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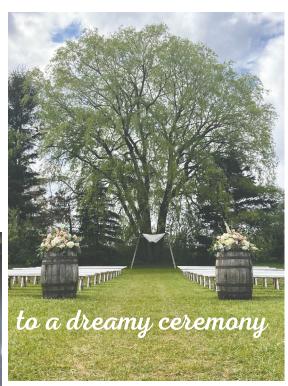
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Questions to ask prospective wedding officiants



Couples make many decisions when planning their weddings. Everything from the design of save-the-date cards to the color of the napkins at the reception tables requires couples' input. Choice of officiant is another decision that's worthy of significant consideration.

Many couples may have an officiant in mind before they begin planning their wedding. In such instances, couples may choose an officiant who's affiliated with their place of worship or even a friend or family member who's been ordained or certified to officiate weddings. Couples with no such option can ask the following questions as they look to hire an officiant for their wedding.

CAN YOU LEGALLY OFFICIATE OUR WEDDING?

Each state has its own requirements regarding who can sign the paperwork necessary for couples to be considered legally married. An officiant should meet these requirements.

WHAT SERVICES DO YOU PROVIDE?

Some officiants will do more than officiate the wedding. Some will help couples obtain their marriage license and even submit the documentation after the wedding. Those services can be important, but many couples are more concerned with what officiants will do before and during the ceremony. Ask if the officiant will write his or her own remarks to be delivered during the ceremony. Some couples may want to write remarks for the officiant, while others may need help crafting the message they want to convey.

HOW FLEXIBLE ARE YOU?

Ask how officiants handle feedback and how willing they are to deliver remarks they did not necessarily write themselves. Some officiants may have a template they customarily follow, but that doesn't necessarily mean they won't stray and personalize the ceremony based on couples' wishes. Couples should ask such officiants how far

they're willing to stray from their routine if necessary.

DO YOU HAVE A PORTFOLIO?

Written testimonials from past clients can be invaluable, but couples can get a true feel for an officiant's style by watching video of ceremonies they've officiated in the past. Ask prospective officiants if they can share video of weddings they've presided over. It's not a red flag if officiants have no such video, which couples may have forgotten to share. But video can help couples get an accurate idea of how officiants may preside over their ceremony.

WILL WE WORK TOGETHER PRIOR TO THE CEREMONY?

Many officiants will ask to meet with a couple at least once before the wedding so they can get to know them as well as possible. Ask each officiant if this is their policy. Pre-wedding meetings can be conducted in person or via Zoom. When discussing meeting before the wedding, ask the officiant if he or she will attend the wedding rehearsal. It's not customary for officiants to do so, though some might be willing to attend the rehearsal, especially if the ceremony will feature any elaborate components that require their involvement.

MISCELLANEOUS CONSIDERATIONS

Couples also may want to broach some additional topics when questioning prospective officiants. Such topics may include:

- · Officiant's attire
- · Backups if the officiant falls ill prior to the ceremony
- · Officiant fees, and if extra services like attending the rehearsal incurs additional charges
 - · Officiants' experience

Couples can ask prospective officiants various questions in an effort to find the right person to officiate their wedding.

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Unique locations to host a wedding

When tying the knot, couples continue to do so in familiar venues. Houses of worship, hotels and country clubs remain wildly popular wedding venues. Couples who want to stray from that norm often look for unique locations to say "I do," and there's no shortage of special spots to do just that.

ROOFTOP VENUES

Few backdrops inspire the awe of city skylines, especially when couples wait to get hitched until night has fallen and buildings have lit up. Rooftop restaurants and bars have undergone a resurgence in recent years, and these facilities are tailor-made for city-dwelling couples who want an enviable backdrop for their nuptials. Many such establishments are even affiliated with hotels, which can simplify wedding planning.

MUSEUMS

Couples who want their guests to

take a stroll through history before they watch the happy couple stroll down the aisle can consider tying the knot at a local museum. Many museums offer a variety of ceremony and reception options. The vaulted ceilings and airy quality of many art museums make them an ideal place to host large gatherings. The unique decor of such facilities guarantees couples will get some aweinspiring photos on their big day.

VINEYARD/WINERY

Oenophiles will no doubt love the idea of getting hitched at a vineyard or winery, but even people without a taste for wine can appreciate such locales. Sprawling fields and expansive skies make vineyards and wineries an ideal place to tie the knot, and guests will no doubt enjoy the unique surroundings.

STADIUMS

Couples who first bonded over their

love of a particular sport and/or favorite team can incorporate that into their nuptials by getting married at a stadium. Professional and collegiate teams typically offer wedding and reception packages, and guests may appreciate the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hang out on the field where their favorite athletes play.

HISTORIC HOMES

Another go-to option for history buffs, historic homes and mansions can make for memorable places to get married. Such homes tend to have a classic appeal, making them ideal for couples who want traditional weddings that call to mind the grandiose ceremonies of bygone eras.

Couples have an endless array of options when looking for wedding venues. Some outside-the-box options can impress guests and make for memorable ceremonies and receptions.





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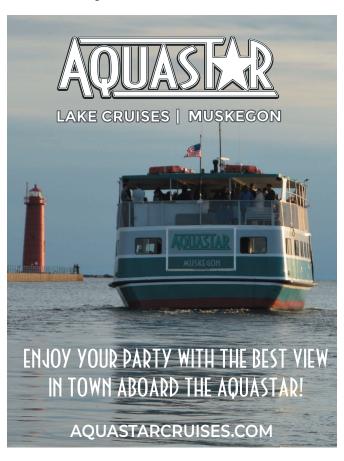
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PHOTO BY SUE BROWN

Jenna (Tews) and Eric Petrus enjoy an iconic ending to their wedding day in Ludington. A beautiful West Michigan sunset and the arrival of the Badger





The best ways to store and serve champagne

Champagne is a vital component of many special occasions, such as anniversaries, retirement parties and weddings.

Champagne is a sparkling wine from the Champagne region of France, though the term "champagne" is often mistakenly used in reference to any type of bubbly.

Champagne is a wine and, like merlot or pinot grigio, it has specific storage and serving temperatures to ensure top flavor. According to ThermoWorks, wines have specific layers of flavor that are most effectively enjoyed when they're experienced at the proper temperature. In wine, temperature affects alcohol, acid and aromatics. Thermo-Works suggests a temperature of 45 F for champagne.

In addition to controlling temperature, there are other ways to help ensure champagne reaches the palate in optimal fashion. Grape Escapes, a wine tasting and touring company, says that champagne is already aged properly before being sold, so it does not necessarily benefit from extra aging in the bottle. When kept too long (beyond 10 years for vintage cuvées), some effervescence may be lost and the flavor will change.

Bottles of champagne should be stored horizontally in a well-chilled environment. They should be kept away from bright or artificial light. Chilling also will help reduce the "pop" and overflow of the bubbly. If you purchase champagne and need to chill it for serving, you can achieve this by either chilling it in the fridge for three hours before serving, or in a Champagne bucket in a mixture of ice and water for 30 minutes

Etiquette experts say it is preferable to open a bottle of champagne with a hiss rather than a large pop. To achieve this, chill the champagne and also open the bottle very slowly and with a great deal of control.

When the champagne is opened, Daniel Brennan, PR and communications director at Champagne Laurent-Perri-

er, advises taking your time pouring a little champagne into each glass to allow the bubbles to settle. Then return to the first glass to pour more, helping to make the champagne less likely to froth. Do not tilt the glass like pouring a beer, rather pour the champagne gently down the inside of the glass.

The shape of the glass comes down to preference. Traditional coupes look the part, but tulip-shaped flutes will produce more bubbles and help capture the flavor and aromas of the champagne.

It's ideal to drink all of the champagne in a bottle, as it will begin to lose its fizz immediately after opening, yet that isn't always possible. A specialized champagne stopper will help keep the champagne fresh for up to two days after opening. Aftering the bottle has been opened, refrigerate it.

Do not wash champagne glasses in the dishwasher. Hand wash and allow to drip dry. Soap or fibers from towels can impede bubble formation in the glass during subsequent pourings.



Savings strategies for weddings



The question was popped; the engagement ring presented. What's the next step on the road to the wedding? Saving should definitely be on couples' minds.

A wedding is likely the most costly party couples will ever throw. According to The Knot's 2019 Real Weddings Study, the average cost of a wedding in 2019 was \$33,900. There are many different costs associated with weddings. Some are predictable, while others are unexpected.

Investopedia says the vast majority of couples budget too little for their weddings and also end up spending more than they had planned. Various strategies can make it easier to save for a wedding and avoid a post-wedding financial hangover.

GET INFORMED

It's impossible to budget for a wedding and ultimately save without knowledge of what services and items cost in the region where you live. A wedding in New York City will be expensive, while a wedding in Mississippi will cost a lot less, indicates SuperMoney's guide to wedding costs.

Conduct some research and find out what photographers, florists, transportation providers, reception halls, and wedding wardrobe vendors charge for common services. This will paint a vivid picture of what a wedding may cost in your area.

FLESH OUT THE BUDGET

Once you have gathered estimates, you can then figure out a financial goal. This also is when you can determine where to rein in spending and where you might want to splurge. If having a video memory of the wedding is not a top priority, you can skip videography services. If you have a special flower that you like, you may want to budget more for that bloom even if it isn't in season.

SET UP A DEDICATED SAVINGS ACCOUNT

One of the easiest ways to save for big-ticket items like a wedding, home purchase or other financial goals is to use an automatic savings account that may be available through your bank or employer. An automatic savings plan will pull a set amount from a personal checking account into a savings account through auto-draft. The bride and groom can link indi-

vidual checking accounts to one savings account to contribute iointly.

AVOID OVERSPENDING

An analysis of your spending habits will likely reveal areas where you can scale back so you can devote more funds to wedding savings. Do you need a takeout coffee in the morning or can you brew a pot at home? Might you be able to scale back on streaming services? Do you feel comfortable buying less expensive store brand groceries over name brands? Small cost savings can quickly add up.

ADD UP GIFTS

Factor in deduction of expenses that other people will commit to covering for wedding expenses, but only if you have concrete confirmation. A parent may host the rehearsal dinner. One's relative may offer to pass down an antique wedding gown to wear. But rather than simply removing these gifts from your savings calculations, keep them as a safety net to put toward unforseen expenses.

Saving for a wedding can be challenging. But various strategies can help couples plan their dream weddings without breaking the bank.

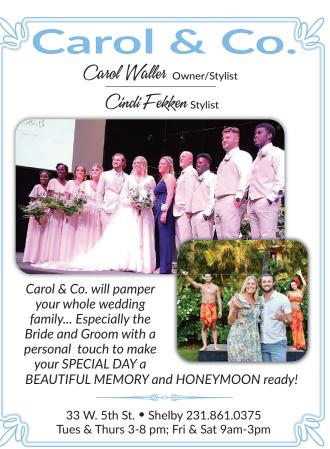




PHOTO BY SUE BROWN

Kennady Merrick and Matt McClellon get creative for their Engagement photo shoot by using their very unique classic camper. They are planning a Ludington wedding in July.





Fun ways to utilize social media in your wedding



Young couples tying the knot today grew up with social media, so it's no great surprise that so many want to utilize various platforms when planning their weddings. In fact, the Brides 2018 American Wedding Survey found that 87 percent of brides turned to the social media platform Pinterest for inspiration when planning their weddings.

On the surface, modern wedding ceremonies and receptions may look similar to the nuptials of yesteryear. However, engaged couples have increasingly incorporated social media into their weddings, and the following are some fun and creative ways to embrace that trend.

· Create a social media photo booth. Guests may take more pictures at modern weddings than the photographers who were hired to document the happy couple's big day from start to finish. Social media boards are digital screens that display social media walls. Live event social media boards collect and curate content from social media channels and display it on a single digital screen. Users, in this case a couple's guests, simply use a predetermined hashtag when posting photos and the images are then displayed on digital screens in real time. This can be a fun way to engage guests during the reception.

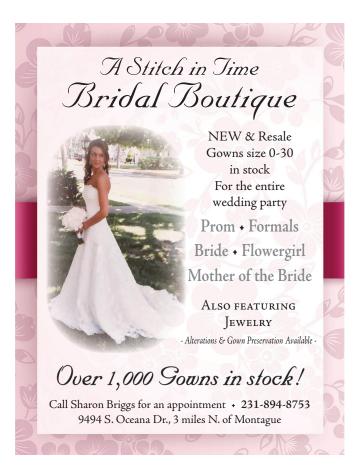
· Live stream the wedding. Live streams became very popular during the pandemic, when couples getting married had to pare down their guest lists in order to adhere to social distancing guidelines. But live streams can continue to be used after the pandemic, as there will always be guests who can't make it to the wedding. Facebook Live was a go-to social media platform for live streaming weddings during the pandemic, and it can be utilized to involve loved ones in the festivities

even if they can't be there in person. Live streaming via social media may be especially useful for couples who want to enjoy destination weddings, which tend to be small affairs due to travel constraints.

· Hashtag the wedding. A couple-specific hashtag can serve as something akin to a wedding album, only it's one everyone can easily access via the couple's chosen social media platform. Encourage guests to hashtag photos from the wedding so everyone can have a good time looking back on the ceremony and reception once the day has come and gone.

· Plan with your party. Social media can be as fun, inclusive and useful when planning the wedding as it can during the wedding itself. Brides and grooms can create their own private Pinterest boards and share them with the wedding party. Everyone can then use the private board to bounce ideas off each other. Couples can infuse a little fun into the Pinterest board by encouraging their groomsmen and bridesmaids to post outrageous outfit ideas or submit sing-along song requests to be played during the reception.

Social media is a big part of modern couples' lives, so it makes sense for them to find fun ways to incorporate various platforms into their weddings.



Music is an important component of wedding celebrations



song for their first official promenade as a married couple.

- · Wedding party entrance song: Couples can ask their music vendor to put together the majority of the songs for their reception, but they may want to choose their own wedding party entrance. This song typically is a fast-paced, upbeat song that gets the crowd pumping and ready for a fun night. Think "Dynamite" by Taio Cruz or "Can't Stop the Feeling!" by Justin Timberlake.
- · First dance: The first dance song is another personal choice for the couple. Slow songs traditionally are chosen, but couples who want something a little different have increasingly selected faster songs and paired them with rehearsed choreography. "Thinking Out Loud" by Ed Sheeran has become a popular first dance song.
- · Other songs: Couples also will select songs to complement dances with their parents, cake cutting, garter toss, and any other special traditions or moments. They also can make requests to include songs of different eras to appeal to guests of all ages.

Music is an important component of wedding celebrations and deserves some extra consideration to ensure everyone has a great time while cutting a rug.

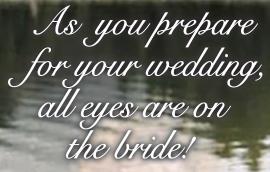
Few things set the mood of a wedding more effectively than music. Beautiful songs often are incorporated into wedding ceremonies, and romantic or upbeat songs intermingle to create a festive mix at receptions.

Playlists curated specifically for weddings can be found online to help couples narrow down their options. According to Wedding Forward, a wedding planning guide, wedding planning experts and modern couples agree that wedding playlists should be have a 60/40 split of classics and new wedding songs.

Music is a personal choice, but couples may benefit by considering who will be in attendance at their weddings. In so doing, couples can ensure the music played at their weddings reaches as many people as possible there:

- · Wedding processional song: The wedding processional is the moment the wedding party walks down the aisle. Music may be a traditional hymn, classical music or a favorite contemporary song.
- · Bridal processional song: In many traditional wedding ceremonies, the bride walks down the aisle separately, with her father or both parents. She customarily will have a different song from the rest of the wedding party. While "Bridal Chorus/Wedding March" is a traditional choice, some brides may prefer a different tune.
- · Wedding recessional song: Again, depending on the ceremony location and choices, the recessional may be a classical piece or a hymn. Some couples choose an upbeat





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Explore various wedding styles during planning



Every wedding is different, even if many share some common components. As couples plan their weddings, learning about some popular wedding styles can help them create a ceremony that suits them.

CLASSIC WEDDING

Classic weddings are the storybook traditional weddings that many people dream about for years. Key elements include a tuxedo for the groom and a white gown for the bride. Formal attire is reserved for the rest of the wedding party. The ceremony is conducted in a place of worship before everyone retires to a fancy catering hall for the reception. Traditional weddings also may include the time-honored customs like toasts, cake cutting, bouquet toss, and parent-child dances.

BEACH WEDDING

Beach weddings often are casual, laid back affairs. Dresses may be less structured and flow with sea breezes, while guys may even don shorts with linen shirts or jackets. Guests can expect the party to be much more free-flowing and the traditions of classic weddings may not be part of the celebration.

BOHEMIAN WEDDING

Free-spirited individuals may dive head first into a bohemian style wedding. According to wedding planner David Tutera, a boho wedding is casual and comfortable. It tends to come off chic but appears that way with minimal effort. Decor is typically humble and blends harmoniously with nature. A boho wedding may take place outdoors or in another less traditional venue, such as a farmhouse or botanical garden. Wedding party attire may be mismatched and showcase each person's individual style.

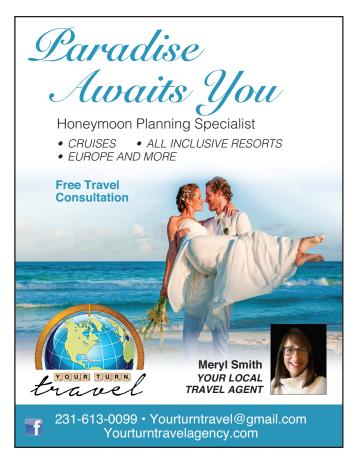
MODERN WEDDING

Brides and grooms who crave contemporary and current trends may prefer a modern wedding. Graphic color schemes, clean lines and minimalistic flowers might be part of a modern wedding. Attire may be angular and edgy, and the venue may run the gamut from sleek museum to a city rooftop.

DESTINATION WEDDING

Couples who love to travel and don't want to worry about the minutiae of wedding planning may find a destination wedding is a good fit. Destination weddings last more than one day and focus on relaxation, activities and lots of fun. Destination weddings tend to be less formal and less traditional than classic weddings. Due to the remote locations, destination weddings also can be smaller and more intimate, as many invitees may be unable to attend. Yet those who can attend often get to enjoy tropical islands or mountain retreats.

Wedding styles are as unique as the people getting married. Choosing a theme that has the right feeling can help couples make the most of their special days.







Wedding day tipping guidelines



Vendors may be in the background during a wedding, but the roles they play are vital to making ceremonies and receptions memorable for couples and their guests. It's customary to tip wedding vendors who provide great service. The wedding experts at The Knot note that the following guidelines can help couples determine how much to tip the unsung heroes who make their weddings so memorable.

- · Photographer/videographer: Photographers and videographers are unique among wedding vendors because their work will be looked at for decades to come. The Knot notes that it's not necessary to tip wedding photographers and videographers who own their own studios. Their fees are all the compensation they need. However, many photographers and videographers do not own their own studios, and the efforts of such professionals are worthy of a little something extra at the end of the night. The Knot notes that a tip between \$50 and \$200 is standard for these professionals, and that tip can be given at the end of the reception.
- · Reception staff: The reception staff works as hard as anyone during the wedding, and those efforts merit a good tip. Many reception venues include gratuities in their food and drink fees, and couples can check to see if they have already



CONTINUED: tipping guidelines

tipped staff and if they think the mandatory gratuity is sufficient. A tip between 15 and 20 percent of the food and drink fee is standard. Maître d' fees also may be built into the wedding contract. If not, a tip between \$200 and \$300 is standard and can be delivered at the end of the night.

- · Band/DJ: Music features prominently at many wedding receptions. Bands and/or DJs can set the tone for a fun night couples and their guests will remember for years to come. Tipping musicians is optional, but it's the norm to do so when they provide exceptional service. Couples who have a band playing can tip between \$25 and \$35 per musician, while DJs generally receive a tip between \$50 and \$150.
- · Drivers: Many transportation firms also include gratuities in their contracts, so couples should check to see if they've already tipped limo or bus drivers before paying them a little extra. If the tip is not included and the drivers arrive on time and get guests to the wedding on time, then a tip that's between 15 and 20 percent of the total bill is standard.
- · Delivery personnel: Individuals who deliver items like cakes and flowers are typically given a gratuity upon delivery. A tip between \$5 and \$10 per person is standard, though individuals who deliver items like tables, chairs and portable restroom facilities and then set those items up may be deserving

of a little extra.

· Officiants: Officiants who are affiliated with a church or synagogue where the ceremony will take place are not typically given a gratuity. However, The Knot notes that a donation to the place of worship between \$100 and \$500 is standard. Couples who still want to give the officiant a little extra can tip between \$50 and \$100. Independent officiants who receive fees directly from the couple need not be tipped.

These figures can serve as guidelines, but couples also can give a little extra if they feel their vendors have gone above and beyond.







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