

THE MONTHLY

The East Bay's Premier Magazine of Culture and Commerce

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Shopping Around

Old, New, Borrowed, Green? |

From vegan cake to eco-fetti, here's how to create an earth-friendly wedding. | *By Rachel Trachten*

My romantic husband wants us to get married all over again. The first time around, we tied the knot in a chic Manhattan loft. But 20-plus years and two kids later, we live in Berkeley, and Zach has become an environmental artist along the way. He now imagines a wedding in a cypress grove by the ocean, an event that features blue skies and a green attitude. Part of me is nostalgic for our long-ago *Sex and the City* ceremony. But if I give in to Zach's notion, creating an eco-friendly wedding in the Bay Area will be a piece of cake—make that organic vegan cake.

Consider the myriad interpretations. Some couples still opt for a church ceremony and a country club reception, but incorporate organic food and carbon credits. Others live by the adage that simpler is greener, creating an e-vite in lieu of paper invitations and giving out homemade jam instead of elaborate party favors. Still others figure smaller is greener, with 25 guests generating a lot less waste and carbon than 150.

Committed to making the party eco-friendly, many betrothed borrow, rent and reuse everything from the punch bowl to the decorations. And they even select dresses that really can be worn to cocktail parties after the big day.

Jolene Rae Harrington, director of creative content at the wedding resource book *Here Comes the Guide*, observes that green weddings come about in two ways. Some couples are "deep green," already thinking about eco-friendly choices when they begin to plan. Others stumble across the concept and make a few green choices that will have an overall effect on the party. "It's important for all of these couples to understand that even a few small choices can have a major impact on the wedding industry," Harrington says. "Vendors and locations are responsive to customer demand. It's a ripple effect."



Back to Earth catering, based in Berkeley, helps clients make greener choices that range from food (seasonal, local and organic) to music (acoustic rather than electric) to transportation for guests (why not a biodiesel bus?). "Every decision made about a wedding can be put through the green litmus test," says Ari Derfel who owns Back to Earth with Eric Fenster. "For every choice, you can ask, how is this option impacting the planet?"

Derfel says weddings are often used as an expression of wealth, but don't have to be. "For our clients, [weddings] are an expression of values. Couples want to show their family and community what's important to them."

Vanessa Hauswald, co-owner of the Petaluma-based company e(vent) incorporates education into the process by explaining green practices to the wedding party and placing a staff person near the compost and recycling area, to answer questions and thank guests for helping out.

Since choosing a life partner *and* contributing to the melting of the polar ice caps seems like a little too much to think about, we've broken it down for you.

The Setting

Many Bay Area brides and grooms stroll down an outdoor aisle, in a winery, farm or garden. Margie Richardson, who coordinates rentals at the U.C. Berkeley Botanical Garden, notes that couples not only appreciate the site's spectacular redwood grove, but also can enjoy a clear conscience, knowing that their rental fee supports the garden's ecological programs. Getting married in a natural setting or at a local nonprofit offers "an easy way to be green," says Harrington. "You get a fantastic location and know that your money is going toward a cause you believe in."

The Invitations

E-vites or an invite embedded in an e-mail are obvious paper-free choices. For a more formal look, invitations can be printed on recycled paper using soy or linseed oil-based ink. (Traditional inks are petroleum-based.) Two years ago, Berkeley's Greener Printer received no green invite requests; the company now averages 3 to 5 per week. And according to Miguel Alson of the Bay Area's Autumn Press, people who seek out recycled paper also tend to create more modest invitations with fewer inserts. San Francisco bride Emily Hagopian explained her wedding's eco-friendly features in a program made of biodegradable seed paper, which guests could later plant in their gardens.

The Attire & Pampering

Some eco-conscious brides opt for vintage gowns, while others

Eco-delicious: Brides and grooms are going all out to go green on their big day. This Edith Meyer cake (top) has Meyer lemon and bittersweet chocolate tiers, and organic vanilla-bean buttercream frosting, tinged green with natural coloring. Another Edith Meyer organic cake (bottom) is bittersweet chocolate covered in chocolate fondant and fresh organic berries. Photos courtesy Edith Meyer

Tying Our (Green) Knot

by Amelia Spilger

The most vivid moment of worry I experienced before our wedding ...

Click [here](#) to read on.



Love will grow: Emily Hagopian gave redwood saplings as wedding favors. Photo courtesy Emily Hagopian.

seek out organic fabrics and local designers. Greenest of all is wedding attire that gets a second chance. Jennifer Colgan, co-owner of The Wedding Party in Berkeley, notes that “one of the main features of our dresses is that they are re-wearable; bridesmaid’s dresses are no longer the traditional puffy taffeta gowns that women wear once and throw away.” The same goes for the groomsmen. Event planner Maxine Andrew recently worked with a couple that chose black business suits over tuxedos—simply for their versatility after the big day. Brides Against Breast Cancer, a national nonprofit, accepts dress donations and hosts gown sales nationwide to support the Making Memories Foundation.

For pre-wedding pampering, brides are also seeking salons that offer natural alternatives. Bisou Nail Lounge is a new green salon on College Avenue that offers non-toxic, vegan polishes. Owner Keina Kataoka doesn’t believe in using the traditional spa chair for pedicures and instead fills a bowl full of organic rose petal water and adds lemons, limes and herbs. “You can drink what’s in it,” says Kataoka. Other local salons—including 17 Jewels on Telegraph in Oakland—are listed in the Bay Area edition of Greenopia, a green living guide.

The Rings

As for jewelry, a sparkling diamond atop a gold wedding band may not be an eco-friendly choice. African diamonds are associated with violent conflict, and even Canadian gems face criticism for harming ecosystems and disrupting indigenous communities. Gold mining can create massive pollution and release toxic chemicals. Couples lucky enough to have an heirloom ring in the family can avoid these dilemmas; others visit antique shops or green jewelers like greenKarat.com, brilliantearth.com or Berkeley’s Pavé Fine Jewelry Design to find recycled gold, silver or platinum. “Having good conditions for the workers and good health-care, those are companies we work with,” says Pavé owner Michael Endlich, whose shop uses only conflict-free diamonds, and almost all recycled gold.

The Photographer

During a recent cleaning of my storage room, I came upon a huge box filled with the wedding photos rejected from our album. Zach suggested tossing them, regretting their lack of recycling potential. These days, digital technology averts that predicament. Couples who go digital avoid negatives and proofs and can save the printing for their best shots only. Bride Emily Hagopian, herself a photographer whose work focuses on promoting sustainable design, asked her photographer to shoot digitally. “Film is wasteful and requires plastics and chemicals, some of which are highly toxic,” she says.

The Gifts

Green Party Guide

14 Karats, www.14karats.com
17 Jewels, www.17jewelssalonspa.com
Autumn Press, www.autumnpress.com
Back to Earth,
www.organiccatering.com
Bisou Nail Lounge, (510) 655-6363
Blue Heron Catering,
www.blueheroncatering.com
Bonneville Environmental Foundation, www.b-e-f.org
Brides Against Breast Cancer,
<http://bridesagainstabreastcancer.org>
Brilliant Earth Jewelers,
www.brilliantearth.com
Edith Meyer Wedding Cakes,
www.edithmeyer.com
e (vent), www.e-ventcreations.com
Fisher’s Custom Design Jewelry,
www.fishersjewelry.com
Green Karat Jewelers,
www.greenkarat.com
Greener Printer,
www.greenerprinter.com
Heifer International, www.heifer.org
Here Comes the Guide,
www.herecomestheguide.com
Instead of You! Coordination & Design, www.insteadofyou.com
Lee’s Florist, leesfloristnursery.com
M. Lowe and Co.,
www.mlowejewels.com
Organic Bouquet,
www.organicbouquet.com
Patricia Gibbons,
www.patriciagibbons.com

Online green registries allow couples to select gifts that range from bamboo cutting boards and organic cotton towels to membership in eco-friendly nonprofits. Richmond resident Trena Cleland helped friends create an alternative gift registry; topping their wish list were gifts of “hand and heart” such as homemade food and gardening help. Some local shops—like The Treehouse Green Gifts on College—feature earth-friendly gifts. Nonprofits like the World Wildlife Fund and Heifer International have jumped in as well, offering wedding registries where guests can make charitable donations in the couple’s name.

The Food

To reduce the costs of an organic meal, Oakland bride Anna Hartman went vegan. “My mother was apprehensive,” she says, “but in the end it was great. Most people at the wedding hadn’t even heard of tempeh, but they enjoyed it.” Both Hartman and Emily Hagopian worked with Back to Earth caterers Fenster and Derfel, who charge from \$50 to \$200 per guest. Hagopian’s organic, seasonal menu included wild mushroom phyllo pursettes, almond-crusted chicken skewers and lavender lemonade.

Oakland caterer Blue Heron received its green business certification last April. For owner Debbie Pfisterer, the certification process meant replacing plastics with products made of corn or sugar cane fiber, composting all food scraps, and switching to fluorescent lights and recycled paper. Blue Heron is known for local, sustainable and organic ingredients; their special wedding buffet includes grilled salmon sprinkled with grapeseed lemon oil, new potatoes roasted with rosemary and Sonoma garlic, and seasonal greens with edible flowers.

The Cake

Edith Meyer of Santa Cruz makes exquisite cakes using free-range, all-natural eggs, organic flour and fresh fruits from her garden or from local farmers. “Organic ingredients create inherently delicious cakes,” says Meyer, “with so much more flavor and no chemical taste.” She also guides clients toward fresh, seasonal choices—if a couple requests strawberries in December, for example, she offers a seasonal alternative (ginger, perhaps). She relies exclusively on chocolate from Scharffen Berger, which uses organic beans and provides fair and safe conditions for plantation workers. And yes, vegan cakes are available. “Vegan cakes are tricky,” Meyer notes. “You have to make compromises, but I’ve come up with some great recipes.” Her favorite? The chocolate—very moist, featuring cocoa, tofu and pureed prunes.

The Flowers

The national company Organic Bouquet strives to protect the environment and improve farm worker safety by preventing the

www.patgibbonstiorai.com
Pavé Fine Jewelry Design,
www.pavefinejewelry.com
Shibumi Studio and Gallery,
www.shibumistudio.com
Solano Jewelers,
www.solanojewelers.com
The Treehouse Green Gifts,
www.treehousegreengifts.com
Terrapass, www.terrapass.com
U.C. Berkeley Botanical Garden,
<http://botanicalgarden.berkeley.edu>
The Wedding Party,
www.theweddingpartyonline.com
World Wildlife Fund,
www.worldwildlife.org

Additional Resources

Organic Weddings: Balancing Ecology, Style and Tradition by Michelle Kozin
Green Weddings That Don’t Cost the Earth by Carol Reed-Jones
Portovert: an online magazine for eco-savvy brides and grooms,
<http://portovert.com/press>

use of toxic pesticides. Their flowers are available online as well as at Whole Foods markets. Wilton Lee, owner of Lee's Florist in Berkeley, grows flowers such as camelias and narcissus, as well as peach and pussy willow blossoms, without using pesticides in his father's Berkeley garden. El Cerrito florist Pat Gibbons provides organic blooms as requested and favors floral arrangements with herbs like lavender or mint, grown without pesticides, to add texture, color and scent. Gibbons also advocates local and seasonal blooms—tulips and anemones for spring and the deep, rich reds and browns of dahlias, branches and berries in the fall. Reusing flowers is also a green priority. "Many couples give the flowers to guests or to hospitals or nursing homes; sometimes the church flowers can be shared between the morning and afternoon ceremonies," Gibbons says.

The Honeymoon

Once the organic bouquet and biodegradable confetti (eco-fetti) have been tossed, it's time for a green honeymoon. Bay Area couples can minimize travel with a trip to the wine country or the coast. For those craving a more exotic getaway, eco-friendly resorts around the globe offer gorgeous natural settings with dwellings made of recycled materials and powered by sun and wind.

Web sites like Terrapass let couples calculate and then offset their event-related carbon emissions. These sites feature a wedding carbon calculator, which estimates the event's carbon footprint based on travel, hotel rooms and other energy used. Bride Emily Hagopian used the Bonneville Environmental Foundation's Green Tags program to compensate for the estimated 16,800 pounds of carbon emissions associated with her wedding. She describes the offset as "the equivalent of planting 2.3 acres of trees in one year . . ."

The Cost

Because weddings pump an estimated \$73 billion annually into the national economy, where those dollars are spent makes a difference. "Green is the new Silicon Valley, the new dot-com," says Harrington. "With all the concern about global warming, people are looking to put their money into doing something productive." She suggests that couples leverage their dollars in favor of greener values by telling vendors that they chose them because of a specific practice, like supporting sustainable farming or recycling.

Event planner Andrew emphasizes that eco-friendly choices don't mean giving up on the splendor of a high-end wedding. "With so many amazing purveyors and artisans in the Bay Area," she notes, "you can surround yourself with incredible talent. Going green is not necessarily less expensive; it may mean putting a style

footprint on your event.”

But for couples searching for more economical options, many green choices will suit. Hauswald of (e)vent says green weddings are generally less expensive “because we encourage people to think about using less and having less waste.”

As for my own green re-wedding, I’m still considering Zach’s proposal. It’s hard to imagine anything more romantic than our first young-love wedding in New York City, complete with the glittering Manhattan skyline and a taxi to transport the wedding gifts. But if Zach takes me to the beach at sunset and tempts me with fair-trade chocolates and his grandmother’s diamond ring, I might just say yes.

Rachel Trachten is a freelance journalist and regular contributor to The Monthly.

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