

Weddings

The road to "I do" is usually paved with things that have to be done. From cakes to corsages, rehearsal to reception, preparing for this monumental day can sometimes begin the second the engagement ring is placed on her finger. Not only are childhood dreams eager to be fulfilled, but budgets are barking in one ear while opinions of friends and family are whispering in the other.

With an estimated 26,186 Boston area-weddings in 2007, according to The Wedding Report, you aren't alone in wondering how not to let this big day take over your life. The following tips from local experts can help.



Food and Function

To begin, you'll need to pick a season. What's your pleasure—spring flower bouquets, an evening of summertime breezes, fall leaf peeping or a winter wonderland? With four distinct seasons in Boston, you have your pick, and your choice can translate into where you'll have your wedding. Obviously, a beach-bound bride will have to rule out colder months, but she'll certainly shine during the warmer ones. On the other hand, a hotel or restaurant could be a great choice for year-round splendor.

"Usually what they consider first is location; do they want to be on the beach, in the city or suburbs," says Tricia Enos, director of weddings at Boston's Omni Parker House, one city location sure to make any couple happy. Its historical rooftop ballroom offers spectacular views and an unparalleled privacy level not normally seen in most hotels, with its own private kitchen and bathroom. "It's the history of the hotel and the location," explains Enos. "Brides tend to play up the old-world Boston experience."

From the glorious rooftop to beautiful rooms such as the Historic Press Room and Louisa May Alcott ballroom, the Omni Parker can accommodate ceremonies and receptions from 10 to 250 people. "It's a genuine Boston experience with the modern-day conveniences," agrees David Ritchie, director of sales and marketing.

"The Omni Parker House reminds us of what Boston is all about. We keep up traditions and trends." And it shows, with the hotel ranked No. 1 in its category in the J.D. Powers and Associates North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Index Study for 2005 and 2006.

Another choice location for cityscapes is Beacon Hill's Hampshire House, an elegant home with sweeping views of the Boston Public Gardens. Around every corner lies an unexpected detail or hidden treasure, celebrating Boston's finest on your special day. With working fireplaces on every level, handcrafted oak bars and brass chandeliers, the Hampshire House offers an unparalleled warmth and intimacy for your unforgettable event.

The Hampshire House offers customized wedding packages and menus, whether you're dreaming of an intimate champagne brunch or an elaborate evening reception. From the larger second-floor Library room to the smaller, more intimate Thayer room to several other choices throughout the home, the Hampshire House can fit your wedding needs. For a large affair with 500 of your closest friends, you can rent the entire house. Wonderful menus

cater to your every culinary whim, with packages such as the Classic Beacon Hill, the Elegant Bostonian, or the Grand Wedding.

How grand you want your wedding to be is yet another consideration when choosing a venue, according to Mary-Catherine Deibel, co-owner of Upstairs on the Square. In this case, size can be everything.

Start with a guest list, with your maximum and minimum numbers. Then decide how many you're willing to cut in order to fit into that venue," advises Deibel.

With several different rooms to choose from, brides and grooms have many choices at Deibel's fine restaurant in Cambridge. For a party of 100 or less, have the entire event (ceremony to seated dinner) in the Monday Club, or host a beautiful dinner party for up to 90 guests with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres in the Soiree Room. You also have the option of booking the entire two-floor facility, as you bounce upstairs and downstairs for the ceremony, cocktails, a seated dinner, and dancing.

Another suggestion Deibel has is not just to fall in love with the site but also with the food. Taste the venue's food before signing on the dotted line, by either visiting the restaurant or scheduling a tasting.

"If the catering manager knows that you care about the food, that gets translated to the kitchen," she says. "They will take it to heart."

An outdoor wedding would be a superb way to not only enjoy seasonal fare but also show off the lovely New England seasons themselves. Boasting a new three-season outdoor wedding area, the Bradford Country Club brings casual elegance to a pavilion. Located in Bradford, MA, this beautiful semiprivate golf course is now a stunning location for your wedding—both the ceremony and the reception. The pavilion's first couple will be joined in matrimony this June.

Adjacent to the first hole, this brand-new structure fits up to 250 guests and is decorated to the nines, with chandeliers, a carpeted floor, a permanent stage, and lighted ficus trees. Once the sun goes down, the pavilion is amply lit for an elegant evening reception.

For a smaller wedding, the indoor room of the Bradford Country Club handles 50 to 75 guests. No matter the size of your function, all will enjoy delights from Simply Elegant Catering, the club's exclusive caterer.

Since it's a golf course, why not take advantage? Bradford offers complimentary tee times for parties of the bride and groom the day before the reception.

If you're lucky enough to have a site in mind and it allows you the freedom to choose your caterer at will (most sites require you use its caterer), it's still important to tie in certain aspects of timing and location with food.

"If you're choosing a place that's rustic, New Englandy, that's a very different feel than a mansion. That would translate into the design, food, and décor," explains Emma Roberts, owner of Capers Catering in Stoneham, MA, a high-end caterer. The largest wedding she's handled is 600 people, the smallest only 35. "Once you have thought of the venue, you have to take into consideration the season."

In the winter, Roberts suggests heavier foods such as braised dishes and osso buco, whereas the spring typically finds her guests dining on fishes, grilled items, and seasonal produce—perhaps the difference between Roberts choosing to serve a pan seared halibut with a fennel crust and mustard-herb sauce or her grilled lemon-marjoram top sirloin steak with a brochette of grilled mushrooms. Capers tries to use mostly organic ingredients, adding natural flavor and special touches whenever possible.

Capers handles everything from soup to nuts, literally, taking care of not only food but also rentals and staffing. Before hiring for your reception, she suggests asking if these three things are included in the caterer price. "Although larger caterers usually cover rentals and staffing, some mom-and-pop smaller ones might not," she explains.

The bottom line is open communication, whether your caterer is on-staff at a venue or solo. Ask questions—lots of them. You don't want any surprises.

The icing on the ceremony might be the first kiss as man and wife, but the cake is certainly one of the reception's sweeter moments.

"We usually recommend coming in three to six months before the wedding date to schedule a tasting consultation for your cake," says Kelly Delaney, owner of Cakes for Occasions, a custom cake designer in Danvers, MA. During this meeting, bring with you the following information: number of guests, if the cake is your only dessert, and whether the cake and/or dessert will be served or buffet-style.

Once you have narrowed down the basics, the fun begins as you choose the wedding cake of your dreams. If you settle on a tiered cake, Delaney suggests choosing a different flavor for each layer, keeping at least one of them traditional, like chocolate or fruit, to keep those with less-adventurous sweet teeth happy.

That doesn't mean you can't also be bold. People "search out" Delaney's Opera Cake, a chocolate cake soaked in coffee or espresso and then filled with cocoa and cream and layered with mocha butter cream.



Photo: Person + Killian Photography for Ana Hernandez

An Elegant Bride

"It is important to consider the setting and/or theme of the wedding before choosing a gown," says Leslie DeAngelo, owner of Vows Bridal Outlet, a high-end designer bridal outlet store located in Newton, MA. The store has been featured on shows such as *Chronicle* and won Best of Boston®, several times for discount wedding gowns.

"If a bride is having a destination or beach wedding, she may opt for something in a lightweight silk organza or perhaps a lovely English net," suggests DeAngelo. "A bride having a more formal wedding might opt for a classic silk peau de soie or a fully laced Alençon gown."

Specializing in high-end designer samples and overstock gowns at 50 to 75 percent off retail prices, Vows carries the best of the best, with Vera Wang, Badgley Mischka, and Reem Acra among the coveted labels. Vows is also happy to announce its own private couture Liv Harris Line, which launched in 2006. To view most of Vows' inventory, visit bridepower.com, a virtual storefront of available designs.

Ana Hernandez, owner and designer for Ana Hernandez Bridal Studio, agrees with DeAngelo on the importance of theme when choosing your gown. Hernandez's custom-design wedding-gown boutique on tony Newbury Street was awarded Best of Boston® in 2005 and 2006 for most original design and trend-setting wedding gowns.

"It's more organized after she has set the date and has a venue," she says. "She'll know if she's having a summer wedding; a fall wedding; an idea of what her room will look like; whether it's indoor, outdoor; what time of day. Once you know these things, the next step is to start looking for your gown." With 60 designs in her collection, Hernandez is able to work with a bride on every aspect of customizing a dress to her body and personality.

"Brides always ask, 'How will I know it's the dress?' I tell them, 'You will know the same way you [knew] when you met him,'" says Hernandez.

"Ultimately, it's about getting married and exchanging your vows. When it comes down to it, you could get married in white jeans and a white T-shirt," she laughs.

Although it may seem overwhelming, sometimes the best way to get all the information together is to go straight to the source. Immerse yourself in the scene by attending a bridal show or a vendor's luncheon.

Gather with other brides as you learn about Boston's wedding vendors on March 11 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Omni Parker House's "Brides of Distinction" bridal brunch and fashion show. Tickets are \$40. The Hampshire House also hosts its 5th Annual Engagement Celebration on February 21 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Brides and grooms mingle and speak with industry professionals during this complimentary get-together.

No matter how daunting the planning may seem, try to keep your eyes on the prize, your marriage.