

the florida keys

Top wedding planners share their tips for unlocking a one-of-a-kind, no-holds-barred bash. BY AMY EISINGER

Admit it: You've fantasized about having a completely over-the-top wedding. You've daydreamed about the fabulous setting, the luxe décor and the mind-blowing food. You've imagined the looks of awe on your guests' faces as they step into your reception. Well, how's this for wish fulfillment? We asked some of Florida's most in-demand planners, who've thrown quite a few dream-worthy affairs, to share their ideas for turning your wedding fantasy into a reality. >>

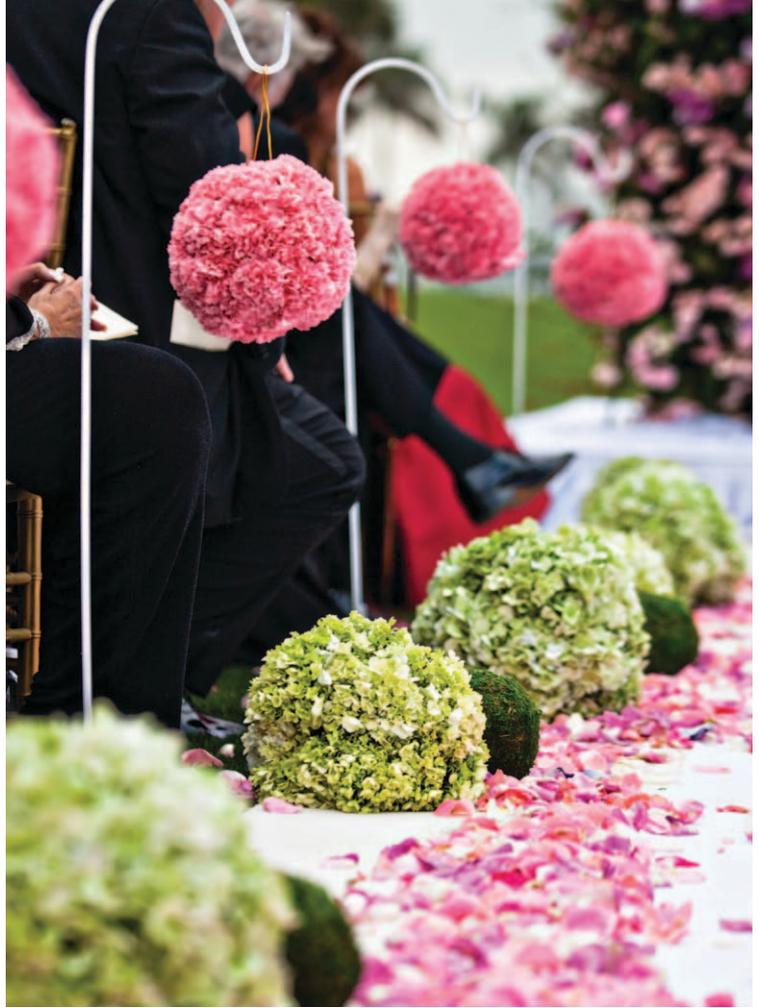
set the scene

Your invitations are the first hint that your wedding will be completely fabulous. Make sure you send the right message.

brand it Hiring a calligrapher or designer, or working with your planner to come up with a custom wedding logo, is a small detail that can make a big impact. Other major events and parties have their own brand or logo, and your wedding should be no exception. Use your logo on everything from the invites to the custom gobo light on your dance floor.

go 3-d If you want to make your invitation really stand out, you'll have to bring it to new heights. Sending 3-D-style invites that come in boxes with a small welcome gift for your guests is a great way to instantly set the mood. Go for custom wine bottles with labels that list your info as a save-the-date; or for a New Year's wedding, send boxes with noisemakers and bright confetti nestled alongside your invitation.

welcome them warmly When your wedding weekend finally rolls around, give your guests everything they could possibly want. We're talking splits of champagne, suntan lotion and aloe vera gel for their beach days, Jet Ski rental tickets and, of course, a mini hangover kit with aspirin and Gatorade.



make it a multiday affair

Chances are, you've got people flying in from all over. That's exactly why you should make the party last for two or three days.

start with a mixer Host a welcome party the first night all of your guests are in town to introduce everyone. Rent out your favorite restaurant, or take them all on a short private yacht cruise before you dock and then dine at a local hot spot.

organize a game Give your guests a non-corny way to start conversation by placing personalized trivia cards about you and the groom on each table at the rehearsal dinner and then encourage guests to quiz each other. It'll give people a way to talk without really putting them on the spot.

offer a late brunch If you've hosted everything from a welcome party to an after-party, your guests may want to sleep in the day after your wedding. Work with your hotel to arrange a late brunch and checkout for your guests so they can still see you for mimosas and Bloody Marys. >>



feast like royalty

From the first drink to the end of dessert, a memorable meal is all about careful planning and skillful execution.

drink up Greet your guests with a drink at your outdoor ceremony—and we don't mean bottled water. Set up a sweet tea bar, for instance, complete with barbershop paper straws and plenty of garnishes—like raspberries, mint, limes and peaches—so your guests can feel instantly cool. Try the same bar idea at your reception, but this time, give them the option of spiking their drink with liquor or champagne.

serve delicious food Don't misunderstand us—having a luxe wedding isn't about serving food no one can pronounce. Instead, it's all about having food that everyone will talk about for months to come. Incorporate your ethnic heritage into the food, or even take menu ideas from your parents' weddings. Just remember: Simple food can still be stellar; the important thing is to find that perfect caterer.

bring on the sweets These days, you don't need to just have a single wedding cake. Multiple small cakes that come in a variety of flavors, or mini posh desserts—like delicate macarons and handcrafted petits fours—are just the thing to give your guests a sweet treat. Planning the best dessert is easy, as long as you work with your caterer and keep the seasons in mind: For instance, buttercream cakes never last long outside in the summer heat.



max out your décor

From the moment they arrive, transport your guests into another (more fabulous) world.

light it up Can't decide on simply one color for your reception? Then try this: Go with an all-white palette and then use uplighting to switch up the whole look for the reception. Think: a romantic blush glow for your first dance, amber during dinner, and blues or purples during the late-night dance party. In your photos, it'll look like you held your wedding in several different locations.

better not bigger Make your centerpieces noteworthy for all the right reasons—not because guests couldn't see one another across the table. Low, lush, bloom-packed arrangements will give your wedding a formal, garden-fresh feel—perfect for setting the mood and transitioning from a beach ceremony to a black-tie reception.

inside and out Setting up an outdoor lounge of plush armchairs and low couches isn't just a romantic way to watch the stars come out—it's also a great way to help your party flow freely between the ballroom and the terrace. Depending on your taste, you could go with vintage hand-carved tables and velvet couches or modern designs with clean lines and stylish prints. Either choice will have your guests feeling just as pampered. >>

amp up the entertainment

Picked your band? Great. Here's how to get the most out of your music.

the power of one Rather than hiring your ceremony and reception musicians independently, planners suggest letting entertainment companies create a unique musical experience totally tailored to you. So you can have The Beatles during your ceremony and Beethoven during dinner—or vice versa.

add something extra Whether it's belly dancers, break-dancers or even Chinese dragon dancers, a little extra entertainment can go a long way. Slip them in at the end of dinner or after the first dance for a fun surprise.

save the last dance Picture this: You've spent the whole night dancing with friends, but for your last song, the crowd clears out and the band plays just for the two of you. Private last dances can be a romantic way to end the night.



details that wow

Trust us: It's all in the details. These standout touches will really make an impact on your guests.

over-the-top Imagine: a vintage crystal chandelier hung by near-invisible wires so it seems to float above your outdoor dance floor. Sound fantastic? Then try hanging three or more to get the full effect.

arch perfection Start your wedding with head-turning wow by having your florist build the ultimate altar. Whether you're inside or on the beach, an arch stuffed with romantic blooms in your color scheme, plus cascading vines to form a backdrop, will literally be picture-perfect.

—Special thanks to Tamara Cohen of TC Event Design; Kelly McWilliams of Weddings by Socialites; John Gandy of John Gandy Events; Kristen Johnson of An Affair to Remember; Leana Gallagher of Amelia Occasions; Heather Canada of First Coast Weddings and Events; and Julia Greenstein of Sweet Treat Events



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