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**Wedding Planning 101, by Kellie Van Hook, Defining Moments**

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**Wedding Officiant**

Schedule and reserve a date with an officiant **first** . . . without the Officiant properly reserved, there is no wedding! A deposit or full payment reserves your Ceremony date and time.

**Location**

Decide on a location...Locations for you reception and ceremony vary just as when you are looking at buying a house. Consider what the theme of your wedding is going to be, how much you can spend on the location itself and what the amenities are that the venue has to offer.

Historical Sites...are usually a beautiful venue with gorgeous gardens and expansive views. A historical site is perfect for accomodating the ceremony and the reception. They can usually accommodate a horse drawn carriage ride, large wedding parties, and minimal decor as they have an aura all their own. Events at these sites are usually in a tent, with touring of the house and grounds.

A Vineyard...Vineyards are a unique place to hold your wedding. They offer a mystique that affects all your guests. Vineyards have a relaxing feel to the location. Most Vineyards have a tasting room that they will open to your guests for the cocktail hour. Some have larger tasting rooms that can accomodate a small wedding party. They are also great venues to hold your rehearsal dinner and showers. Vineyards are usually a tented site. They also require you to rent the equipment needed for your reception. Vineyards require you to serve their wines and you may need an ABC license for beer served on site. Most vineyards will not let you start your event till after 5:00p.m. when they have closed to the public for the day.

Country Clubs...A Country club is a popular site for weddings. They are trained in catering to weddings, so they usually are very easy to work with. At a country club you most always have to use the house chef. The tables, chairs and tableware are supplied. You may only have to buy the centerpieces, but many have a house centerpiece that you can work with. You may want to upgrade your linens and centerpieces to create a unique feel.

Hotel Ballrooms...These sites have the capacity for a large crowd. They will supply you with all the tables, chairs, linens, tableware that you will need. They also will accommodate your catering needs. This is a convenient venue for out of town guests. The hotel provides a professional staff.

Things to consider...Size it can accommodate; Rentals needed; Extra costs, labor etc.; Bathrooms; Heating / AC issues; Dance floor; Convenience for wedding guests. Sites usually book up a year in advance, and you can usually get a lower rate if you pick an off time for your affair.

## **Ceremony**

Things you may need for the ceremony...

Altar Flowers, Bouquets, Boutonnieres, Flower Baskets, Petals for walk, Aisle Runners, Unity Candles and Tables, Programs, Ring Pillows, Lighters, Microphones, Awning for the Musician, Bird Seed, Audio Equipment, Archways.

A note about bubbles... Bubbles have become very popular because of their fairytale quality, but bubbles have a downside as they are made of soap and can stain your dress.

It is wise to hire a Wedding Coordinator for the rehearsal and ceremony day. They can organize your party and attend to the set up of your ceremony area as well as assist you when needed. They also keep the stress off the bride, groom and mothers as the excitement of the day starts to set in. The Wedding Coordinator can help with the etiquette that is needed for the wedding.

## **Reception**

After you choose your site, you then need to look for a caterer.

Each Caterer can vary on his or her food and price. When looking for a caterer ask your Wedding Planner whom they would recommend. Or ask other vendors whom they have worked with and would recommend. Once you have established a theme for your wedding, tell the caterer that you would like menus geared for

that theme. Most caterers will have sample menus for reviewing. Give them an approximate head count that they can work with. Then attend a tasting with the caterer so that you can refine your menu choices. Keep in mind that you may have the same menus as a buffet or a sit down meal. They may even work your selections to just serve heavy appetizers.

Questions to ask... What will the presentation look like? Does the caterer supply their own serving pieces or will you need to rent them? Does the caterer handle the alcohol, delivery and chilling? Ask what the caterer will supply (because of cost and space involved many caterers do not stock all the equipment needed. This is also because they service so many different types of events.)

Check to see how much staff is required for your event. This is usually a fixed cost and non negotiable as the caterer knows what is required to create and serve the food and service your guests. Nothing is worse than not having enough staff to handle your event. Tipping is a nice gesture and the staff appreciates it because they work extremely hard to so your event flows well. Just be sure the vendor knows it is for the staff and it will be divided fairly. A suggestion is to write a separate check for the staff or give cash (small bill as no one ever has change).

Guest List... When deciding whom you would like to ask to your affair, you first need to decide on what size you would like your wedding to be. Then you and your fiancée can sit down and list all the people who are important in your life and would like to share your day. Be sure to get input from both sets of parents as to whom they would like to attend. Once you have this initial list done you will be able to start narrowing down who will come and who will not and refine your figures accordingly. It is best to do this early so that you do not look for sites that cannot accommodate your guests. Also each additional guest will change your fee structure. Once you have decided on a list, it is recommended to send out Save the Date cards. This way your guests can schedule their time off accordingly.

Decor...Now that you have decided on your theme, it is time to create the decor that will enhance your day. What will your centerpieces look like? Will it be a simple but elegant look of candles on mirrors with rose petals scattered? Or will you have a traditional floral bouquet? Or will you decide on a formal theme with candleabras and a floral mix? All of these examples are beautiful looks, but you need to make sure your centerpieces speak your vision. If using florals be sure to decide ahead of time who will take care of them after the event or you can give them to the staff or donate them to a nursing home.

Linens...make a huge difference at your reception. Some brides upgrade all of their linens, while others just do the buffet, cake and head tables, then use a solid blend on the guest tables and let the centerpieces speak for themselves. If using rental tables be sure that the linens will drape to the floor as the table legs are ugly

and will deter from your look.

Place Settings...Place cards are a nice touch on the table. My favorite way is to list the names of the guests at each table framed and set on the table. It is less time consuming for you and the staff, thus cost effective. You can rent the frames or buy them then use the frames later for your favorite pictures of the day. On the gift table you can place a framed version of all the tables and who will be seated at each. If using traditional name cards be sure to have the names in order for each table and supply a master list in case of a mix up. Organization is definitely the key here. You can use table numbers or name your tables with special streets or islands or anything that is special to the two of you. Favors can be placed on the tables and used as part of the decor.

Formal sit down dinners will require more settings on the table. Usually knives, forks, spoon, wine glass, water glass, napkins, coffee service, salt / pepper and more depending on what the menu is.

Buffet dinners will be less tableware, with knife, fork, napkins, water & wine glass. You may choose for the glassware to come from the bar and silver to be placed on the buffet. Coffee can be served from its own station.

Station menus will require more plates and silver to be available, as each station will need its own settings.

Beverages... A bar can be set up with alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. You may choose an open bar, which can be expensive for the host. If you do choose an open bar consider limiting your alcohol selection and do not serve shooters. This should help cut down on guests partying too hard. A wine and beer bar is a nice touch; it offers your guests cocktails and limits the all out "Let's party" attitude. Specialty bars are fun ways to have a theme. Some examples would be; mimosas, bellinis, cosmopolitans or martinis. For guests that don't drink alcohol you can have a specialty bar of lemonades and punch.

Cakes...can be done in a variety of ways. You may choose a baker or make a cake yourself ( if opting for this please allow yourself time to make and decorate it ). You may choose a cake large enough to serve all the guests or just have 2 layers for presentation and then a sheet cake in the kitchen for cutting and serving. Talk to your vendor for more ideas.

Music...Many different options to fit your budget. DJ's are usually more economical than a band. They can play a variety of music and can recommend songs to fit your budget. Bands are usually more expensive and you will need to check your site to find out what requirements or limitations it has for the bands and noise level. They can be specialty bands so ask what their preference is and

if they take requests. String Quartets are a lovely touch for the ceremony and reception alike. They provide a mellow background for your guests to enjoy. Check to see what requirements they have concerning their instruments.

Flowers... Looking through magazines is a great way to find the type of floral's you would like to have. You can then take the picture to your florist and have them price it for you. The florist has a great creative input for how to achieve the look in your florals you want. If on a tight budget you can check with your local market. They have staff on duty and are experienced with arrangements and corsages.

Don't forget that you may want to save your bouquet when the wedding is over. Contact a vendor that does beautiful dried floral displays with your flowers.