



A rehearsal dinner on Nantucket at dusk, organized by wedding planner Marcy Blum.

Sounds Like a Plan

Four top wedding planners reveal their secrets about pulling off the biggest parties, the things brides really want and who pays for what. BY STEPHEN HENDERSON

MARCY BLUM is a New York-based wedding planner whose clients have included Tom Clancy, two Rockefeller brides and Kyra Sedgwick and Kevin Bacon. 212-929-9814; marcyblum.com.

What is the biggest trend in weddings today?

People are looking for formal, elegant dinners, but they no longer want to make their guests sit through a four-hour meal with dancing in between each course. Now it's straight through appetizer, entrée and dessert, then they party!

Is it still customary for the bride's parents to pay for the wedding and for the groom's to cover the rehearsal dinner?

One family is usually paying the lion's share, but I'd say half the time, it's the groom's family. Whoever doesn't foot the bill for the wedding, though, is still expected to host the rehearsal dinner.

How much does an average wedding of yours cost?

From \$1,000 a person.

Of the weddings you've planned, which was your favorite?

Probably Katie Lee and Billy Joel's. Katie spent a lot of time in

Italy, so we simulated a scene from the Tuscan countryside inside a tent at their estate in Oyster Bay, New York. We had wooden tables, grapevines draped from the ceiling and Katie's favorite Italian foods. It was very soulful.

Any outrageous requests?

On one occasion I had to round up a hot date for the mother of the bride. She was recently divorced, and her ex-husband was bringing along someone twenty years younger. I found a guy—and he was gorgeous.

Do you have a signature touch?

I like surprises: maybe an a cappella group singing doo-wop or a marching band leading people from cocktails into dinner.

JENNIFER ANDERSON founded her event-production company in Chicago in 1997. Although she oversees corporate functions and affairs for many Midwestern social fixtures, she's best known for some of the Windy City's most elegant weddings. 773-296-4350; jenniferandersonevents.com.



Dinner is served at the Nantucket rehearsal event arranged by Blum.

What is the biggest trend in weddings today?

People look for the ooh-aah moment. Sometimes I'm influenced by a global theme—a Moroccan tent with lots of textures and colors, for example—or I'll use 1930s Busby Berkeley glamour and hang jewels, crystals and flowers from the chuppah.

How much does an average wedding of yours cost?

In Chicago, the charges are probably half as much as in New York. My weddings begin at \$500 a person. Have I spent \$2,000 a head? Absolutely.

Of the weddings you've planned, which was your favorite?

It was a winter party at the Four Seasons Chicago, and we were evoking that wonderful icy-blue feel of frost and snow. Vodka and caviar were served on twelve-foot tables hand-carved from ice, and the chairs were covered in white organza. The backdrop for the band's stage was a fiber-optic curtain with flickering lights; a panel painted with Palladian windows hung in front of it and appeared to be looking out on a clear, crisp evening. I dangled tons of votive candles from the ceiling; they twinkled all night like stars.

Any outrageous requests?

One of my grooms owned a construction company. Instead of riding to the church in a limousine, he and his groomsmen went in a dump truck. It was hilarious!

What is the best way for a bride to convey her ideas to her wedding planner?

I ask her to make an "inspiration board" with very specific images of the things she loves: hairstyles, dresses, shoes, jewelry, flowers and food. Even if the board is all over the place, it shows me where she's coming from.

SAUNDRA PARKS is the founder of the Daily Blossom, one of New York's most innovative floral-design and event-planning companies. Her clients for various parties and weddings have included President Bill Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, Mariah Carey, Tonya Lewis and Spike Lee, and Malaak and Chris Rock. 212-633-9000; dailyblossom.com.

What is the biggest trend in weddings today?

Brides are no longer afraid of color. I'm doing more affairs with bright orange, pink, and sexy, romantic red accents. There's much more individuality, and the decor reflects the couple's aesthetic.

Is it still customary for the bride's parents to pay for the wedding and for the groom's to cover the rehearsal dinner?

The older the couple, I find, the more focused they are on paying themselves. Maybe it's a second marriage and the parents paid the first time around. It's enough already.

How much does an average wedding of yours cost?

From \$400 a head, but the sky's the limit.

Of the weddings you've planned, which was your favorite?

A September wedding in Sag Harbor, New York. The bride wanted to be married on the beach, so we kept things simple and set up under a tent and decorated it with mounds of hydrangeas. A hurricane made landfall that day, however, and we had to scramble to a nearby church. The guests were trouper, and the bride was just as happy and beautiful as ever. There was such love emanating from the couple. We rode out that storm!

What is the largest wedding you've planned?

In November 2006, I did a Harlem Renaissance-themed wedding for 600 at the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church, in New