

Say “I Do” to an Unconventional Wedding

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Photos by Pat Robinson Photography

COUPLES TODAY FEEL FREE TO
KEEP SOME WEDDING TRADITIONS
WHILE CREATING OTHERS
OF THEIR OWN.

WHEN FORD MARRIED LIZ—EXOTIC-ANIMAL nurse and former zookeeper—he embraced her love of creatures. With help from local bird whisperer Phung Luu, soaring owls and parrots graced the aisle at their wedding. Thrilling their guests, sun conures—small parrots with brilliant yellow and green plumage—joined the bride and groom after their vows, making wedding photos and memories spectacular.

As millennials, creative, unconventional and fun-loving couples plan their special day, some keep traditions that are meaningful, but toss others as brides once tossed the bouquet. They're saying good-bye to Saturday ceremonies, fluffy white wedding cakes and gowns and ... throwing the bouquet.

Today's couples are inviting guests to festivities in unique venues with *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter* and dinosaur themes. They're dishing up special food, flowers and entertainment over a full weekend or making a Thursday night extraordinary.

A LOVE STORY THAT SHINES

Just out of college in 1963, Isaiah married Julia. At that time—before joining the Peace Corps, returning to Philadelphia, and transforming a community through their love of art—Isaiah had no idea what magical moments he would provide for Philly-area couples decades later.

Using found objects and folk art, Isaiah created Philadelphia's Magic Gardens. There, in 2006, the Zagars renewed their vows among his mirrored and stained-glass mosaics, enchanting staircases and glittering treasures.

Today Philadelphia's Magic Gardens hosts weddings that sparkle and shine like no others.

For one wedding, the garden was the charmed site for vows under twinkle lights, breakfast food for dinner, dessert from an ice

cream truck and sparkler send-off. Newlyweds held hands walking alluring paths, danced in the courtyard, and shared a kiss by the word “kiss.” Guests were enthralled.

If a dinosaur in top hat and bow tie is your preferred greeter, marry at the Delaware Museum of Natural History and let your imagination run wild. A Tyrannosaurus rex skull sculpture dons twinkle lights or a floral crown. *Jurassic Park's* music theme becomes the recessional.

One bride made centerpieces from ostrich eggs, evoking images of dinosaur eggs. Naturally, she saved one for the bridal party's pre-ceremony breakfast.

LOVE AT FIRST BITE

If an ice cream truck doesn't suit your taste, Honey Bee Sweets and Treats offers unsurpassed dessert tables. Tiers of French macarons and pyramid stacks of donuts—honey-lavender glazed or chocolate topped with strawberries—delight all ages.

Serock Catering has conveyed couples' stories through food at the Elmwood Zoo, vineyards, barns, Power Plant Productions—at



Funky getaway cars, flowered bridesmaid dresses, summer suits for groomsmen, and pets in the wedding party—you'll likely see them at this season's weddings.



Bright flowers and informal arrangements are the choice of many modern brides.



the old Wilbur Chocolate factory—and other venues. John Serock suggests sharing original or unusual fare at cocktail hour. While couples might be foodies, Grandma might prefer to avoid a seared raw tuna steak at the reception dinner, he says. Serock, along with a Philly bride and Chicago groom, designed cocktail hour food stations to bring family and friends together over mini Philly cheesesteaks and pretzel bites, and mini Chicago pizzas.

Couples are also accommodating dietary restrictions creatively. A gluten-sensitive bride enjoyed Serock's wedding "cake"—cheese wheels decorated with figs, berries, grapes and flowers.

Oxford's Neuchatel Chocolates has the sweetest gifts and favors around. Their chocolate high heels and wine bottles filled with truffles make great bridal party gifts. Bowls of Neuchatel's fair-trade chocolates are coveted additions to party tables.

SOMETHING PINK, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BORROWED, SOMETHING BLUE

Sabrina Ann Couture sees brides who are less traditional, more relaxed and comfortable expressing individuality through unique wedding gowns. They're selecting dresses in shades of blush or ballet pink, adding bright sashes and accessorizing with floral wreaths instead of veils.

Inventive brides are also choosing ankle-length dresses to show off their fabulous stilettos, crystal foot jewelry for beach ceremonies, rhinestone-enhanced ankle tattoos, and Lirika Matoshi's

dazzling crystal-studded tulle glam socks with either vintage or new high heels.

Some are saying yes to barefoot sandals after kicking off heels on the dance floor or for outdoor weddings. Blue barefoot sandals hand-crocheted by Ally for her upcoming nuptials at the family farm got such a favorable response that they're now available from her Trinity Willows Etsy shop.

Finally, the groom's best man isn't the only one in a bow tie. A white leash and bow tie make his best friend the wedding's best dressed dog.

As for jewelry, choices extend beyond the classic Tiffany solitaire. There's an uptick in rose gold (adding copper creates the rosy glow), a smattering of colored gems (think Kate Middleton's sapphire) or pricey colored diamonds (like Blake Lively's pink sparkler).

Increasingly, millennials are foregoing a big engagement bauble and opting for a unique wedding band, in a design with personal meaning for the couple, says Michael Cook of Paoli's Walter J. Cook Jeweler. Custom designs may also include mixing metals, or different cuts and colors of stones so the ring's setting is distinctive, says Cook.

ADORED AND ADORNED

Anna never thought much about weddings until she met her beloved Sean. With few expectations, they've been intentional about keeping or changing traditions for their August celebration. Along



A wedding “cake” of cheese. Why not? Great for gluten-free couples.
PHOTO COURTESY: SEROCK CATERING



The perfect cake topper for a wedding at the DE Museum of Natural History.
PHOTO COURTESY: DE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY



More inventive ways to integrate flowers.
PHOTO COURTESY: MATLACK FLORIST, BARTLETT PAIR PHOTOGRAPHY

with bridesmaids, Anna has a man of honor; Sean’s female friends and brothers are his attendants. Their multi-event day honors family and friends they adore.

Starting with their processional, an electric guitar version of Stevie Wonder’s “I Believe,” their morning family wedding accommodates older relatives who don’t drive at night. Friends are flocking to their evening party by the pool, with dancing and—since Anna and Sean are musicians—a jam session.

Decorating reception tables, bridesmaids’ hairdos and attendants’ jackets are colorful satin flowers Anna fashioned. In the works: a matching satin sash to adorn her white gown.

Ally and Steve, too, are focused on bringing together loved ones. Their wedding weekend will include bonfire s’mores and a dinner where everyone brings a favorite dish plus the recipe to make a keepsake cookbook.

ROMANCE BLOOMS

Some brides express unique personalities through wedding flowers as well, says Cameron Peters Floral Design. Hot pink and jewel tones replace whites and creams for bouquets. Floral hoops hang from ceilings. Table centerpieces become favors for attendees. Wildflowers add to the mix.

Matlack Florist helps couples use plants in innovative ways: planting trees instead of lighting unity candles to join families; creating walls of greenery—ferns and succulents—for nuptial backgrounds; and draping lanterns with flowers to hang from trees at outdoor celebrations.

For out-of-season or unusual flowers, or butterflies that won’t flit away, origami bouquets and boutonnieres are the solution.

OVER THE MOON

Unconventional finales send newlyweds off with panache—sparklers, bubbles and balloons. They head to grand honeymoons in exotic Africa, Asia, or Australia, says WhirlAway Travel. Or they take a minimoon—a weekend resort trip within driving distance—until they have time and resources for a bigger vacation, especially if they’ve traveled for their bachelor’s and bachelorette’s parties.

For pre-nuptial destination parties, most couples bypass Vegas and choose fun towns like Austin, Nashville or New Orleans. Others opt for local but unusual activities, like duck hunting at Thousand Acre Farm in Middleton, Delaware. Mostly bachelor groups head for this prime location near the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal for water fowl. An afternoon of hunting in the marshland duck blinds (one has heat and electricity) followed by a wild game dinner with beer and bourbon tastings before cards, pool and hanging out.

Meanwhile, the bachelorettes may do a full spa day, bridal boot camp session or wine tasting. Something for every taste!

Donuts, dinosaurs, magic gardens and minimoons. As original as weddings may be, the love behind “I do” still endures. ♦



Clockwise from top left: Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens host weddings that sparkle. PHOTO COURTESY: ALLEBACH PHOTOGRAPHY. Animal guests of all kinds join the party—unplanned and planned. PARROT PHOTO COURTESY: DAVID HILLIARD SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY. Serve your signature cocktail from a converted horse trailer, not a hotel bar. Rings of rose gold and colored stones are on the rise.