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ORLANDO HOME & FURNITURE

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PRINCESS BRIDES
AND PERFECTLY
THEMED WEDDINGS

PLUS
CLUB HOPPIN'
RITZ STYLE

TOURING FLORIDA
WINE COUNTRY





Christopher and Sofia LeCours



Benji and Ginny Rattner

WITH THIS THEME, *I thee wed.*



Calvin and Genesis Mickel



Pablo and Christina González with Lola

THREE UNIQUE WEDDINGS REFLECT EACH COUPLE'S INTERESTS AND IDEALS.

by Leigh Duncan

MOST COUPLES OPT FOR traditional weddings. Others, however, want to plan a special day that's a bit – or maybe a lot – out of the ordinary. That's what the following three Central Florida brides did – and their guests are still talking about it.

One couple timed an elegant, plated-dinner, evening reception so they could roll out masks and candy-apple stations at the stroke of midnight on Halloween. Another couple honored their old-fashioned romance with a 1940's theme evident in everything from the bridal party attire to the wedding programs and vintage-style photography. Still another couple celebrated a connection with nature during an eco-chic wedding, proving that organic can be classy and elegant.

Each theme reflected the personalities of the couples involved, but had to be brought to fruition with the help of wedding coordinators, family and friends.

The intensely personal experience of a themed wedding leaves an indelible impression on guests and participants, bonding brides and grooms and celebrating passionate and intimate connections. In the end, what it all boils down to is symbolism: the creation of a one-of-a-kind, artful event inspired by the very things that make us unique.

PHOTOS: OPPOSITE PAGE: (TOP LEFT) ANGELA ROBBINS; (TOP RIGHT) SUNSHINE PHOTOGRAPHICS.COM; (BOTTOM RIGHT) KEVIN KEELAN; (BOTTOM LEFT) COURTESY UNIQUE DESIGN STUDIOS



Man's Best Man

ON YOUR WEDDING DAY, YOU WANT TO INVOLVE THOSE WHO ARE closest to you. For many, that list includes man's best friend. With the right outfits and a little imagination, canines can be entrusted with formal roles, such as ring bearer, flowerdog, bridesmaid or even best man – or best mutt.

Or, your loyal hound can simply take his place as an honored guest. If you want your best animal companion to participate in your nuptials, you may want to call in a specialist: Bow Wow Vows in Windermere can help incorporate your dog into your big day with class, style and peace of mind.

Rachel Holzer was already the owner of a successful dog-walking service, Dog Walking Diva LLC, when she created Bow Wow Vows. "I was a bride-to-be and couldn't imagine Reesie, my treasured Yorkshire terrier, not being a big part of our big day," she says.

So Holzer started calling pet sitters and dog walkers but couldn't find anyone willing to take responsibility for handling an animal at a wedding. "I started swirling ideas up to create a service that would assist other couples getting married, as well as myself," Holzer adds. "Thus, Bow Wow Vows was organically born."

Bow Wow Vows customizes packages to meet the needs of bride, groom and dog. Packages include special wedding-day grooming services and fashionable, high-end bridal attire.

Looking sharp and wedding-day ready, your pampered pet is then chauffeured to and from the event, and handled with loving care throughout the ceremony, reception and photography events. It's even given a custom "Swag Bag" filled with treats and toys as a congratulatory gift.

"Getting married without our Victorian bulldog, Lola, was not an option for Pablo and me," says Christina González. "That's when our wedding coordinator put us in touch with Rachel. Her service is a lifesaver. We had an elegant wedding with Lola walking down the aisle and right by our side. Without Rachel, it wouldn't have happened."

Since Bow Wow Vows' inception in December 2009, Holzer has participated in several weddings in Orlando and throughout Florida, traveling as far south as Miami. She handles dogs of all breeds and sizes as well as other animals.

Says Holzer: "When couples tell me that their dream wedding wouldn't have been possible without our services, it lets me know that there is a need and we're doing something sacred and memorable for people who consider their pets family."



OLD-FASHIONED LABOR OF LOVE

Christopher and Sofia LeCours
Wedding Date: October 17, 2010

From the beginning, there was something old-fashioned about the romance between Sofia Segami and Christopher LeCours — right down to the antique ring Christopher gave Sofia when he proposed.

The Orlando residents met in 1996 at the University of Florida. They were college sweethearts, but broke up and led separate lives until the fall of 2007, when they reconnected on Facebook and a romance was reignited.

“The old adage, ‘If you love something set it free; if it comes back, it’s yours forever,’ is our story,” Sofia says. “Our friends, who followed our history, saw it coming before we did.”

In May 2010, Christopher took Sofia back to Turlington Square on the UF campus, where he proposed with an antique peridot ring that he and his daughter, Eve, had picked out together. The ring resembled a treasured toy ring that Eve had given Sofia earlier.

Christopher, who worked as a banquet server at the venerable Dubsread Golf Club,

had seen enough modern, cookie-cutter-style weddings to want something else for himself and his bride. Sofia, a self-proclaimed “old soul” who shared Christopher’s sensibilities, decided that staging their wedding in a different era would be just the ticket.

“The vintage theme honored our past, our personalities and everyone who knew our history,” says Sofia. “It was dubbed the ‘Labor of Love,’ because all of our friends and family helped make it truly unique, elegant and special.”

The couple was drawn to the 1940s because the decade combined high style with solidarity and sacrifice as the country entered World War II. “We wanted to honor those ideals, as well as the elegance of the time,” says Sofia.

Though the wedding was produced in Orlando, Christopher and Sofia chose a destination wedding equidistant for their guests: “Savannah’s rich historical ambiance and architecture fit our theme perfectly,” says Sofia. “The whole wedding party and all the service providers were from Orlando, but we all migrated to Savannah just for the event.”

Green dominated their color scheme: “It’s our favorite color, and it symbolizes fresh, new



PHOTOS: (TOP LEFT, TOP RIGHT, CENTER LEFT) ERIKA BARKER; (TOP CENTER, BOTTOM LEFT, BELOW RIGHT) ANGELA ROBBINS



life, love, peace, optimism, joy and nature,” adds Christopher, who donned a pin-stripe suit, a green paisley tie and a fedora for the wedding.

Sofia wore a vintage-inspired gown with lace and delicate beading and asked her bridal attendants to wear something in keeping with the 40s. They all obliged, with some finding beautiful pieces at local resale stores. “Our 1940’s newsboy-style ring bearer wore a bow tie, knickers, suspenders and cap, and held a messenger bag filled with our wedding programs,” Sofia says.

One of Eve’s teachers, Felicia Goretsky, handmade her jewelry while longtime friend and local stylist Beth Doucette did her hair and makeup. Invitations were traditional 1940’s-style telegrams delivered to guests via messenger.

Bridesmaid and *Florida Homebuyer Orlando* magazine art director Toni Foster designed the wedding program, titled *Best of Times*, which was mocked up to resemble a newspaper from the era. It featured tongue-in-cheek tales casting the bride, groom, attendants and friends as Bonnie and Clyde-type characters planning a secret wedding. Foster also designed a period-appropriate wedding announcement showcasing a picture of the couple in front of Whitefield Chapel, where they were married.

A sleek, antique Bentley chauffeured Christopher and Sofia to the reception, which was decorated with such props as old typewriters and hatboxes. For photography, they called on two friends: Erika Barker, a former military combat photographer, and Angela Robbins, an

established fine art, fashion and editorial photographer. Another friend, local animator and artist Quinn Holmes, provided the videography.

“Our images were far superior to anything we’ve seen,” says Sofia. “They were edgy, elegant and truly captured the time period and the essence and energy of our wedding day.”

In the spirit of conservation and reuse, bridesmaid Angela Leavell made all of the flowers and boutonnieres, giving each attendant a handmade keepsake. To honor her mother’s memory, Sofia was given a bouquet charm with a picture of her parents on their wedding day.



In lieu of a traditional cake, Christopher’s sister, Gin, designed and made cupcakes, some adorned with lotus flowers in the style of Sofia’s family seal. And rather than a guestbook, Sofia’s sister collected old postcards and asked guests to inscribe them with personal messages. She has been mailing to the postcards to the newlyweds at regular intervals throughout their first year of marriage.

Guests were also given CDs that looked like vinyl records, with covers designed by Sofia’s sister. Christopher’s compilation honored the couple’s decidedly old-fashioned romance with meaningful songs from various decades, starting with the ‘40s.

“Most of our guests contributed their time, talent and love to make the wedding possible. They felt a true sense of ownership and investment, rather than being mere participants,” says Sofia. “It truly was a labor of love.”

A MONTH TO REMEMBER

Benji and Ginny Rattner

Wedding Date: October 30, 2010

October is an anniversary month in more ways than one for Benji and Ginny Rattner. They met in October 2008 and were engaged in October 2009. It only made sense, then, to go for a trifecta, with a wedding one year later on October 30, 2010, followed by a surprise Halloween-themed after-party at the stroke of midnight.

The couple met online through a Jewish dating network, JDate.com. Benji was in Colorado and Ginny in Fort Myers. But they bonded instantly over Brett Favre, of all people, who had just left the Packers for the Jets. Originally from Wisconsin, Benji was an avid Packers and Badgers fan, while Ginny, with family in New York, cheered for the Jets.

They emailed and telephoned until Benji called an audible and visited Ginny in Fort Myers while en route to see family in Naples. The face-to-face meeting was a game changer, and a long-distance romance ensued.

For a year, Benji and Ginny got together whenever they could, including an October gathering in Benji's home state for a friend's wedding. That's when Benji took Ginny to Calatrava's Milwaukee Art Museum, ran with her through the pouring rain and asked her to make a wish in the fountain. He was on bended knee when she turned to him afterwards – and she knew that her wish had come true.

"We didn't meet like ordinary couples, so we wanted an anything but ordinary wedding," says Ginny. "It had to be on October 30, 2010, at a destination where all our family could be together. And we were blessed with parents who wanted to give us the wedding of our dreams."

Benji's parents live half the year in Wisconsin and half the year in South Florida while Ginny's parents live in Tampa. "So we chose the Waldorf-Astoria in Orlando for its location and grand elegance," Ginny adds.

To pull it all together, they hired Jamie O'Donnell and Kristin Allgire of Phoenix Event Group in Orlando (phoenix-eventplanning.com), who were recommended by the Waldorf. "There are certain things you don't mess around with, and this is one of them," says Ginny. "Picking Jamie and Kristin was the best thing we did."

The planners then orchestrated a classy ceremony with traditional Jewish elements and an adult-only reception with a surprise Halloween after-party for the ultimate *wow* factor.

"Ginny was adamant about a pinkless wedding," says

O'Donnell. "So we all agreed on a purple, silver, black and white color scheme, perfect for an elegant affair and an unforgettable reception, especially going into the wee hours of the morning on Halloween. It was a great yin-yang, masterfully constructed to end with a bang."

Orlando Rabbi Robert Leftkowitz married the couple on the Waldorf grounds beneath a Chupah, a traditional wedding canopy symbolizing the home the bride and groom will build together.

Lee Forrest Designs in Orlando did the flowers and built the lace-covered Chupah with silver willow branches and pomanders of purple, lavender and white button mums. High and low centerpieces of purple stock lavender hydrangeas, ivory and lavender roses, lavender spray roses and purple lisianthus were arranged in crystal trumpet and bubble vases.

The Chupah was later brought inside and placed around the wedding cake. Ginny's cake design, a unique five-tier vanilla confection with chocolate crème and Oreo filling, was executed by Lia Fairmont, the Waldorf's cake designer, under the direction of Executive Pastry Chef Kurtis Baguley. Ginny also surprised Benji with a custom-made groom's cake in the shape of a University of Wisconsin Badger. The mascot was, of course, wearing a Packer cheesehead.

A DJ and a band, Skyline 407, were both booked through Day Entertainment and kept everyone dancing all night long at the reception, held in the Waldorf Grand Ballroom. Just before midnight, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* blasted through the speakers, signaling the

kickoff of the surprise Halloween after-party.

At the stroke of midnight, candy-apple stations and ice-cream bars rolled out, and masked servers clad in tuxedos and white gloves passed out silver trays of trick-or-treat candy bags. A late-night buffet included grilled cheese sandwiches, sliders and Halloween cookies.

"The DJ kicked up the music and handed out Halloween masks, boas, sunglasses and tinsel wigs to guests to get them in the spirit," says Ginny. "The entire dance floor was packed with costumed guests having the best time – and we've got the pictures to prove it."

Videography and photography were provided by Orlando's Pro One Video and Sunshine Photographics, respectively.

"The month of October has such a special relevance for Benji and Ginny, and we were able to design a wonderfully elegant wedding with a major wow factor," says O'Donnell. "It was the perfect way for everyone to let loose, have fun and honor Benji and Ginny."









A GALACTIC AFFAIR ON A GLOBAL SCALE

Calvin and Genesis Mickel
Wedding Date: March 2010

The stars were aligning, literally and figuratively, when Calvin and Genesis Mickel first met in an online group playing *Star Wars Galaxies*. The gaming evolved into chatting. Then, in 2007, Calvin journeyed from Minnesota to Florida, a state seemingly light years away, to meet Genesis in person.

Sparks flew and the couple eventually decided to marry. When it came time to plan their wedding, these two celestial souls opted for an event in tune with nature, the universe and Mother Earth.

Calvin, a computer programmer, proposed to Genesis Humphrey, an environmental consultant, on Valentine's Day 2009, after a day of snowboarding and what he playfully describes as "a romantic dinner bribing her with chocolates and alcohol – and a family heirloom ring."

They're both nature lovers who appreciate organics, sustainability and locally produced products. So choosing a theme for their wedding was simple.

"Our theme expressed a connection with nature fused with organic and spiritual elements," says Calvin. "We chose March 20, 2010, because it was the equinox – the first day of spring. We felt it was symbolic of new beginnings and connections to universal cycles."

But who could pull off such an ethereal event? After searching the Internet for ideas and meeting wedding coordinator Heather Snively, founder of Weddings Unique in Winter Park (weddingsunique.com), everything fell into place beautifully for the couple.

"Heather was the only coordinator we interviewed who really understood what we wanted, and we knew she could deliver it," says Genesis. "We wanted an elegant, eco-chic wedding – not the typical images of a barefoot hippie with flowers on my head."

The ceremony and reception were both held at the Winter Park Racquet Club, chosen for its beautiful lakeside setting and

its central location. The club also customized an organic menu for the Mickels that included organic wine, local organic fruits and vegetables, and entrée choices such as free-range chicken, sustainably harvested salmon and vegetarian dishes.

Calvin and Genesis also wanted to add some Zen-like aspects to the event. Stones, arranged in a galaxial-shaped spiral, served as place cards. On one side was the guest's name done in calligraphy, while on the other side was an engraved name of the assigned table – Joy, Hope, Faith, Love, Peace, Unity, Wisdom, Honor or Harmony. The engraving was by Dusty Nutz Design in Ormond Beach.

Guests took their escort stones home as gifts, along with beautifully packaged tree seedlings from the Audubon Society – each indigenous to three varying U.S. regions in which their guests resided. "The seedlings also symbolized new beginnings, new life," adds Genesis.

The flowers, provided by Greenery Productions in Ocoee, were another nod to spring. They included cherry blossoms, orchids and even dogwood blossoms on the wedding cake from Party Flavors Custom Cakes in Ocoee.

"The tables were decorated to incorporate air, fire, water and earth," says Calvin. "Tall orchids from a greenery in Apopka for air, floating candles for water, and moss and rocks for earth."

Instead of a traditional guest book, the couple opted for a Wish Tree. Greenery Productions provided a Manzanita branch that was set next to the cocktail area. "Guests were asked to finish a series of unfinished sentences or to offer words of wisdom to us, then hang them on the tree," Calvin says. "We made a scrapbook out of the cards afterwards."

Their memories were documented by international wedding photographer Kevin Keelan, who lives in Central Florida but works worldwide.

Calvin and Genesis both note that throwing an organic yet luxurious wedding isn't as hard as it seems; it just takes a little perseverance and legwork. Adds Genesis: "It's easier than you think and wonderfully rewarding to make such good-conscience decisions for your big day."