



BRIDES

Unique Entertainment

From the months of planning to the hand-written vows and everything in between, weddings are serious business. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't infuse a little fun into the experience.

There are many ways to add a dramatic flair to your ceremony or reception. You just have to be open-minded and consider what your guests will enjoy and remember.

Weddings are about you and your new spouse, first and foremost so make sure to incorporate your own personal style into whatever you choose to include in your special day.

PERFORMERS

Many brides choose to hire DJs or piano players to provide the musical entertainment at their weddings.

If you're looking to add a little more spice, you may consider opting for a live band or impersonator.

Do you have a band in your area that has made a name for itself for great local music? Does anyone you know have connections to regional or even national acts? A live band that can take requests and perform a diverse repertoire of songs is best to appease all tastes at your wedding.

Impersonators of artists such as Sinatra and Elvis, as well as many others, depending on the style of music you prefer, are available.

Good impersonators are true performers who can



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have your guests dancing and laughing the entire night.

As with any vendor you bring into your wedding day, make sure to vet your music provider by checking out his website and asking for references from past wedding clients.

PHOTO FEATURES

It is important for every bride to make a lasting impression. One of the best ways to achieve this is through photos that your guests can treasure forever.

Do some research during your planning phase to find a talented caricaturist in your

area. He or she will be able to produce quality, timeless items that you and your guests can turn into keepsakes.

Photo booths have become popular features at many weddings, allowing your guests to use props and professional photography services to make long-lasting memories. Green

screen photo booths add an extra dimension to your wedding by allowing guests to take photos in front of a variety of backdrops.

No matter how you decide to mark your occasion, unique entertainment can make your wedding stand out from the rest.

Surprise Your New Spouse

Since the day you became engaged to be married, you have probably focused on decorations, menus, guest lists and invitations. It's easy to become wrapped up in the details.

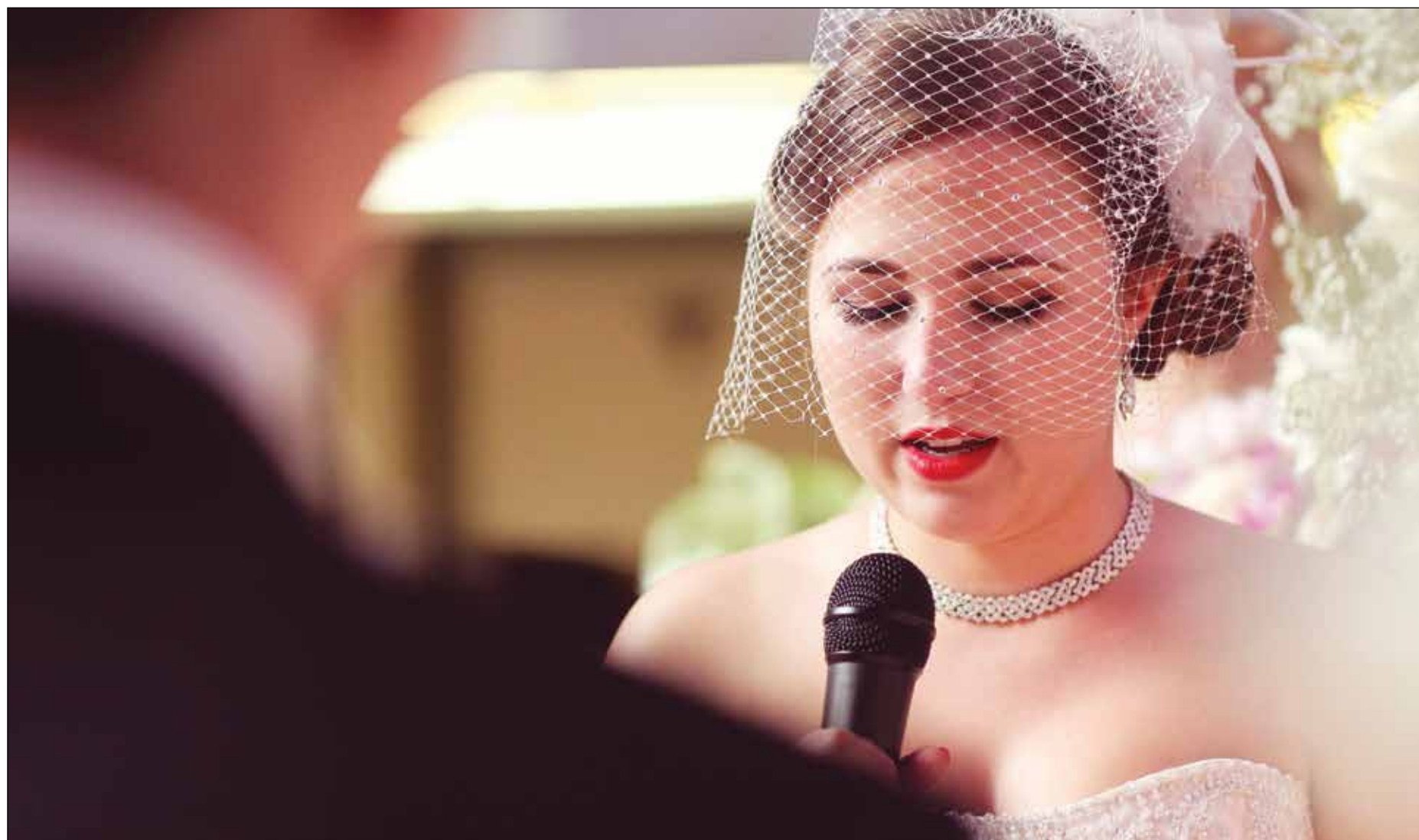
You want your wedding to be perfect and you're committed to pulling everything together in line with your budget and timeline expectations.

But don't forget the actual reason you're getting married: to show an enduring commitment to the one you love. You can make your special day even more special for your future spouse by thinking of unique ways to show your affection and appreciation. They can range from grandiose gestures to simple ideas — as long as they come from the heart you. Create a lasting moment that you and your spouse will talk about for decades to come.

SONG & DANCE

Maybe it's a power ballad from the 1980s or a contemporary hit from the 1990s. If you share a special song with your special someone, why not belt it out in front of everyone to show your love? This is a romantic way of conveying your love and giving your guests a show at the same time.

The same goes for a dance. Coordinate a flash mob-type dance with your bridesmaids that happens randomly during your reception. The bigger and more dramatic the



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better, especially if the point of your reception is fun, fun and more fun.

SPECIAL MESSAGES

Your surprise doesn't have to be gesture that everyone sees or an expensive gift. In fact, it can be discreet and absolutely free. Ask your flow-

er girl to deliver a special message to your future spouse, either verbally or in a sweet handwritten note.

If you're writing your own vows, give a sneak peak of what you'll be sharing later in the ceremony.

One or two sentences will do — just enough to let your

future spouse know what to expect.

FAVORITE FOOD

Does your partner love a specific meal that isn't on your menu? Talk to your caterer about adding a customized plate for your future spouse and keep it a secret. If

you enjoyed a memorable meal the day or night of your engagement, re-create that dish on your wedding day.

Wait until the rest of your wedding party has been served and then coordinate the delivery of the meal to make it an extra memorable occasion.

Hire the Right Photographer

Working with the right photographer can give you memories of your wedding day that last a lifetime. That's why it's so important to make a well-informed decision on who will be taking the shots at your wedding.

Consider discussing pricing and scheduling with two or three photographer candidates before making your final hire.

Look for creativity and past experience shooting winter weddings, especially if any part of your plans involve the outdoors. The bright sunshine of winter can cause challenges to photographers if they're not well versed in handling such environments.

SET A BUDGET

Professional photography can take up a large chunk of any wedding budget, so it's crucial to your bottom line to set aside the right amount of money. What are you willing to pay? Could you sacrifice other aspects of your wedding if your ideal photographer's prices come in a little higher than anticipated?

These are questions you need to consider when it comes time to sign the contract with your photographer. And don't be afraid to negotiate with potential photographers, as it's an expected part of doing business. They may be willing to take your rate, especially if it looks like they won't be booked for that day. Photographers depend on referrals when it comes to finding new clientele, so being flexible with rates and schedules are usually part of their business plan.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Online tools and photographer websites have made it easy for brides and grooms to do their research. All wedding photographers are not created equal, and searching through online



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rate sheets or portfolios will prove this.

Sit down with your laptop or mobile device and search for photographers in your area. Also check your local newspaper for photographers, who may be advertising special rates during the slower winter wedding season.

Make notes of what you like and dislike about the work or rates of the wedding photographers you are research-

ing. Enter these notes, as well as photographer names and contact information, into a spreadsheet. This will help you stay organized when it's time to make your final decision.

DON'T SKIP THE CONTRACT

Even if you personally know the photographer you hire for your wedding, it's critical to enter into a written contract. Legitimate professionals will

have a standard contract for their engagements that spells out time of arrival, length of services, rights to photos and final costs.

Signing such a contract protects you in the case of not receiving full services, and can help you legally get your money back in case you put down a deposit. Make sure to get a signed copy of the contract for your records.

Help Guests Stay Warm

Even the warmth of a romantic wedding can't cut through winter's chilling bite. Outdoor weddings pose a challenge to brides and grooms, who want their guests to have an enjoyable experience — even if it's below freezing.

Fortunately, there are little touches you can pull off to warm up your guests and let them know you appreciate them sticking through the cold conditions. Especially if you're getting married at a destination venue that is used to hosting winter weddings, there are plenty of tools at your disposal to making sure your guests stay comfortable. Consult with your wedding planner or local venues on ideas they have used in the past.

A WARM WELCOME

One of the most effective planning techniques is to think about how you personally would like to be treated and greeted at a cold-weather wedding. From the moment you arrive to the time that you leave, what are some things you would appreciate if you were on the other side of the equation?

How about scarves and shawls rolled up in baskets at the entrance of your wedding ceremony and reception? If your budget allows, you can urge guests to grab one for staying warm during the vows and also for a special parting gift.

These types of baskets are not only functional but can serve as visually pleasing parts of your decoration. Guests will remember your thoughtfulness as they enjoy the warmth.

COMFORT FOOD AND DRINKS

Comfort food such as soups and stews are perfect options for your winter wedding menu. Substantial and hearty, they will warm up your guests following your beautiful ceremony and give them the energy to enjoy your reception. Consider keeping your soup ingredients seasonal and local to keep your overall costs down.

For drinks, a glass of warm wine is a welcome touch, as is warm apple juice or hot chocolate for the kids. As an alternative to a candy table or chocolate fountain, you can set up a hot chocolate or coffee bar, complete with chocolate flakes, flavored creams and sugar. Watch as your guests keep coming back for more.



Wedding Technology

As we increasingly turn to mobile technology for news, weather and information-gathering, the wedding industry has also jumped on board.

A simple search of the Google Play or Apple App Store reveals hundreds of mobile applications on the market designed to help you plan and execute the wedding of your dreams.

The Internet makes it easy to research gowns, vendors and wedding locations, and smartphones make it that much easier. The use of smartphones to access wedding planning websites has nearly doubled from 2011 (33 percent) to 2014 (61 percent), according to 2014 research by TheKnot.com.

Technology tools such as spreadsheets and finance trackers also help you control your budget and stay focused on the various tasks at hand. These digital gems are free in many cases, giving you a cost-effective way of organizing and maintaining important information.

ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSES

One of the best uses of technology to help organize your wedding is the spreadsheet. Fully customizable and editable as you go along, spreadsheets help you input and update information related to budgets, vendor quotes, invitation lists and much more.

Consider building one master spreadsheet with multiple smaller files for optimal organization. If you are sharing planning responsibilities with a wedding planner or family member, consider using a cloud-based spreadsheet that allows all involved parties to

upload, edit and analyze information.

IN-WEDDING TECHNOLOGY

It is becoming more popular to integrate social media into the wedding mix. Couples can create their own Twitter

hashtag and display a live Twitter feed throughout the reception on a projection screen hooked up to the Internet. Add a placard to each table with the name of the hashtag or Facebook group and encourage people to sign up.

Guests love seeing their mes-

sages pop up on the screen and it's a great way to make everyone feel like they are even more a part of your special day. You can create a wedding day memento out of the social media interactions later by printing out and framing a portion of the online exchanges.



DIY Centerpiece Ideas

Before your guests mingle and dance the night away at your reception, they will find themselves seated at their table for a while. The centerpiece will be the focal point of their attention.

This gives you the perfect opportunity to show off your creative side.

Whether you go with the wintertime or holiday theme, it is important to incorporate a little of your own personality into the centerpiece. Fresh flowers, floating candles or even photos of the special couple are all great ways to capture your guests' attention while they sit back, relax and enjoy the festivities.

Many natural and decorative items are symbolic of the winter and holiday season, and most can be creatively incorporated into your wedding centerpiece design. Here are a few items to consider when putting together your DIY winter wedding centerpiece:

- Glass icicles, droplets or marbles;
- Leaves, acorns or twigs;
- Shiny objects like crystal garland or diamond confetti;
- Fake snow;
- Christmas lights;
- Small lanterns;
- Ornaments;
- Fresh fruit, such as apples, grapes or cranberries; and
- Twine, ribbon or other fabrics.

HOLIDAY AND WINTER THEMES

Jingle bells, holly and mistletoe are traditional markers of the holiday season — and ones that you should consider infusing into your table centerpieces. These items work well together and can be combined with tall or short vases filled with beautiful, vibrant flowers.

You can even etch special messages into your vases to make them stand out. Find an etching kit at your local arts and crafts store, and etch words such as “Winter Love” or other season-inspired sayings into the glass. This little touch of personality will have your guests talking.

The perfect wedding centerpiece doesn't have to remain contained in the middle of the table. Complementary pieces strewn across the table make more impact. Items such as flower petals and snowflake cutouts work well as extra pieces to give your centerpiece more table space.



By the Numbers

Much can be discovered by analyzing wedding statistics, including where most people are getting married, how much money they're budgeting for their reception and how many people they are typically inviting.

These numbers may be helpful to you in planning your own wedding because you can gain an insight into how other people are approaching their own special day.

The Knot, the No. 1 multi-platform wedding resource, every year releases its Real Weddings Survey.

Last year's edition covered every thinkable statistic related to the wedding day, from the most popular colors to the average number of groomsmen picked for the ceremony.

Here are some of the highlights from The Knot's study, broken down into various categories:

WEDDING COST

- Average wedding cost: \$31,213 (excludes honeymoon)
- Most expensive place to get married: Manhattan, \$76,328 average spend
- Least expensive place to get married: Utah, \$15,257 average spend
- Average spent on a wedding dress: \$1,357

ABOUT THE BRIDE AND GROOM

- Average marrying age: bride, 29; groom, 31
- Most popular month to get



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engaged: December (16 percent)

- Average length of engagement: 14 months
- Most popular month to get married: June (15 percent) followed by October (14 percent)

ABOUT THE WEDDING

- Average number of guests:

136

- Average number of bridesmaids: four to five
- Average number of groomsmen: four to five
- Popular wedding colors: ivory/white (44 percent), blue (37 percent), Pink (28 percent), Metallics (26 percent), purple (23 percent)

ABOUT THE LOCATION

- The top 10 most expensive locations to get married in 2014:
- New York — Manhattan, \$76,328
 - New York — Long Island, \$55,327
 - New Jersey — north/central, \$53,986
 - New York — Westchester/

- Hudson Valley, \$52,954
- Illinois — Chicago, \$50,934
- New York — Outer Boroughs, \$49,781
- Pennsylvania — Philadelphia, \$44,090
- Rhode Island, \$41,914
- California — San Francisco/ Greater Bay Area, \$39,690
- New Jersey — South \$39,191