet-inspired suites, with gas-burning fireplaces. During the holidays, the resort's "elves" can deliver a fresh Christmas tree to the newlyweds' room. **PARTY TIP:** Host a casual rehearsal dinner of fondue and raclette at the cozy Swiss Chalet restaurant. *Site fees from \$1,500; sonnenalp.com.*



↑ **If you love the French countryside**  
**TRY Auberge du Soleil, in Napa Valley, California**

Founded by French restaurateur Claude Rouas in 1981, this Relais & Chateaux property in California wine country evokes Provence with its Mediterranean-style buildings and 33 olive-tree-covered acres. Weddings can take place on a terrace overlooking the vine-covered hills, and receptions feature Michelin-starred fare prepared with locally sourced ingredients. The wine list, naturally, is stellar, with ample New World offerings as well as hundreds of bottles from the Loire Valley, Burgundy, and Alsace. **PARTY TIP:** For a French flavor, serve Champagne and mignardises, a selection of hand-rolled truffles, seasonal tartlets,



pâtés de fruits, and petite financiers. *Wedding packages begin at \$5,000; aubergedusoleil.aubergeresorts.com.*

↓ **If you love a medieval castle**  
**TRY Barnsley Resort, in Adairsville, Georgia**

Located an hour from Atlanta, Barnsley is ideal for couples who desire the storybook romance of a castle wedding. Created from British shipping tycoon Godfrey Barnsley's former estate, the resort has its very own crumbling manor house ringed by formal gardens. Ceremonies can be held among the ruins, followed by a tented reception. For the full fairy-tale treatment, arrive via horse-drawn carriage. **PARTY TIP:** Life on a castle estate involves a host of outdoor pursuits—and so does a visit to Barnsley. Organize an afternoon of sport, like a group clay shoot or horseback ride, with your wedding party. *Reception packages from \$199 per person; barnsleyresort.com.*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF VIZCAYA MUSEUM AND GARDENS; VICTOR VILLATORO; COURTESY OF THE SONNENALP HOTEL; COURTESY OF THE RITZ-CARLTON, HALF MOON BAY; COURTESY OF AUBERGE DU SOLEIL

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## UNEXPECTED SHOTS TO GET

*Brooklyn- and Nashville-based wedding photographer Isabelle Selby shares moments you may not have thought to capture.*

### Getting Ready With Your Pets

A great way for couples to include their animals (without having the furry friends attend the wedding): “Incorporate them into photos at the beginning of the day,” says Selby. Candid moments of them taking in the flurry of activity while you’re getting ready will result in some seriously cute pictures, and it’s a nice time to snap some “family” portraits, too, if you’re seeing your spouse-to-be before the ceremony.

### A Location That’s Important to Your Family History

“I had a bride request a photo of herself and her husband in front of the church that her grandparents were married in, and I loved this sense of nostalgia.” This idea also works well for engagement pictures.

Make them your own by choosing a place that’s important to your loved ones, like a family home or a favorite restaurant or park.

### A Cameo by a Digital Device

“As much as we try to keep cell-phone time

to a minimum and enjoy the moment, they’re not all bad.” In fact, a candid shot of guests laughing together over something on the screen, a picture of friends making faces while they attempt a selfie, or a shot of the screen itself showing the weather report for the day can all help capture the energy of the wedding.

### Night Portraits

“If you’re still on a wedding-day high at the end of the night, add one more set of portraits. A streetlamp, sparklers, or even a car’s headlights can make for photos that feel a little edgier, but every bit as romantic.”

### Just After the Ceremony

“I love capturing a couple in their first married moments, before they greet guests and start any ‘official’ portraits. I suggest that, immediately following the ceremony, they take some time alone to share a private toast, nibble on some food, or admire their new rings.

Then I’ll come in for the last minute or so to take candid photos.”



## Should I or Shouldn't I HIRE A VIDEOGRAPHER?

We asked couples who did, couples who didn't, and the experts themselves to weigh in. Read their tips and tales, then decide how you want to document your day.

TEXT BY CLAIRE SULLIVAN

### We Did

Alisa Richter & Barrett Sheridan

“I wanted a videographer because of a conversation I had with my mom,” says Alisa. “She was organizing family videos and realized she had no footage of her late parents. That made a huge impression on me. We interviewed three videographers and met with our top choices in person. You want to feel comfortable with your videographer, because you’ll be spending a lot of time with him or her behind the scenes. I’m grateful to have our wedding video, because everything goes by in such a blur. And I have wonderful footage of our parents to show our kids and grandkids.”

### From the Photographer

Kate Headley, Washington, D.C., and New York City

“In the end, it’s about your comfort level and how much you want to interact with the camera. I suggest couples on the fence hire a videographer for the rehearsal dinner—especially if there are a lot of toasts—so they can capture the audio. Or designate a friend with a steady hand to shoot the vows and toasts with sound in mind. If you do opt for a videographer, look for someone with the same approach as your photographer.”

### We Didn't

Libby Weinfurter & Allen Shyu

“When we found our photographers, we knew that we had to have them,” says Libby. “They were a little more expensive and ate into any budget we would have had for a videographer, but we believed they would do our wedding day justice and, since we had two people shooting all day—from when we got ready through the lantern lighting at the end of our reception—we didn’t feel the need for more coverage. We have a home full of gorgeous wedding photos.”

### From the Videographer

Lindsay Quinn, NST Pictures, NYC

“Sound is the main benefit of videography—your fiancé’s voice cracking when he says his vows, the conversation you’re having with your mom as she is buttoning your wedding dress, the groomsmen trying to teach each other how to tie bow ties. Your memories of this jam-packed day may fade over time, and the all-encompassing medium of video can bring you back into the moment with the details of movement and audio. With a photo, your brain has to fill in all the blanks.”





## HOW TO SABER CHAMPAGNE

*Opening the bottle with a sword or knife is one impressive party trick. And it's not even that difficult, once you know how it's done. Event designer Bronson van Wyck explains the essentials.*

1. Chill the bottle to between 45 and 48 degrees—colder temps lower pressure and inhibit vibrations, which makes the bottle more stable for sabering. To ensure the neck of the bottle is nice and frigid, place the bottle upside down in an ice bucket for 20 minutes beforehand.
2. Do a safety check. Make sure that you have room to swing freely and that the bottle is pointed away from onlookers. And give guests enough time to get their phones out—sabering was made for social media.
3. Carefully remove the foil around the cork completely. Then unwind and discard the wire basket.
4. Find one of the two vertical seams running up the bottle. Hold the base of the bottle firmly in one hand, pointing it away from you, tilted at a 30-degree angle, seam up.
5. With your other hand, hold the saber flat against the bottle. Firmly slide the blade along the seam of the body, hitting the lip at a slight angle (remember to follow through). The cork and the glass ring will pop off intact, and the Champagne will be ready to serve.

# Everything You Never Knew You Needed to Know About SPARKLING WINE

## A BEGINNERS' GUIDE TO BUBBLES

**CHAMPAGNE** "Only wine from the Champagne region of France can be labeled as such," says New York City-based event designer Bronson van Wyck. "And it must be produced in the *méthode Champenoise*, with its second fermentation occurring in individual bottles. Most Champagne varieties are rich and complex, but my favorite for weddings is blanc de blancs, or white wine from white grapes. It's easy to pair with food and usually very dry with a clean finish. For the true bubbles aficionado, select a single-vintage Champagne, made during a year with an exceptional harvest and aged in the bottle longer."

**PROSECCO** "Prosecco is bright, clean, and easy to drink. It's mainly made from the Glera grape variety in the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions of Italy, and nearly all proseccos are fermented in vats (not in bottles, like Champagne), so it's more affordable. It's also lower in alcohol than many other sparkling wines, so it's a good option for hot-weather celebrations."

**CAVA** "Cava has fresh, citrus notes, and is made with a blend of Spanish grapes in the same method as Champagne (secondary fermentation in the bottle). Because of this, it's closer in character to Champagne than prosecco," but it's generally more affordable than the former.

**CRÉMANT** This is a broad term for sparkling wine made in certain regions of France. "The grapes vary slightly, but I find crémants to be the closest substitute to true Champagne. They're often meant to be drunk relatively young as well, and are well-priced and a bit more complex than cava or prosecco."

**ROSÉ CHAMPAGNE** "A popular choice these days, rosé Champagne is made either by allowing the white juice to stay in contact with the red skins of either Pinot Noir or Pinot Meunier grapes (or both), or by adding a small amount of red wine to the otherwise white juice. It's typically dry and complex, and looks particularly pretty when served."

Champagne is sold in 15 different bottle sizes. A Melchizedek or Midas is the largest, equivalent to 40 standard bottles.

Sparkling wine is best served chilled between 47 and 50 degrees, but never iced; a temperature that's too cold lessens the aromas and flavors.

*Dosage, the addition of a mix of reserve wine and sugar, is often the final step before corking in making Champagne. Found on labels, these terms indicate the amount of sugar per liter.*

DOUX	DEMI-SEC	SEC	EXTRA DRY	BRUT	EXTRA BRUT	BRUT NATURE
More than 50 grams of sugar per liter	32 to 50 grams of sugar per liter	17 to 32 grams of sugar per liter	12 to 17 grams of sugar per liter	Less than 12 grams of sugar per liter	0 to 6 grams of sugar per liter	No dosage; less than 3 grams of sugar per liter

## Flutes vs. Coupes



Coupes are stylish and offer superior aromatics, but you'll have to drink up quickly—the wider, shallower glass means the fizz goes flat faster. When it comes to preserving bubbles, tulips and flutes keep them going longer.



While this technique will work just fine with a common kitchen knife, an official tool, like Christofle's sterling-silver-handled saber (shown, top) for St. Regis Hotels & Resorts certainly adds flair. It also comes with a hands-on sabrage lesson for two at the St. Regis of your choice. Price upon request, [stregisrituals.com](http://stregisrituals.com).

PETER ARDITO (BOTTLE); GETTY IMAGES (GLASSES); COURTESY OF ST. REGIS HOTELS & RESORTS (SWORD)