

InStyle

WEDDINGS





VENUES

Whether you plan to marry in a church or a synagogue, a ballroom or an outdoor garden, here are some inspiring venues for your dream ceremony.



ABOVE, FROM LEFT: A flower-filled ballroom. An outdoor ceremony, with a backdrop of hills, in Napa Valley.

LEFT, FROM LEFT: Actress Mel Harris married Michael Toomey in an outdoor ceremony in a field of cut grass and flowering mustards. A ceremony takes place onstage, with a dramatic view outdoors.

BELOW, FROM LEFT: At a Jewish ceremony at The Breakers hotel in Palm Beach, Florida, the aisle is lined with flowers and culminates in a flower-bedecked chuppah. Benches set up for a beach wedding.

OPPOSITE, TOP: Actress Jamie-Lynn Sigler married her manager A.J. DiScala at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden in Brooklyn, New York.

BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT: A couple marries in a wooden frame built by the groom to symbolize a home. A traditional church ceremony. The forest surrounds an outdoor ceremony.





Matt Lauer—along with his wife, Annette Roque Lauer—enjoyed the cocktail hour at the reception for fellow TV journalist Elizabeth Vargas and her husband, Marc Cohn. No reception would be complete without champagne served in flutes, like those at Kyle MacLachlan's wedding (opposite, top left) or in coupe-style glasses (opposite, bottom right). But consider offering signature cocktails as well, such as peach-flavored bellinis (opposite, top right), or even lemonade and fruit punch ladled from simple glass jars (opposite, bottom left) as a refreshing alternative.

the entrées at his post-nuptials fete, which took place at a California resort decked out to resemble a casino.

And, of course, food isn't the only aspect of your reception that you'll need to work out. Music is a wedding-reception tradition that goes a long way toward setting the mood as well as keeping guests entertained. Whether played by a band or a DJ, it can range from the rap selected by hip-hop artist Nas and his bride, R&B star Kelis, to the soft jazz performed by the trio hired for ABC newswoman Elizabeth Vargas's Park Avenue wedding, to the pulsing Latin techno that served as soundtrack to the nuptials of Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony. You can always mix things up if you like, too: Russell Crowe invited both the Australian Chamber Orchestra and an ABBA tribute band called Björn Again to perform at his reception, held at his 560-acre cattle ranch in the Australian bush.

And while everyone loves to hit the dance floor at a wedding reception, these days there are plenty of other ways you can ensure guests have a good time. Actress Katey Sagal and her groom, Kurt Sutter, hired palm readers to tell guests' fortunes, while actress Alyson Hannigan and groom Alexis Denisof had both a trampoline and a photo booth set up at their reception, the latter so that the couple could have a few charming reminders of their guests. Meanwhile, actress Kimberly Williams Paisley and singer Brad Paisley invited friends and family to celebrate the day after their ceremony at an outdoor hoedown, where a country band and an inflatable kids' castle kept things fun and laid back.

Even carefully chosen favors can serve to delight your guests. At Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas's wedding, guests received a Welsh "love spoon," a gift of affection from Zeta-Jones's native Wales. Singer Michelle Branch wed musician Teddy Landau on a tiny island off the western coast of Mexico and opted to use necklaces she'd made herself from fishing wire and seashells as favors. Kevin Costner and his bride Christine Baumgartner, whose nuptials took place at Costner's ranch in Aspen over a weekend that included swimming, canoeing and horse-back-riding, gave guests tins of wildflower seeds, both to evoke the rustic setting of the event and to symbolize the start of something new.



Heartfelt (and sometimes humorous) toasts to the bride and groom represent one of the reception's main highlights—here ABC newswoman Elizabeth Vargas and her husband, songwriter Marc Cohn (above), react to a few well-chosen remarks. Nevertheless, little details can be memorable as well (opposite, clockwise from top left), from a flower tucked into a hem-stitched napkin or the pretty floral garland that rims an ice bucket to the script on a slice of a cake or the sheen of ivory-handled flatware resting on a silver tray.

MUSIC

For many couples, the big decision when it comes to the music played at their reception isn't necessarily swing versus soul, but DJ versus live music. There are pros and cons to each, and you should weigh them carefully before you book. DJs are generally much cheaper than bands—several thousand dollars less, in some cases—and they provide a known quantity: the Top 40 hit you heard on the radio while you and your groom were courting will sound the same at your reception as it did then. A DJ's playlist is virtually endless, and he or she can switch from Sinatra to Cyndi Lauper without a pause, ensuring everyone from your grandparents to the flower girls will find something they can dance to.

But the same reason some people choose a DJ—the predictability—is why others choose to go with a live band. The latter may only play one or two types of music, but ideally it does so with a certain distinctive style and spontaneity. And while everyone may have heard "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," they might not have heard it done with the Latin flavor given it by a particular salsa band. There's also something about a band that announces the occasion as a particularly special one.



That doesn't mean that a band is always the better choice. Says Jung Lee, a partner in the N.Y.C. event-planning company Fête, "I'd rather have a phenomenal DJ who understands a party than a so-so band." If you want the best of both worlds, you can always choose to hire musicians for the cocktail hour and a DJ for the rest of the night or vice versa. But whatever type of entertainment you hire, you should keep a few things in mind:

SET A BUDGET

The standard duration of a set by either a band or a DJ is four hours, with overtime charges calculated by the half hour or hour (and generally set at a slightly higher rate than the main set's per-hour fee). Depending on the size of the band, you should be prepared to pay anywhere from \$2,000 to \$20,000, while a DJ will generally run about \$750 to \$2,500 (where you live and how long you book him or her for will affect the cost).

START YOUR SEARCH EARLY

If you are working with a wedding coordinator, find out if she has some trusted musical allies. Ask recently wed friends for recommendations, and keep your ears open at every wedding or event you attend. Most established bands have CDs of their music, and some even offer streaming audio online. But pros usually advise taking in a live set of any band you are seriously considering.

SET UP INTERVIEWS

When you've narrowed down your list of contenders, set up a meeting with each bandleader or DJ. Share your musical tastes—even bringing along a list of songs you've made as they've occurred to you while daydreaming or listening to the radio—as well as what kind of crowd will be attending so that your bandleader or DJ can tailor the musical selections accordingly.

LEFT: Grammy-winning musician Marc Cohn sang his ballad "One Safe Place" to his new wife, ABC newswoman Elizabeth Vargas.