

A full-page photograph of a wedding couple standing in a grassy field next to a pond. The bride is wearing a white gown and holding a bouquet, and the groom is in a dark suit. They are holding hands and looking at each other. The pond in the foreground reflects the couple and the sky. The background is a dense forest of trees.

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The life of a wedding planner

*Need a falcon for your wedding?
Gina Maloney says she has you covered.*

by Genia Wickwire

HOW DID YOU get into the wedding planning business? After I left the fashion industry in New York City, I moved to Woodstock to raise my children. I concentrated on our family and our beautiful community. I loved helping my community.

I helped out with gala events at the Center of Photography and with fundraisers for the Woodstock Day School and Woodstock Elementary. I helped create events where ever I was needed.

One day, a friend asked me if I would ever consider doing weddings. I replied that I would love to. The next thing I knew I was producing a three-day wedding in Woodstock between one of the most sought-after music video directors and the owner of the most important fashion emporium in Paris. It was fantastic!



MICHAEL MASON STUDIOS

Falcon from Alex and Lisa's wedding.

After that wedding weekend, I was hooked. I started my business.

What is your favorite part of wedding planning?

There are so many things I enjoy about planning and designing a wedding. I really love getting to know my clients. It takes a year of planning together, learning what they like, and what they think is beautiful and important.

My heart is so full of joy because we get to bring their dreams to life and surpass their expectations. At the end of the day my clients' happiness is all that matters. Knowing we can bring such joy and surprise to our clients, their friends and family is utterly fulfilling.

What is your least favorite part?

It can be challenging dealing with difficult clients. I feel so lucky in the last 13 years I can say we only have had two. We have been so fortunate to have had such



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Left, a wedding should be a joyous time says wedding planner Gina Maloney. Pictured here are Becky May & Ryan and their furry friend; right, Gina and her husband of 28 years.




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great clients.

I think people who come to the Hudson Valley to be married share the same values, love of nature, adventure, and a deep desire to share the Hudson Valley and all it has to offer with their friends and family.

What advice would you give to any couple planning their wedding even if they don't use your services?

Do it your way! Create the day that represents you as a couple. Be authentic, be organized, prepare your budget, and truly understand what vendors will cost before you jump in.

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can really help with all of the above. A good planner will know who to work with and who not to work with. In the long run, we generally save our clients money and alleviate the stress that planning can

bring. We know what everything will cost, who the best vendors who will fit your budget are, and how to make the event beautiful and well-run. A wedding has so many moving parts. Having

a team to guide you and run the day can be priceless.

What was the funniest moment you ever had in planning a wedding? How do you

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handle unforeseen happenings?

It was just after Covid, and it was the first wedding after a year of being in lockdown. The bride, groom and family were ready to party.

The night before the wedding we had the rehearsal and a big opening dinner party. The bride had a bit too much to drink and was very hung over on the wedding day.

We got through hair and makeup okay, and it was ceremony time. We lined everyone up, and the procession started.

Just as the bride was about to walk down the aisle, she looked at me and said she was going to be sick!

We flew into action, pulling her hair back and assuring her that everything would be okay. We gave her some water, a mint, a bit of lipstick, and fluffed her dress.

Down the aisle she walked. She was a real trouper.

What was the most unusual request you ever had?

I was working with a couple from Los Angeles getting married at the Full Moon Resort in Big Indian. The groom asked us to find a bird that could fly the wedding rings to the ceremony. He wanted to surprise his fiancé.

It took us almost two months to find



Becky May & Ryan's wedding, planned by Gina Maloney.

the right bird, a beautiful but intimidating falcon. The groom had to practice with the falcon before the ceremony. In order to call the falcon, he had to hold up a dead mouse. Once the falcon flew to the groom, the groom would be able to retrieve the rings, and the falcon would get to eat the mouse.

The funniest part to me was that the entire wedding was vegan! The very surprised bride got to watch this falcon devour the mouse.

What advice would you give a couple for life together?

Be each other's best friend. Respect and support one another. Try to plan your joy. Walk hand in hand through life.

You will have many ups and downs. Marriage is like a roller coaster, I always say: Just hold on!

I have had the honor of being married to my best friend for 28 years and going strong. I am holding on!

I asked a dear friend who has been married for over 50 years for the secret of a lasting marriage. Her advice: Never wear pajamas in bed! That might work. LOL.

Any last words of wisdom?

A wedding should be a joyous time. Yes, it can get stressful. Remind yourself what it is truly about, creating a union with the person with whom you would like to spend the rest of your life. Create the day that will make you happy. Enjoy every minute!

The joy of serving!

I believe most sincerely, my journey has given me the wisdom and the intuition, which allows me to co-create ceremonies that are Intimate, Sacred and Joyful.



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Wedding-bell blues

Epic nuptial bloopers — and how to avoid them, sometimes

by Frances Marion Platt

*The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!*

— Robert Burns, "To a Mouse"

IN A WORLD populated by perfect humans, love would always last forever. We don't go into marriages thinking about how they might not prove to be our last.

The ideal wedding day lives in our imaginations as a once-in-a-lifetime event. Consequently, it's a widely accepted truism that we want that day to be perfect, and we will go to great lengths to make it so.



Wedding bloopers including dropped wedding cake.

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Of course, exactly how far we will go to exercise total control over the success of a wedding celebration is a question that will vary with the personalities of the couple involved, their next of kin and chosen attendants. For some, every tiny detail must be orchestrated, every conceivable tradition observed. Others will take a more laid-back approach, eschew some traditions altogether, and relish the interactions that happen spontaneously on their big day.

But no one wants to leave the doors wide open for a disaster.

One good way to anticipate things that could go wrong and reduce their likelihood is to seek the advice of married friends about the obstacles they needed to navigate at their own weddings. The Internet now makes it easy to read other people's accounts of Bridezillas, overbearing in-laws, drunken uncles, tantrum-throwing flower girls, grossly inappropriately garbed dates of wedding-party members and other such preventable ways in which one's wedding memories might be tainted.

There are nearly always helpful strategies to approach the sticky politics of

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blending families, if one thinks things through in advance.

Many such horror stories can be found on the subreddit *r/AmItheAsshole*, a/k/a AITA: an online destination with more than a million followers where users post about their real-world interpersonal conflicts and invite judgment from fellow Redditors. These accounts make irresistible clickbait on social-media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, many of them reposted by actor George Takei.

Recent AITA stories include one about a groom's father who walked out of the wedding reception in a huff after the son chose to do his first dance with the aunt who raised him instead of with his stepmother, with whom he was never close, for example. Another concerns a dispute over a bride's refusal to include her groom's trans friend in her "traditional" wedding party. There are battles over dietary restrictions, tattoos and piercings, childfree wedding ceremo-



John Novi talks about wedding bloopers from back in the day.

nies, transportation costs, who pays for what. The list of potential disagreements

and opportunities for participants to take offense is endless.

An arena for human frailties

So it's wise to read what other couples have had to cope with and be forewarned. Sometimes the conflicts are so extreme and the interested parties so recalcitrant that the wedding has to be called off. Or certain relatives are disinvited, But more often, compromises can be found, so long as communications are kept clear.

Although advance planning can help couples stave off many an awkward wedding-day situation, our universe is a place prone to randomness, and not all circumstances are under our control, as Robert Burns reminds us. Sometimes a vendor of wedding services will mess up, or there will be an equipment or power failure. Sometimes the weather will be hellacious on our day of choice. If you choose to make small children or pets welcome at your ceremony, you need to accept that they may behave in ways that don't prioritize decorum.

"Our backyard wedding in Croton went perfectly until Benywaid, the family dog, decided to join us at the altar," recalls Kristin Brown of New Paltz. "Someone took a photo I can't find of Benywaid trying to climb up into my arms while my godmother continued to bravely read our vows. The photo later appeared in a book about wedding mishaps that also featured John Novi."

Novi himself – the internationally famed chef who ran the DePuy Canal House in High Falls for 45 years, hosting many a posh wedding (including that of actor Robert DeNiro) – has some stories to tell of his own human frailties as a vendor.

His culinary education began under the auspices of his parents, who owned the Novi Bakery in High Falls. One time in his youth, he miscalculated the date that a wedding cake was needed and tried to deliver it to the venue, Ski Minne, a week before it was actually expected. "Not to be punished by my father, I told my parents the groom was called off to Army Reserves, and the wedding will take place the following week," he relates. "Of course, I froze the cake and redecorated it in time for the wedding."

On another occasion, there was no escaping the consequences of his tripping down a flight of ten stairs while delivering a four-tier wedding cake, with an

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unsympathetic witness present. “I fell, turning my back and ass into the cake as it landed on the bottom of the floor, the steps. My sister, who was helpless at the time, looked down at me sitting in the cake and said, ‘John, my impression would have looked a lot better than yours.’”

Get me to the church on time

Human error figures into a number of stories that Karen Humphrey, a Saugerties-based freelance event planner, has to tell from her years in the business. “I had only worked a couple of events as an assistant to an amazing local wedding planner prior to this wedding. It was my first time with my own responsibilities rather than working at her side for the entire event. I was already nervous, but was determined everything go off without a hitch,” she recalls.

“Sometimes, depending on a lot of factors, weddings can be a little bit flexible with the schedule and flow. This one was really tight because of our contract with the venue; and the way things were set up, everything had to stay precisely on schedule or we weren’t going to get

to everything. There was no option to extend the end time.

“I was sent to the hotel to make sure everything went smoothly and put all the guests on the bus to get shuttled to the ceremony on time. Tammy [Baldwin, former proprietor of Charmed Places], my boss, was setting up the ceremony waiting for us to arrive. There were several phone calls that morning (and probably the whole week before) with her stressing that whatever happens, the bus must leave on time. Get them on the bus, make sure everyone is accounted for, and make it head out on time: super-simple.

“The bus had stopped at another hotel for a first load of guests, and I was waiting with the last bunch to get transported to the ceremony. At exactly 2 p.m. the bus starts to pull in; I see the other guests on board, the rest are in the lobby with me – a huge sigh of relief!

“The driver waves at me and starts coming for the overhang, the front door where guests typically pull up to unload. (I forget which hotel this was exactly – picture an old-school Super 8, not some megahotel.) My first thought was, ‘I don’t think he can make that. I think the bus

is too high.’ Surely he knows this, right?

“But he’s gassing it, and I can now tell, as he’s really close, he isn’t going to make it. So, I start frantically gesturing ... too late. Smashes the top of the bus into the hotel roof, rips a section off the bus roof that goes flying. The concierge comes out cursing in Spanish. The bus driver gets out, blood pouring from his head. Two guests are bleeding all over their wedding finery with minor injuries.

“Needless to say, that wedding did not start on time. I will never forget the phone call to my boss: ‘Ummm...well, you are not going to believe what just happened.’ We later learned there was over \$100,000 worth of damage to the bus and hotel.”

Other memorable wedding disasters in Humphrey’s experience were wrought by Mother Nature, however – notably “a tornado that hit Buttermilk Falls. The ceremony was happening across the property. I was at the bottom of the hill setting up the reception in an amazing tent that we filled with real glass chandeliers. This mini-tornado came out of nowhere as I was setting up the tables. The mother of the groom had just run down the hill to check out the tent the moment the ceremony ended. It was her and the catering staff in the tent with me.

“All of a sudden the wind comes slamming through, the chandeliers start swinging and crashing together, spraying glass everywhere. Everyone is running and I am standing there in shock, trying to figure out what to do next. There was nothing I could do. We all took cover in a little cottage and I awkwardly spent the next two hours in a tiny room while the mother of the groom picked tiny shards of glass out of my hair the entire time.”

That one clearly wasn’t preventable, though one might make a mental note for the future that tents and glass chandeliers don’t necessarily mix well. Some forethought might have made things easier for another of Humphrey’s clients whose wedding was planned for the grounds of Basilica Hudson: “... the bride with the outdoor ceremony and an eleven-layer tulle-skirted dress. The moment she stepped outside, the bugs flocked to the tulle. Within minutes it looked like a swarming black mass. She freaked out and took it off, down to her Spanx in front of all of us vendors, and goes running inside. Now I find myself on a ladder hanging the dress from a beam

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so that I can get underneath it – slowly, painstakingly, with a pair of tweezers and a lot of patience picking thousands of bugs out of what seemed a zillion layers of tulle. That one didn't start on time, either!"

From this experience, Humphrey draws the following lesson: "Never, ever do tulle outdoors." A broader conclusion from all these tales of wedding-day fails might be that we can only do our best to anticipate as many as we reasonably can -- and let karma take care of the rest. Even if the perfect day turns out much less than perfect, the thing that went stupendously wrong can supply a pretty funny story to pass on to our offspring.



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Home, sweet home

Exploring the reasons homeowners love their homes

by Francesca Ortolono

WHEN YOU PURCHASE a home, you are investing in much more than just a physical space. You can be finding an emotional refuge where you feel comfort, security, and a sense of belonging. Homes are repositories of cherished memories and the backdrop to life's most significant moments. Many people feel deep connections with their homes, an affection rooted in a myriad of factors.

Why do some people love their homes with so great a degree of intensity? How do certain spaces seem to become so integral a part of their owners' identity?



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At the core of the love many homeowners feel for their home is its familiarity, the comforting embrace that surrounds them within its four walls. Home is a haven where we can unwind, be ourselves, and find solace. The sense of security provided by a familiar environment allows us to navigate the challenges of the outside world with greater confidence, knowing that we can return to a place where we are unconditionally accepted.

Celeste S., a homeowner in Kerhonkson, calls her home her sanctuary. "No matter what happens while I'm out in the world," Celeste said, "coming back to my home always makes me feel better."

"Returning home" has positive symbolism often stemming from one's childhood development. It runs deep in the heart.

Personalized space

One's home is also a canvas for one's self-expression, a reflection of personal tastes, interests and experiences. Every element, from the choice of furniture to the art work on the walls, tells a story.

The ability to personalize one's living space creates a sense of ownership and identity, turning a house into a true home. When Alice F. from Modena purchased



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her home, she immediately painted the interior to the colors that best matched her taste. Alice said, "Putting my own touches on this house really made it a home -- my home."

Whether it's an entire kitchen redo just the way you imagined, a simple collection of travel mementos, or a wall adorned with family photographs, these added elements express who you are. They not only make the space visually appealing but also serve as constant reminders of the homeowner's journey and the things they hold dear.

Homes are witnesses to the passage of time, silently accumulating memories. It's where your child took their first steps, where your family gathers for holiday celebrations, and where your friends come together for laughter and companionship.

"Upstairs in our home holds a small loft space that has become very sweet for our son," Jillian and Thomas Carney from Highland explained. "It's a special space where his gliding chair is placed as it overlooks our living room."

For Jillian, it was the place that "many tender moments filled with lullabies happened there."

Thomas said the home's open floor plan invited engagement, it was perfect when they hosted parties. With its exposed wooden beams, stone fireplace, and tall windows, he felt the great room "has the



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perfect aesthetic for our growing family.”

Nostalgia plays a powerful role in shaping our love for our homes. Each room holds snippets of the past. Experiences become memories, both joyous and challenging, contributing to the deep emotional connection homeowners feel toward their homes.

A living, breathing entity

Simple, everyday rituals can significantly impact one's attachment to their home. Rituals establish a comforting rhythm in daily life. Think of the morning routine of sipping coffee on the porch,

The love for one's home is woven with threads of comfort, personalization, memories and ritual.

the smell of a home-cooked meal,, or the ambiance created by a crackling fireplace in the winter,

Jacob and Natsha H. first-time homeowners from Kingston, appreciate their rituals. “We absolutely love lounging in our cozy living room curled up in the warmth of our sofa together sipping coffee while watching the birds out our picture window.”

It's in these spaces that one can truly relax and shed the burdens of the day to recharge for tomorrow's endeavors. The



Above, Jillian and Thomas in front of their cozy fireplace; left, a child's room holds memories shaped by the love and comfort they feel in it.

consistency of routines contributes to a feeling of stability and permanence, fostering a deep appreciation for the familiar and the predictable.

Here's a ritual of my very own.

At my house, one of our garages has an automatic door opener. When I pull into the garage after a day on

the road, the sound of the door closing seems to signal to my tummy that it's hungry.

I noticed that it was only after the door started to close that my tummy started to growl. I concluded that the anticipation of my husband's delicious home-cooked meals was wired into the sound of the door closing.

Home can become a retreat where individuals can rely on the constancy of their routines to ground them in the midst of life's uncertainties.

In the tapestry of human experience, the love for one's home is woven with threads of comfort, personalization, memories and ritual. It's a complex and deeply emotional connection that transcends the physical structure of a house. A home is a living, breathing entity, shaped by the lives and experiences of those who inhabit it.

As we navigate the world, facing its challenges and embracing its joys, home ownership can provide us a steadfast companion in which we can find solace, celebrate triumphs, and weather storms. Home is the place where the heart resides, and the love we have for ours can be proof of the enduring power of the spaces we create to call our own.

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Francesca Ortolano is a local licensed real estate salesperson who can be emailed at francesca.ortolano@randrealty.com.

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Planning your own wedding?

Here's how I did mine without completely losing my mind

by MK Scully

A disclaimer: I am a highly anxious person. My now-husband often claims he can sense me “vibrating” even as I’m trying to exude nonchalance. I have been compared on more than one occasion to a small bird, frantically cheeping and flapping my wings over things that may never even happen.

I am terrible at meditating and addicted to my phone. So please do not adopt a patronizing tone toward me. I do not think of myself as a wellness influencer, achieving inner peace while cashing my latest five-figure check from AdSense. These are merely some hopefully helpful tips for staying sane in the eye of the hurricane that is wedding planning.

My husband and I got married October



1, 2022 in a beautiful outdoor ceremony that took under 15 minutes and included exactly zero religious references. In attendance were nearly 150 of our nearest and dearest. The subsequent reception lasted well past midnight and has been called “the best wedding I’ve ever been to” by multiple guests not known to exaggerate.

So whether you’re recently engaged and already stressed, or in the home stretch and trying not to panic, I’d like to offer a few humble insights on how I, an anxious flapping bird of a person, pulled off an unforgettable wedding and actually managed to enjoy the planning process.

A small lifestyle change or two may be in order

For me, that was quitting caffeine. It was my then-fiance’s idea, actually. Sometime around May 2022 I was crawling out of my skin. I have a thriving side hustle in the wedding industry myself, as well as working a regular Monday-Friday job, The the



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effort of maintaining my performance at work while keeping all the details of my many clients' weddings in my head alongside my own was taking a serious toll on my mental health. I was edgy, highly emotional and overwhelmed.

I had never considered scaling back my coffee intake. It was not, in my opinion, even that extreme -- one, sometimes two cups a day. Surely that wasn't making much of a difference. But I felt so terrible that I was willing to try anything.

I quit cold turkey, which was brutal and unnecessary: I could have started by going down to half-caf, or weaning off with green tea. But I chose the path of most resistance, and even so, after a week or so of withdrawal, I began to notice a marked reduction in my baseline level of anxiety.

I was sleeping more soundly and no longer experiencing a daily 2 p.m. crash. I had to admit that cutting caffeine out of my life, at least temporarily, had been a wise choice.

Slow down

We got engaged in June 2021, and I began planning pretty much immediately. Working in the industry, I'd seen firsthand how far in advance vendors can book out. I have no regrets about locking in our beautiful venue or awesome caterers right away. But I did learn that in some areas it's best to take a beat before you book.

Case in point: I booked the first hairstylist I spoke to who had my date available. After a disastrous "hair trial" wherein the stylist used dirty tools, gave me a 2000s prom curly half-updo when I had asked

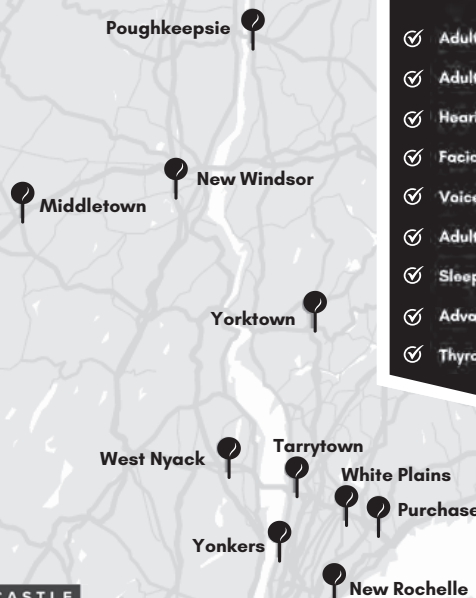


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for a windswept Brigitte Bardot look, she spent most of our hour together sharing her conspiracy theories about vaccines, I was forced to admit to myself that my choice had been a mistake.

Make sure your vendors are the right ones for you, not just the only ones available.

Plan your own wedding, not a Pinterest one

And hey, if your wedding is a Pinterest wedding, you do you!



The point is, have fun with it. Decide what's really important to you and your partner, what fun or non-traditional extras would make it feel more like "you," and what traditional elements you could do without.

For us, flowers and cake felt superfluous. Our outdoor venue was already beautiful, my bridesmaids had gen-

erously offered to DIY bouquets and centerpieces with homegrown flowers, and our caterer was providing a copious assortment of desserts for our guests. Why not allocate that part of the budget to something else?

We got a party robot. We have no regrets (That's a man on stilts in an LED robot costume who dances, takes selfies and blasts a carbon dioxide cannon at your guests, if you were wondering).

We also decided that cocktail hour should come before the ceremony. We got all our formal photos out of the way before most of our guests arrived, and then we joined them for a drink and a

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snack.

As a wedding vendor, I've seen couples forego everything from speeches to parent dances to alcohol. What's important to one couple may be the last thing another couple cares about. And at the end of the day, your wedding should be designed to please you, not the judgmental bridal magazine editor in your head.

Ultimately, my wedding day was just as much of a happy blur as everyone told me it would be. I married the love of my life and spent the day and night celebrating with all of my favorite people.

When I woke the next morning, I wandered blearily in my pajamas back to the reception site to look for my misplaced bouquet (I never found it). I looked around at the remnants of the party and had a half-formed, hungover thought that I couldn't wait to plan another one.

The realization that I would never have to was bittersweet.

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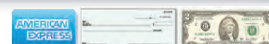
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