

From White Weddings To Green Weddings: Planning An Eco-Friendly Affair

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In recent years there has been a noticeable shift toward environmental awareness in nearly every aspect of one's life. Weddings are now following suit, but that doesn't mean paying more to "go green."

Kimberly Goetz, a wedding and event planner in Long Beach and proponent of eco-friendly weddings, says a general misconception about green weddings is that they tend to be more expensive.

"The biggest thing that they're afraid of is that there is going to be an increased price tag to their wedding," Goetz says. "I try to work creatively with them . . . [to] offset some of those costs."

With fewer couples hosting their nuptials in a place of worship, outdoor weddings are increasingly popular. Goetz says she likes to suggest taking the ceremony to a local beach for a beautiful backdrop and to cut down energy and transportation costs.

"As an information source, a wedding planner should be able to save a bride money instead of costing her more," she says. "I find that I can offset a lot of those costs that she might incur with having a green wedding with some sensible decision-making."

Other options are venues in the Los Angeles area that are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certified. Eco-friendly venues include places like SmogShoppe, a 100 percent solar-powered location that may be the greenest event space in Los Angeles.

With the new decade upon us, the importance of going green has become even more personal, making brides and grooms think about their carbon footprint before they walk down the aisle. Carbon footprint describes the amount of carbon dioxide produced by a person, place or event and is a measurement for the environmental impacts of that.

Couples can determine their ceremony's environmental impact using online carbon footprint calculators. Carbon Fund has one specifically for weddings on its site, www.carbonfund.org. Goetz says the organization also allows couples to use its carbon credit donation option. The option to purchase carbon offsets, which pay for efficient energy resources and the study of alternative energy, can make the wedding party feel good while not skimping on their important occasion.

"People have a conscience about this, I think, when you offer them opportunities to feel better about what they're doing for the planet and for their guests," Goetz says. This day represents the bride and groom and their value system. It not only has a theme that goes with it, [but] it represents to the rest of their friends and family their values."



Annatarian, an eco-friendly fashion brand, creates custom eco-bridal gowns for brides who want to wear an eco-effective design. Annatarian's mission is to promote peace, love and understanding through art and fashion. For more information on her dresses, visit www.annatarian.com. (Photo courtesy of Anna Mkhitarian)

Going green can make any wedding more personal, and one key element of every wedding is the dress. Wedding fashion can be eco-friendly, too.

Anna Mkhitarian, an artist and fashion designer in Los Angeles,

creates eco-bridal gowns through her line Annatarian. Eco-bridal gowns are made from remnants of fabric from vintage pieces – or maybe your mother’s dress – to create a unique and truly personal garment. Mkhitarian says she has incorporated family heirlooms and antique jewelry into wedding gowns.

“A lot of times the brides want more natural fabrics,” she says. “We’re a little bit different from other eco-friendly companies where we look at the bigger holistic picture. So it’s not only incorporating being friendly to the environment, but also adding a health and spiritual aspect to the whole thing.”

To do this, Mkhitarian’s dresses are lined with natural materials, such as peace silk, hemp and organic cotton.

“We like to focus on having natural fibers touch the skin and [it] being breathable.”

Mkhitarian says she sees a trend in the wedding industry of couples moving beyond the decadence and consumption to a more personal, sustainable wedding.

“Not only is it hip, the whole eco-thing, but there’s a shift in just the way people are looking at how they live and what they eat,” she says, “and marriage is a huge part of somebody’s life.”

Chef Paul Buchanan agrees. His catering business, Primal Alchemy, uses farm-fresh, locally grown food items to create delicious meals.

“In my own catering business and in our lives, people are aware of it, but some people are walking the walk just a little bit more than others, knowing what we do affects the earth,” Buchanan says.

Primal Alchemy caters corporate events, weddings and even more intimate meals, serving anywhere from 3,000 people to a couple.

“Whatever the size of the event, we try to focus on the fact that we’re using local ingredients, seasonal, and try to have the least impact as possible as far as generating trash,” Buchanan says.

Primal Alchemy focuses on making the lowest environmental impact by using utensils and dishes that can be reused, recycled or composted.

If catering green isn’t your style, try using eco-friendly favors. Options can range from giving organic almonds to guests to having potted plants as centerpieces that can go home with them. An option Goetz suggests is to have attendees donate money to the National Arbor Foundation, which will plant a tree in their name.

Transportation between the ceremony and reception can still be classy and energy efficient. Driven Eco provides green chauffeured transportation in alternative-fuel or hybrid luxury vehicles. The company doesn’t use any stretch vehicles, only sedans and SUVs.

Ed Stapleton, co-owner and vice president of Driven Eco, says a popular mode of transportation for green weddings is the Toyota Prius.

“It makes a statement,” he says. “It’s not the stretch pulling up; it’s a Prius. So it’s like the ultimate statement for the green wedding. We’ve also done it with compressed natural gas vehicles, with Lexuses, but the Prius seems to be the popular car for weddings.”

For more information on green weddings, check out <http://long-beachweddinglounge.com>. ■