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Committing to green

Wedding ceremony can be a model of environmental philosophy

By SUZANNE ELSTON, QMI AGENCY

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A bouquet of flowers from Shoshanna Saxe's green wedding: The blooms were local, pesticide-free, in season and gorgeous, provided by Eco-Florain reused container. Many were wildflowers.

January is a very busy month for planning weddings.

No wonder, as Christmas and New Year's are two of the most popular times of year to get engaged.

But more and more couples are opting to green their celebrations, both as way of demonstrating their commitment to the future, and also to the planet that sustains all life.

When Shoshanna Saxe and her fiancé started planning their wedding, there was no discussion about whether or not it would be green.

"We wanted our wedding to reflect how we feel about the world and our relationship to it," said Saxe, a civil engineer with a masters degree from MIT. "The most important thing for us was to make the wedding as sustainable as possible."

When the couple wed last September they opted for locally grown foods (a challenge because Kosher was also a requirement) and a green venue — Toronto's Wychwood Artscape Barns. Bullfrog Power provided the electricity and the cooling came from ground source heat pump.

The bride's mother, prominent environmental lawyer Dianne Saxe, filled in the rest of the wedding details:

"We bought everything we could from members of our network, Green Enterprise Toronto. Most of the food was local and organic. The flowers were local, pesticide-free, in season and gorgeous, provided by Eco-Flora in reused container. Many were wildflowers," said Dianne. "All paper was recycled, before and after. Surplus food went to Second Harvest and the flowers were

donated to area hospices after the wedding."

While this may seem like a lot of effort (and expense) Saxe said that the biggest surprise was that in many cases going green was also less expensive.

For example the bride's gown, an "eco-dress" by designer Adele Wechsler, was made by fair trade labour from sustainably grown vegetable-dyed silk and it cost less than most standard bridal gowns.

As for the rest of the bridal party, "Lots of us wore clothes we already owned and loved, instead of buying new duds for the occasion," said Dianne.

In keeping with the spirit of sustainability, 3% of the food budget was donated to Mazon; an organization dedicated to preventing and alleviating hunger.

At the end of the day, Shoshanna said it was well worth the effort.

"The food was fantastic, everybody had a good time and our wedding reflected how we wanted to live our lives together," she said.

Wedding & Shower Invitations and Thank you cards

Go virtual

Create your own wedding website (our use a template service like weddingwindow.com) for RSVPs and gift registry

Send electronic invitations and thank-you cards

Post photos of showers, wedding and honeymoon

Eco-friendly

100% recycled paper or tree-free papers

Botanical papers – embedded with seeds for planting

Buy Canadian (www.botanicalpaperworks.com)

Make your own (www.ehow.com)

Wedding Attire

For the Bride

Reuse – purchase a vintage gown or wear your mother's (or grandmother's) gown

Opt for earth-friendly fabrics such as silk, hemp and organic cotton

Purchase a new or used designer dress from Brides Against Breast Cancer (bridesagainstbreastcancer.org) at a substantially reduced price and help grant a wish for a terminally-ill cancer patient

For the Groom

Rent rather than buy your suit or tuxedo

For the Attendants

Opt for dresses from second-hand shops or pick a theme color and have attendants pick a dress of their choice that can be re-worn

Bridesmaids can donate their used gowns to the Glass Slipper Project (www.glassslipperproject.org) an organization that provides gowns for high-school students too poor to attend their school formals

Flowers

Wedding Flowers

Choose organically grown, in-season, locally produced flowers

Avoid using imported flowers from countries where pesticide use can be very high and labour standards can be very low

Plan ahead and grow your own

Centrepieces

Purchase small flowering bushes or perennial plants that can be taken home and planted by wedding guests

Use recycled glass containers or natural materials such as twig or rattan baskets

Choose fruit baskets that can be taken home by guests or donated to shelters afterwards

Use candles made from beeswax or soy

Food and Catering

Choose locally-produced food in season, whenever possible

Go organic and/or vegetarian

Opt for locally produced wines

Avoid using disposable items such as napkins, plates and cutlery and decorations

Rent, borrow or purchase second-hand items such as chocolate fountains, arbours

Favours

Make a donation in honour of your guests thorough www.idofoundation.org

Fair Trade chocolates

Seed packets or seedlings

Transportation

Opt for a hybrid limo, horse and carriage or a bicycle built for two

Choose a venue that can provide a chapel/hall for the ceremony and banquet hall in one location

Pick a venue that is easily accessible by public transit

Honeymoon

Opt for an eco-friendly destination (www.ecotourism.org)

Where possible take the train (rather than fly to your destination)

Offset your travel by purchasing carbon offsets from an accredited organization such as www.carbonzero.ca

For More Information

Books

The Everything Green Wedding Book, by Wenona Napolitano

Green Weddings that Don't Cost the Earth, by Carol Reed-Jones

The Green Bride Guide: How to Create an Earth-Friendly Wedding on Any Budget, by Kate Harrison

Green Wedding: Planning Your Eco-Friendly Celebration, by Mireya Navarro

Eco-Chic Weddings: Simple Tips to Plan an Earth-Friendly, Socially Responsible, Affordable Green Wedding, by Emily Elizabeth Anderson

Organic Weddings: Balancing Ecology, Style and Tradition, by Michelle Kozin

Websites

www.greatgreenweddings.com

www.greenweddings.net

www.ecolivingcenter.com/greenweddings

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