

LIVING WELL IN THE CITY BEAUTIFUL

JUNE 2009

ORLANDO

HOME & LEISURE

HOT ZONES

WHAT'S YOUR HOME WORTH NOW?

TOP 10 PARTY PLACES
VENUES FOR EVERY CELEBRATION

THE NEXT 10 BEST JOBS

\$3.95



0 74470 56356 3

A photograph of a garden at night. A large tree in the upper half is covered in warm, glowing string lights. In the foreground, a white heron statue stands among various plants, including a large potted plant on the left and a large leafy plant on the right. A brick path leads into the background where a house with a porch is visible. The overall atmosphere is warm and celebratory.

ON LOCATION CELEBRATIONS



PHOTOS: (LEFT) MIKE JONES, (RIGHT) ART FAULKNER



LOOKING FOR THE PERFECT PLACE FOR YOUR NEXT EVENT? HERE ARE 10 GRACIOUS CENTRAL FLORIDA LOCATIONS THAT ARE OFF THE BEATEN PATH.

BY LEIGH DUNCAN

Summer celebrations really sizzle when the setting is just right. Whether you're planning a birthday, wedding or corporate event, we've found a clutch of hidden gems ready for you to stage your next production. Beyond the palatial resorts, Central Florida's exquisite, intimate venues – from the genteel Old Orlando charm of The Courtyard at Lake Lucerne to the tranquility of Harry P. Leu Gardens – can make your next gathering a once-in-a-lifetime event. Here are our top 10 intimate venues for mem-

The Courtyard at Lake Lucerne (left) downtown is centered around the historic Dr. Phillips house. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Casa Feliz (above) is a beautifully restored Mediterranean Revival house in Winter Park.

orable celebrations, along with some advice from expert local planners who've staged events at these locations: Jamie O'Donnell of Jamie M. O'Donnell Event Planning & Design; Heather Snively, of Weddings Unique; and Susie Weiss of Wonderful Weddings.



CASA FELIZ

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this crown jewel of Winter Park is a beautifully restored Spanish farmhouse designed by acclaimed architect James Gamble Rogers II. Bordering Lake Osceola and overlooking the golf course, it boasts Spanish roof tiles and whitewashed century-old bricks, a turret, a fairytale bell tower and a heavy timber balcony colored in Mediterranean hues. Lush landscaping, a Majolica-tiled interior courtyard and fountain, sweeping oaks and native plants in ancient clay amphoras create a picture-perfect backdrop that needs little to no enhancement.

Inside, a private, luxurious atmosphere restored to its original historic grandeur – replete with authentic Spanish furnishings – provides a rich backdrop to your special occasion. The living room, dining rooms, library, courtyard and detached garden room can be configured to accommodate a wide variety of events and group sizes. Private suites are available upstairs, and business groups can gather in the main house or in the garden room.

Weiss: “Probably your best gem. I celebrated my 15 years in business at Casa Feliz in 2004. It was a fabulous party, and the venue worked so well.”

Snively: “In my opinion, this is the most charming location in Central Florida. Great for smaller weddings and events.”

INSIDE TIP: Call well in advance to be sure you secure the date and time you want.

MAITLAND ART CENTER

In 1928, visionary American artist and architect Jules André Smith built the Maitland Art Center as a colony for aspiring artists. The tradition continues today with gallery exhibitions, resident artists and art instruction programs. The Center is a monument to Smith, with many of his carved sculptures punctuating the grounds. Adorned with murals, bas-relief and carvings done in an Aztec/Mayan motif, it offers a distinctive Old World setting, ideal for smaller groups and an array of social gatherings. There are 23 separate structures flanked by lovely gardens and courtyards that set the stage for elegant social and corporate events. The grounds also feature a private chapel reminiscent of Medieval times.

O'Donnell: “If you're looking to combine a quaint chapel with an outdoor wedding, this is a perfect choice. Old World charm and intricate detailing immediately transport you to a Mayan world far away from our attractions and tourists.”

Weiss: “This is a spiritual venue with lots of cultural aspects. The chapel is especially suited for intimate events. I've seen a lot of décor added to it; but I personally believe less is more for this venue.”

PHOTOS: (ABOVE) MIKE JONES (RIGHT) BETSY ARVELO

ALTERNATIVE STAGE-SETTING STYLES WITH A TOUCH OF CLASSIC GRANDEUR.

Snively: “It has beautiful gardens and a unique outdoor chapel, but have a back-up plan in case of bad weather.”

INSIDE TIP: Events are outside. Bring in tents or have a Plan B for rain. Be sure to build set-up and break-down time into your event hours, and bring extra hands since there’s little assistance on weekends.

THE VERANDA BED & BREAKFAST

Another treasure located in the heart of Thornton Park, The Veranda Bed & Breakfast is a classic European-style bed and breakfast, just a short walk from Lake Eola and downtown Orlando’s business district. The inn is comprised of four buildings dating back to the early 1900s, each completely renovated with exquisite style. The all-in-one private setting creates the perfect spot for weddings, social or business gatherings, anniversary parties, bar/bat mitzvahs and family reunions. The interior belies an expansive courtyard framed by Victorian-style buildings and towering oaks. It’s large enough to host both a wedding and reception. If you’re not bringing in tents, make sure you have a contingency plan in case of inclement weather.

O’Donnell: “The courtyard is a blank canvas and can easily be transformed into whatever you imagine. One large area with natural breaks allows one area for seating, another as your dance floor and a third spot for lounging.”

Snively: “Great location in the heart of downtown, plus all-inclusive packages.”

INSIDE TIP: Parking, power supply and existing lighting is limited. O’Donnell recommends bringing in a professional lighting and audio/video company, such as Birchmore Group, which is familiar with the property and truly understands the “math of amps.”

ALBIN POLASEK MUSEUM & SCULPTURE GARDENS

The Albin Polasek Foundation was founded in 1961 by internationally acclaimed sculptor Albin Polasek and his wife. This scenic property is different from traditional Florida estates and features an “uncomplicated” yet romantic aesthetic. Nestled on Lake Osceola, Polasek is surrounded by three acres of green velvet lawns and pathways blooming with lilies and other exotic flora, as well as dozens of lyrical and classical sculptures by the artist.



Opposite Page: Southern charm and romantic accommodations grace the The Courtyard at Lake Lucerne. This Page: The Lakeside Inn provides a spacious setting for any size celebration, such as this antique car rally.



Mediterranean-inspired archways, exquisite artwork, sculptures and gardens set the tone for this extraordinary home museum listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It has hosted a wide variety of events, from weddings to memorial services, as well as the Florida Film Festival Gala and the Winter Park Concours d'Elegance auto show. You can also contract with the Winter Park Boat Tour to have guests arrive by boat at the museums' private dock.

O'Donnell: "The Polasek is an absolute favorite. Like stepping off Fairbanks into a romantic European park. It has one of the best water views in Orlando for an event venue. It's completely private, and the vast grounds give way to endless possibilities and varied party sizes. If guests of honor really want to make a splash, they can arrive by boat, perfect for a lovely bride, debutante or a bar/bat mitzvah party."

Weiss: "I've done several events there, and I am happy to recommend it when someone is looking for a venue that is 'true' Winter Park."

Snively: "Polasek is a Winter Park landmark. It's perfect for a tent, without which you'll need a rain plan."

INSIDE TIP: Parking can accommodate about 100 cars. Larger events have used trolley services to increase capacity. There are tight restrictions on amplified music, so skip the D.J. and go with live music.

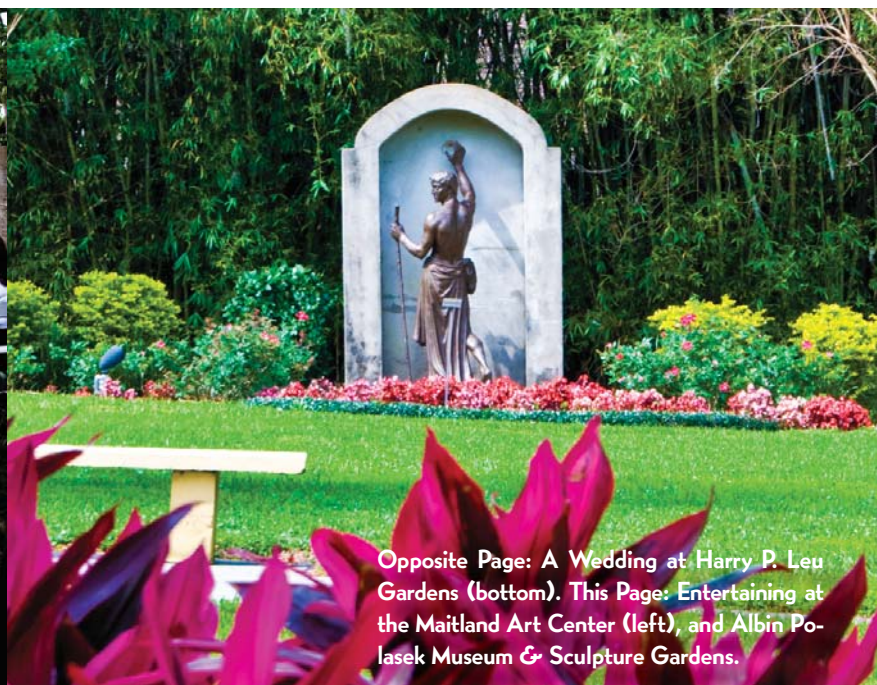
THE COURTYARD AT LAKE LUCERNE

Throw a party with a touch of tradition, in a Victorian country house. For years, The Courtyard at Lake Lucerne's old southern charm and signature style have made it a popular venue for events of all shapes and sizes. Tucked away in downtown Orlando, four historic buildings, each of a different era – from grand Victorian to Art Deco – are surrounded by courtyards and lush tropical gardens. From the casual elegance of the I.W. Phillips House to the opulent splendor of the Dr. Phillips Mansion, two distinct venues host all-inclusive weddings, holiday parties or corporate events while also offering guest accommodations. Gather in the parlor for cocktail hour, or hold your next meeting in spacious corporate accommodations. Complete wedding packages are available.

O'Donnell: "The Courtyard at Lake Lucerne exemplifies southern charm, with paved pathways and wraparound porches and balconies. It's tucked away on a cul-du-sac, so you won't have any through traffic. The gorgeous entry makes a grand impression. It does have a very distinctive personality



PHOTOS: (THIS PAGE) MIKE JONES (LEFT), DEREK SMITH OF SUNSHINE PHOTOGRAPHICS (RIGHT), (OPPOSITE PAGE) BRIAN ADAMS (LEFT), CHARITY DE MEER (RIGHT)



Opposite Page: A Wedding at Harry P. Leu Gardens (bottom). This Page: Entertaining at the Maitland Art Center (left), and Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens.

and décor, which can be costly to try to transform. Most of the outdoor spaces are uncovered, so rain could pose a challenge. However, there's plenty of space inside to keep the party going."

Snively: "This is an eclectic location that combines southern charm and Art Deco in a way you think won't work, but it does! The gazebo is charming."

INSIDE TIP: The parlor area can be used for a dance floor, as well as a back-up ceremony spot if it rains. A horse-drawn carriage also adds the perfect touch to a grand entrance or exit.

Many of Central Florida's intimate venues show that historic Orlando has never gone out of style. Notable landmarks combine with romantic architectural aging and streetscapes to serve up some fanciful options for entertaining on a grand scale. Our area suburbs also features some spectacular settings.

The 120-year-old Lakeside Inn in Mount Dora oozes ancestral heritage and was once a source of healing visited by aristocrats. A cherished tradition of old southern charm beckons those longing for a place that's reminiscent of days gone by, and a picture-perfect setting on Lake Dora makes it a coveted spot for countryside social events and celebrations.

Nearby neighbor Lake Wales is home

to two top spots on our list, **Chalet Suzanne** and **Bok Tower Gardens**. Snively says: "Have your wedding at Bok Tower Gardens and your reception at Chalet Suzanne – a fly-in wedding right in the middle of citrus county. The mountainous area with Bok Tower Gardens in the background makes this a truly unique location."

The **Estate at Cypress Grove** in Orlando is southern charm with a contemporary twist. Snively says it offers a lakeside view in a convenient location. "For events up to 125, this is a popular spot; tents there are fabulous!"

Many local exotic gardens are ideal for social gatherings and events, including **English Gardens** in Winter Park and **Harry P. Leu Botanical Gardens**. "When the roses at Leu Gardens are in bloom, the ceremonies could not prettier," Snively adds. "It's great for a daytime soirée, and the mansion is spacious."

Orlando Home & Leisure has selected only a handful of the most intimate, extraordinary locations for your next special event or celebration. The options are plentiful, but your best bet is to consult an event or wedding planner to make sure you are getting the best location to suit your personal style, taste and budget. For more information on the venues in our top 10 list, visit ohlmag.com.

SURPRISE PARTY PLACES

Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens, Winter Park
407-647-6294, polasek.org

Bok Tower Gardens, Lake Wales
863-676-1408, boktowergardens.org

Casa Feliz, Winter Park
407-628-8200, casafeliz.us

Chalet Suzanne, Lake Wales
800-433-6011, chaletsuzanne.com

The Courtyard at Lake Lucerne, Orlando
407-648-5188, orlandohistoriccinn.com

The Estate House at Cypress Grove, Orlando
407-857-9850, cypressgrovepark.com

Harry P. Leu Botanical Gardens, Orlando
407-246-2620, leugardens.org

Lakeside Inn, Mount Dora
800-556-5016, lakeside-inn.com

Maitland Art Center, Maitland
407-539-2181, maitlandartcenter.org

The Veranda Bed & Breakfast, Thornton Park
407-849-0321, theverandabandb.com

BONUS PICK: **English Gardens**, Winter Park
407-644-3444, englishgardenweddings.com