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MAGAZINE

BLOOMINGTON

*Wedding
Guide*

2008



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Fabulous Weddings

A LOT OF GREAT IDEAS

5 COUPLES. 5 WEDDINGS. 5 DISTINCTIVE EVENTS THAT REFLECTED THE PERSONAL STYLES OF THE BRIDES AND GROOMS.

Five couples who were recently married in Bloomington agreed to share their love stories and the details of their weddings. Each told us how they met, what was best about their big days, and how they worked together to create a dream celebration that captured the essence of their personalities. The five weddings are as distinctive as their love stories: Gautam Kharkar and Alissa Gerrish had a traditional Indian ceremony, complete with Indian attire and with the groom arriving by horse and carriage. Erin Dunn and Ryan Bledsoe, who met at Indiana University, celebrated with an on-campus reception in their favorite college town. Kate Fleming and James Halaris wanted a fun wedding with a classy, all-appetizer dinner menu and a Greek rehearsal dinner in honor of James' heritage. Tom Sienkowski and Jessica Ries planned a laidback affair that brought together friends from 21 states and three foreign countries. Adrian Reid and Rebecca Martinez, who met through their church, had a traditional church wedding with a reception dinner that honored Rebecca's Mexican heritage. Their stories are packed with great ideas that can be applied to special events and weddings of all kinds. Some couples went all out in every area, while others found ways to save money on some things and spend more on others that were more important to them.

All five couples agreed on one thing: their wedding days exceeded their expectations.

COVER: PHOTO BY KEVIN MONAHAN FLOWERS BY ARTFUL BLOOMS

{WEDDING NO.1}

A BIG

Fun

WEDDING WITH GREEK OVERTONES



The wedding kiss: Kate Fleming
and James Halaris. Photos by
Kevin Monahan



Kate with her bridesmaids. Flowers by artful blooms.

When Kate Fleming first locked eyes with James Halaris across a crowded room at Nick's English Hut, she noticed his model good looks, but didn't expect to actually meet him.

When it was time to go home, "I bade goodbye to my friends and turned to leave," Kate recalls. "James was standing there, and said, 'Don't you think we should at least introduce ourselves?'"

The conversation went on into the wee hours of the morning. They walked around campus talking all the while. Kate learned that James' father had come to America from Greece in 1969, and that James was in Bloomington for a weeklong MBA residency program at IU. James learned that Kate was a 2001 IU graduate and general manager of Macri's Deli.

When they parted so James could make a 7 am bus back to his job at John Deere in the Quad Cities, Kate called her mother. "I said, 'Mom, I just met this amazing guy and he's leaving town!' She said, 'Honey, it's four in the morning. Go back to bed—you'll hear from him.'"



The bride's great uncle, Carlyle "Bud" Wilson, performed readings from Genesis and Matthew.

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The rehearsal dinner took place in the "Secret Garden" at the Indiana Memorial Union (IMU) courtyard.

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She heard the next day. They began a long-distance relationship that was sustained by James' frequent visits to Bloomington. When James proposed in January with a ring that he'd had specially designed, they decided to get married as soon as possible. Only after booking their venues did they realize the wedding date, August 18, was the anniversary of their first official date.

Indiana Memorial Union event planner Bari Kuhlman helped coordinate a Greek rehearsal dinner, a nod to James' Greek heritage, in the picturesque garden behind IMU. On the menu were Greek salad, Mediterranean skewers, and marinated wild salmon with orzo. Stephen Sobiech played acoustic guitar and photographers Kevin and Alicia Monahan captured the whole evening.

The wedding ceremony and reception took place at the IU Auditorium, which was decorated in the chocolate, cerise, and apple-green wedding colors. Kate walked down the aisle with both of her parents, while James' groomsmen were his father and brother and Kate's two brothers.

Each guest was acknowledged on the program. "It was a great mix of our closest friends and family," Kate says. "They're all people we fully expect to have a relationship with ten years from now."

Local pianist and singer/songwriter Jenn Cristy, a former backup singer for John Mellencamp, sang during the ceremony and performed with her band during the reception. "She has an amazing, soulful voice," Kate says.



The coordinated linens were provided by IMU with table design by wedding planner Pat Bailey and IMU's wedding coordinator Bari Kuhlman.

The couple wanted a “fun, mingly” dinner that reflected their personalities, says Kuhlman, so they chose an hors d’oeuvres menu that included a mashed potato martini bar (mashed potatoes in martini glasses with various toppings), spinach-artichoke dip with baguettes, hummus and tapenade, stuffed mushrooms, crab cakes, coconut chicken, and petite sandwiches with dipping sauces.

When it was time to cut the cake—vanilla with chocolate ganache and flowers from BLU Boy Chocolate Café and Cakery—they used a cake cutter that had been in James’ family for 90 years and used in 11 weddings. A dessert buffet full of Kate’s favorite Special K chewies, cupcakes, and cookies to match the wedding colors rounded out the meal.

“I loved all of it,” Kate says. “There’s nothing I would change about our wedding.”—*Jennifer Piurek*



(left) The dessert table, courtesy of IMU catering, and (right) the cake from BLU Boy Café & Cakery.

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A COOL, {WEDDING NO.2}

Classic WEDDING



Erin Dunn and bridesmaid, flowers by artful blooms. Photos by Kevin Swan

Even before they met as undergrads at Indiana University, Erin Dunn and Ryan Bledsoe seemed destined to cross paths: Erin's dad and Ryan's uncle were Phi Delta Theta fraternity brothers at IU and after Erin was born, both Ryan's uncle and grandmother came to visit her.

Fast forward to 2001, when Erin and Ryan were set up by friends at IU. From their first date—dinner and rollerskating—they knew there was something effortless and special about the relationship.

After college, the pair maintained a long-distance relationship for three years before Erin moved to North Carolina, where Ryan is a sales representative for Baxter Healthcare. (Ryan is also pursuing an MBA from Duke University; Erin is a clothing buyer for Family Dollar.)

When the two became engaged in 2005, they knew they wanted to return to Bloomington for the wedding.

They planned their nuptials with help from Erin's mom and Pat Bailey, owner of



(left) Erin Dunn and Ryan Bledsoe at the First Christian Church where Erin's grandparents were married in 1939.

(right) Bride and bridegroom stroll on campus.

(below) The happy bridesmaids.

social butterfly (and associate publisher of *Bloom*). Bailey helped connect them with vendors, including photographer Kevin Swan, baker David Fletcher of BLU Boy Chocolate Café & Cakery, florist Karen Pacific of artful blooms, and event planner Bari Kuhlman at Indiana Memorial Union.

Erin's bridesmaids wore chocolate brown gowns and carried vibrant hand-tied bouquets of lisianthus, lavender mini calla lilies, magenta orchids, and purple dahlias offset by privet berries. "I showed Karen a picture of a bouquet in a magazine, and what she created was better than the original pictures!" Erin says.

The September 2007 ceremony took place at First Christian Church, a sentimental choice for the family; Erin's grandparents were married there in 1939.

Dramatic lighting transformed the space at the Alumni Hall reception, infusing the room with splashes of brilliant color, and a band played Frank Sinatra and swing tunes during dinner and cocktail hour.

Photographer Kevin Swan shadowed the wedding party from the time the women were getting ready in the morning until the last dance of the evening, taking a combination of posed, natural, and artistic, abstract photographs.



Other subtle touches helped personalize the wedding. IMU's Kuhlman coordinated Capriole cheese plates, a "performance salad" created by four chefs, and a midnight pizza snack. The cake was a rich chocolate masterpiece with sour cherry filling and fondant icing. And instead of a toast from the maid of honor, Erin asked her brother to do the honors.



Marrying in Bloomington with all of their friends and family was especially meaningful for Ryan. "The whole weekend was incredible," he said. "We had our closest family and friends at our rehearsal dinner at the Uptown Cafe, and that night we met up with all of our college friends at Nick's English Hut. The weather was ideal, 70 degrees. I know everyone says their day was perfect, but ours really was."—Jennifer Piurek

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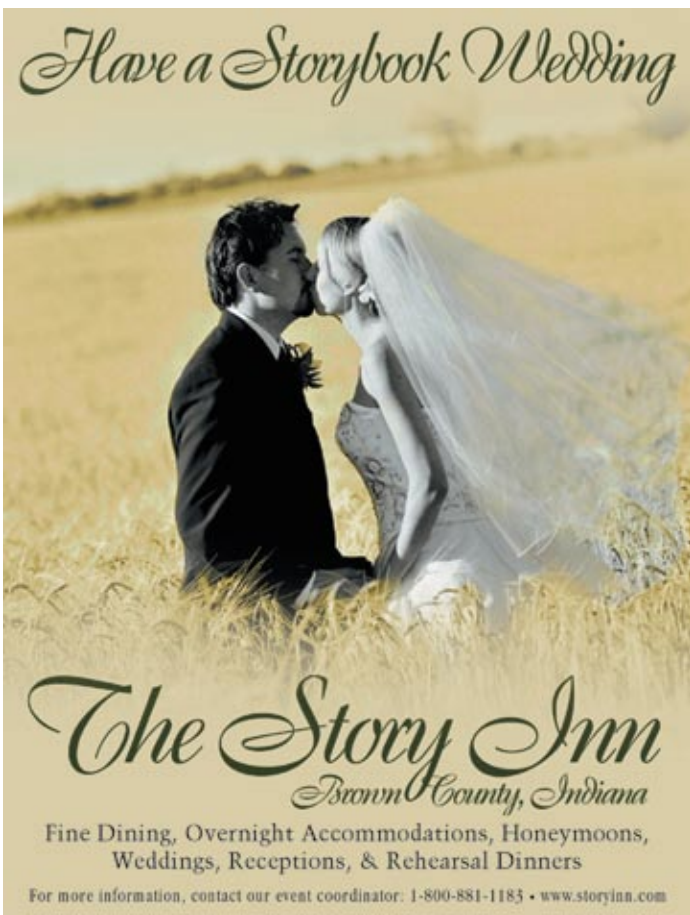
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{ WEDDING NO.3 }

A
Traditional
Indian
WEDDING



The official wedding portrait of Gautam Kharkar and Alissa Gerrish.
Photos by Ball-Spencer Photography

The marriage of Gautam Kharkar and Alissa Gerrish wasn't just a celebration of their love—it was a meshing of two cultures.

The two have known each other since they were children growing up in Bloomington. Alissa is a good friend of Gautam's younger sister Geeta. But it wasn't until Alissa graduated from college in Georgia and Gautam was a U.S. Naval officer stationed in Italy that their love story began.

Their lives reconnected in 2005 during coinciding visits to Bloomington. Soon after, they began a long-distance courtship that culminated with an engagement in August 2006. (Gautam is now earning an MBA from MIT Sloan School of Management in Cambridge, Mass., where Alissa works as a recruiter.)

Their families were thrilled with the match—and especially with the pair's ceremony ideas. Gautam's family is Hindu while Alissa's is Christian, and the couple planned a Hindu ceremony in Bloomington



The traditional Hindu ceremony was held at Deer Park Manor. The groom's parents traveled to India to bring back traditional wedding costumes, jewelry, and other essentials.

for May 19, 2007, and a Christian ceremony one week later in Atlanta, where Alissa's family now lives.

Gautam's parents, Ravi and Bharati Kharkar, handled the planning of the Hindu ceremony with the help of a local event planner and an Indian wedding coordinator from Chicago. Once the date was set, the Kharkars traveled to India to purchase traditional wedding costumes, jewelry, invitations, and other essentials.

"An Indian wedding is not just between the boy and the girl," Ravi says. "It is a family affair symbolizing Alissa coming to our home as a daughter. It is also a chance to have a good time."

On the big day, the Kharkars held a traditional Hindu ceremony followed by an Indian luncheon at Deer Park Manor, attended by 150 relatives and guests. Later that evening, a dinner reception took place at Bloomington Country Club with 225 guests.

A Hindu wedding ceremony is very festive, from the rhythmic music played at various times to the colorful costumes worn by the couple and their families. The bride never wears white—only widows do in Hindu culture—but rather chooses bright colors. Alissa donned a beautiful purple lehanga and veil that accented the gold jewelry given to her by Gautam's mother. The groom wore a traditional turban called a safa and an ivory costume called a sherwani.

Family members are essential participants in the ceremony. Early on, the bride's parents welcome the groom by giving him a place to sit, honey water to sip, and an offering of rice and flowers. Later, the groom's sister ties together one end of the groom's scarf to a corner of the bride's veil signifying eternal togetherness.



(above) The colorful wedding procession on the grounds of Deer Park Manor. (left) The 13-part Hindu wedding ceremony unites the two souls and joins the two families.

One of the most meaningful parts of the ceremony is the Saptapadi or the Seven Sacred Steps. Gautam and Alissa took seven steps together to symbolize the beginning of their journey through life, one step for each blessing: good livelihood, strength, prosperity, happiness, children, joy for all seasons, and lifelong friendship.

"The whole wedding really went well from start to finish," Alissa says. "There were a lot of moving parts, but the coordination between wedding planners and Gautam's family worked beautifully."—Ceci Jones Schrock

The 13-part Hindu wedding ceremony, or vivaha, is one of 16 sacraments prescribed by the Hindu scriptures. In the presence of God, family, and friends, these sacred vows of marriage signify the harmonious merging of two souls as well as the joining of two families.




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{ WEDDING NO.4 }

JUST A BIG, FUN



Bridegroom Tom Sienkowski's devotion to IU basketball is evident in this wedding photo as he takes a foul shot with the encouragement of his bride Jessica Ries and the wedding party.

There was no demanding, out-of-control bridezilla lurking at the wedding of Tom Sienkowski and Jessica Ries.

A self-described “laidback bride,” Jessica laughed at the notion of herself as a high-maintenance, difficult woman in white. Tom agreed. “Our theme was fun,” he said. “We wanted our guests to enjoy the day with good food and drink. Our wedding was basically just a big, fun party celebrating us.”

The couple, who met as IU sophomores, were originally set up by mutual friends and even endured a typically awkward blind date. A few weeks later, Tom invited Jessica to his fraternity's big luau party—and the couple never looked back. They dated all through college and both landed jobs in Bloomington after graduation. Tom works at Enterprise Rent-a-Car and Jessica as a manager at Applebee's.

In an emotional proposal on bended knee—and offering a Gold Casters diamond engagement ring—Tom set the wedding

wheels in motion in July 2006. After choosing the date, July 21, 2007, the fun theme got rolling with the couple's choice of vibrant colors: tangerine, apple green, and fuchsia. With a far-flung guest list (including family and friends from 21 states and three foreign countries, many of them IU grads), Bloomington was an ideal central location for the wedding.

They chose Deer Park Manor for the outdoor ceremony and the reception for 102 guests. With its 40-acre nature preserve featuring waterfalls, fountains, and gardens, Deer Park was a beautiful setting for the wedding and the accompanying photos.

“We spent a huge chunk of our budget on photography,” said Jessica. “It's the only thing you have forever—well, besides the marriage and the love.” Kevin Swan was their “wedding photojournalist” and he captured their special wedding moments without distracting them from the big day.

Tom's devotion to IU basketball even figured into the wedding photography. One of Jessica's customers at Applebee's, Chuck Crabb, is IU's assistant athletic director for facilities management overseeing Assembly Hall, and he graciously allowed the wedding party to pose there for shots—free throw shots, that is. Their wedding album features a priceless photo of a tuxedoed Tom poised at the free throw line, basketball in hand, Jessica beside him, while the wedding party anxiously waits on the sidelines.

Kristina Taylor of Icing on the Cake by Kristina in Nashville, Indiana, made the nontraditional wedding cake. Incorporating the couple's bright colors, her creation was modern with geometric shapes scattered across the fondant icing.

Tom and Jessica's fun theme was interspersed with some family traditions too. Jessica wore



Does it get any more romantic than this?



The outdoor ceremony at Deer Park Manor.

her great-grandmother's pearls, Tom carried a photo of his beloved grandmother in his breast pocket, and the knife used to cut the cake had been used at the wedding of Jessica's parents nearly 30 years ago.

After the ceremony, performed by Jimmy Moore of Bloomington's First United Methodist Church, the real fun began with three hours of dancing and revelry. The couple wrapped up their evening at Nick's English Hut, hanging out with their parents and friends before heading to the Grant Street Inn.

"When I think back to that day, all I can do is smile," said Jessica. "Everything was just so much more perfect than I planned."

—Ceci Jones Schrock

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{ WEDDING NO. 5 }

A FAITHFUL
Celebration
of Love

Their first date took place at a wedding, so you might say that Adrian Reid and Rebecca Martinez were fated to tie the knot.

The couple were friendly as members of the singles group at Sherwood Oaks Christian Church in 2005. Several post-church lunches and e-mail exchanges later, Rebecca invited Adrian to be her guest at a family wedding. That's when the sparks really started flying and, after months of dating, Adrian proposed in April 2006.

Rebecca and Adrian were more serious about their wedding than the average couple. "Our faith is at the center and core of who we are," said Rebecca. "As the first person in my family to have a 'real' wedding, with a dress and an official ceremony, this was more of a legacy thing for me. I didn't care about hair and nails—I just wanted a very traditional ceremony."



The happy bride Rebecca Martinez and flower girls, Olivia Ollis and Maddie Hartley. Photos by Lisa Walker



Rebecca and her new husband Adrian Reid, moments after exchanging vows at Sherwood Oaks Christian Church.

Hoping to get married by Christmas of the same year, the couple fast-tracked the wedding planning. Their demanding careers (he is the Bloomington city engineer and she is a tenure-track professor in the Indiana University School of Education) dictated a local wedding. After discovering a shortage of hotel rooms during the holiday season, the couple settled on a January 27, 2007, wedding date.

They negotiated a good off-season price at Bloomington Country Club for the reception, naturally chose Sherwood Oaks for the

ceremony, and then they needed to take care of all the little details. That's when things got tense. "I started doing all the wedding planning in May, and it was so stressful that I thought I might need a wedding planner," says Rebecca.

Enter Pat Bailey of social butterfly (and associate publisher of *Bloom*). Although Rebecca is not the sort of bride to sweat the small stuff, she felt she needed someone to stay on top of all the details. "Pat was the best investment we made," said Rebecca. "I know what I like but she knows how to do it."

With the details off her shoulders, now it was time for the bride to think about the dress. Rebecca found a strapless designer stunner that would have eaten up half of the wedding budget. With the help of local dress designer Margaret Fette of The Tailored Fit she got her dream dress at a quarter of the cost. Using a photo of the designer dress as a guide, Fette created her own design, complete with a beautiful silk bow at the waist and more than 150 hand sewn buttons along the back of the gown.

Although Adrian and Rebecca wanted a traditional wedding ceremony, they were pretty flexible about everything else. "We just wanted a classy, adult celebration of our love," said Rebecca. They chose simple colors (black, white, and splash of red), the

bridesmaids' dresses and wedding wrap were eBay purchases, and Rebecca's aunt served as official photographer. "I didn't even wear a tux," said Adrian. "Just a black suit."

The rehearsal dinner took place at Grant Street Inn, where the couple had blocked out rooms for their guests. With a nod toward Rebecca's Mexican heritage, El Norteño provided the food and Big Red Liquors the Mexican beer.

The next day, the groom treated his bride to a morning massage from Spaah!, and by evening those proverbial sparks were still flying: the 170 wedding guests waved sparklers as the happy couple walked into their reception on that wintry January night.—*Ceci Jones Schrock*



Bride and groom cut the cake. The reception was held at Bloomington Country Club.

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