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Ecological

Make Your Big Day Big Time Green

By Kathryn Bechen

SO YOU WANT TO "GO GREEN" with your wedding and help save the planet, but you aren't sure where to begin? These eco-conscious couples and resources will help you get started.

When environmental attorney and educator Kate L. Harrison of New Haven, CT began planning her wedding in the fall of 2006, she and her environmental historian groom Barry Muchnick knew they wanted a celebration that was in line with their environmental values.

Harrison was frustrated that she couldn't find the resources she needed all in one place, so she simply compiled all her personal notes and research and wrote the "bible" on the subject, *The Green Bride Guide*, (available Fall of 2008 by Sourcebooks, Inc.) and its companion website and blog www.TheGreenBrideGuide.com, which provides brides a "Look Book" of green vendors complete with online links, as well as feature stories of Real Green Weddings from around the country.

Like shamrocks, Harrison said "weddings come in many shades of green." She wants couples to know that they can have a positive impact on the planet and have a beautiful wedding. "With two and one-half million weddings every year in the U.S., Harrison said, "If every couple did just one green thing, the positive effect on our planet would be enormous."

Just a few ways Harrison and Muchnik incorporated green elements into their Hudson Valley, NY wedding included using locally grown organic food, flowers from their own and neighbors' gardens, her mother's hall rug as an aisle runner, soy candles, reusable linens, and solar path lighting for guests to get to their cars.

Harrison purchased her dress used and after her wedding she donated it to *Brides Against Breast Cancer* at www.BridesAgainstBreastCancer.org. Instead of a tuxedo, her groom wore his great uncle's suit and bridesmaids wore dresses they already owned in colors chosen by the bride.

In lieu of gifts, the couple registered for experiences at

CEREMONY & RECEPTIONS

www.TheBigDay.com and with www.IDoFoundation.org, so that guests could donate directly to charities of their choice.

San Diego-based green wedding planner Lori Pearce, Senior Event Manager for *Plan It Green*, is also on a passionate mission to educate people about the impact weddings are making on the planet. "In four hours, the average wedding creates 800 pounds of trash," she said. "We show couples how they can reduce that load and have a beautiful wedding." Pearce donates much of her own personal time speaking about green weddings at social functions and civic organizations.

Plan It Green founder Rick Halperin has been in the environmental support industry for thirty years. The company offers green services such as a \$250 one hour consult which includes a list of 250 green vendors; another program which includes the initial one hour consult, the list of green vendors, and "month of the wedding" planning for \$1000 to \$1500 depending on the wishes of the couple; or a full service year-long wedding planning package for \$2500 to \$4000 which includes a complete environmental impact report.

Pearce wants couples to know that planning a green wedding doesn't have to be difficult or any more expensive than a non-green wedding. "Sometimes it's just a matter of utilizing the money you spend in a different way," she said. "Costs can be reduced by five to fifteen percent depending on the couple's choices and some vendors even give environmental discounts."

An increase in the interest of green weddings over the past year and a half has bloomed, Pearce said, and she feels about five to fifteen percent of couples are making an effort to go green. "People generally want to do good and will do so if it's easy for them. *Plan It Green* makes it easy."

The wedding site is the biggest way couples can go green and help reduce waste, according to Pearce. "Some sites have fuel cells that use natural resources that produce their own energy instead of using electricity or burning gas, and couples can request environmental impact reports from any site they choose."

Pearce indicated that the second biggest source of wedding waste is catering due to the aluminum foil, Styrofoam, and plastic wrap. She works with environmental caterers that use reusable



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lids, biodegradable plastic wrap, and paper cups that eat up landfill bacteria. They compost their waste and recycle it, use organic foods from farms that are pesticide free, and keep their refrigeration at an environmentally friendly level. Plan It Green even has a “green odometer” for their vendors that rates their “level” of green.

Plan It Green offers several suggestions for how couples can go green. “Buy a wedding dress made from natural fibers such as silk or organic cotton that did not take chemicals to produce, check to make sure your dress drycleaner is using environmentally friendly cleaners, ask your photographer if he or she uses film or digital, and purchase environmental offsets to plant trees.”

Invitations can be printed with soy ink on recycled paper with seeds embedded in it that guests can take home and plant, according to Pearce, and soy candles now are available in many sizes and colors. Couples can also politely request their guests not wrap gifts to reduce environmental paper waste.

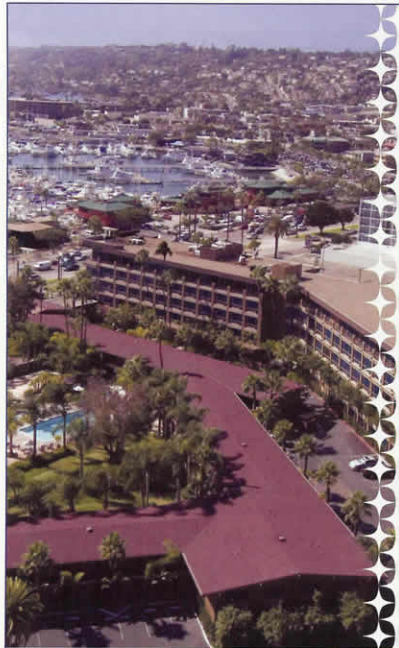
Paula Rae of *Rae Florae* in San Diego said, “Green is hip right now, but it’s really not just a fad because mainstream society is realizing that this is how we always need to do business to help

our planet.”

Rae said it is a misconception among brides that green floral arrangements have to have an austere and “twigs with no color” look. On the contrary, she uses a rainbow of colors in her floral arrangements and wants brides to know that “having a green wedding can still look very elegant and traditional. It’s just a matter of which flowers are chosen,” she said. In addition, floral vases can also be made out of recycled glass or other attractive containers.

During her first appointment with a bride, Rae determines what that individual bride’s personal vision for going green is and how far she wants to take it, depending on her level of social and ecological responsibility, and then they plan together from there. She educates them on deciding whether they want to use local organic flowers or exotic ones that must be shipped from far away and require fuel in the shipping process.

Rae uses vendors in San Diego and Baja, Mexico as “local” vendors for organic flowers. Easily obtainable local organic flowers include gerber daisies, roses, sunflowers, orchids, stock flower,



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isanthus, and some lilacs. Local organic flowers in general are not more expensive, she said, because they have to be competitive in the market. The most expensive flowers are the ones that have to be flown in from other countries.

When San Diego couple Hans Gienapp and Shannon Rankin married, they were committed to incorporating some green elements into their wedding. Their wedding, garden party, and Mother's Day brunch were all orchestrated using www.evite.com to invite their guests, rather than sending paper invitations. "We had a few questions from guests, but most people are now technically inclined enough that it worked great," Gienapp said. "My bride and I were definitely were both adamant about paperless invitations."

Rankin is a marine mammal biologist, so no endangered fish were served at their reception meal, and most of the entrees were vegetarian. They also requested that their flowers be locally organically grown and not shipped in from a long distance. "We tried to practice locally what we want to see globally," Gienapp said, "And we feel like we were able to stay true to who we are as people by incorporating green elements, yet we still had a

beautiful wedding."

How are you and your guests going to get to your big green event? *Wherever Transportation*, a San Diego-based charter shuttle service, will take you there in style while saving the planet.

Owners Bruno Mora and Ryan Wilcox are two young entrepreneurs who have turned recycled vegetable oil into a transportation art form. After purchasing a Mercedes Benz sedan and also a van, they had www.LoveCraftBiofuels.com of Los Angeles perform an engine conversion on both vehicles, enabling them to run on recycled vegetable oil instead of gasoline. Restaurant owners who are friends of theirs provide them with used vegetable oil, which they then filter.

Wedding guests who ride with *Wherever Transportation* receive free water, a satellite TV, and a video about San Diego.

When your big day is finally over and you're putting away all your wedding "stuff," there's still one more opportunity to go green. Head on over to www.RecycleYourWedding.com, list your used wedding items on their website, and you'll help the next newlywed couple save the planet too. ✨



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