



SUBSTANTIAL SPACE The Estate at Florentine Gardens in River Vale offers a large ballroom with 25-foot ceilings, 10-foot crystal chandeliers and room for 360 guests.

The Right RECEPTION

Choosing the best setting for your wedding

It is important to remember one of the earliest and most important wedding tasks is choosing a reception hall. "The first step in making your event one of a kind is to find a reception facility that is not only unique, but that also reflects your personality and style," suggests Jenny Orsini, founder of Pampered Bride Weddings. Orsini stresses the importance of hiring a wedding planner to assist you in transforming the ballroom facility into something amazing. "With a few additional design elements such as specialty linens, unique table shapes and arrangement, event lighting and furniture, any room can be transformed from typical and boring to unrecognizable and spectacular," she says.

CALCULATING COSTS

Consider your spending allowance. Prices quickly escalate. Orsini notes a general guideline is to spend 50 percent of your

budget on the reception.

"Couples should always ask reception facilities about potential extra costs. These can include cake cutting, chair covers, linens, parking, bathroom and coat room attendants and maitre'd," says Orsini. Once a hall has been chosen you should focus your additional reception budget on decorations to make the reception special.

THE SOONER THE BETTER

The most-popular reception halls get booked fast. Once a wedding budget has been discussed and set, figure out the number of guests you plan to invite and research sites that can accommodate the entire guest list comfortably. Many reception sites offer lower rates for holidays, and Fridays and Sundays. The budget-conscious couple should consider an alternative to a Saturday wedding to save on their overall budget. "I encourage couples to get all pricing

BY JENNIFER MONTURI



INTIMATE GATHERING As an alternative to a large banquet hall, Biagio's Ristorante & Banquets, in Paramus, offers a small wine room with wine racks and a working fireplace for smaller parties, accommodating no more than 43 guests.



SOMETHING DIFFERENT The dining room at Chakra Restaurant, in Paramus, showcases hand-carved Cambodian reliefs set within old textured brick walls, along with pillow-backed banquettes. Asian throw rugs and silk-tented bungalows for an intimate and worldly feel for your reception site.

VENUES

information on all seasons and days of the week in order to make the best decision," says Orsini.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Many guests will be traveling from distant areas and will not be familiar with the locale. Keeping the distance close will help prevent your guests from getting lost. Look into nearby hotel accommodations for guests who plan to stay overnight.

Orsini recommends a wedding reception in Bergen. "If your idea of the perfect wedding consists of a large ballroom with ornate chandeliers and beautiful architecture, then Bergen County offers many wonderful sites," says Orsini. Denise Downing, an event consultant from The Estate at Florentine Gardens, adds, "Bergen is centrally located and so easy to get to. The proximity and ease of location allows brides from all areas in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut to utilize our services."

FOR YOU ONLY

"For an intimate reception, brides should look for facilities that do not host more than one event at a time," says Orsini. Downing notes that a couple is not limited to how they use the Estate at Florentine Gardens. "If they want to take an extra hour of photos in the garden, they can do that. They have the entire place to themselves," she says.

Choosing a reception site that only hosts one wedding at a time allows for privacy and individualized service. The Estate at Florentine Gardens, in River Vale; Ramsey Golf & Country Club; The Empire Club, in Little Ferry; The Assembly East Hill, in Closter; and Gatsby's of Cresskill are a few establishments that host one affair at a time. Orsini

also suggests considering a restaurant for an intimate reception, like Biagio's Ristorante & Banquets or Chakra Restaurant, both in Paramus, as an alternative to a large banquet facility. "Rooms with fireplaces and remarkable architectural detail often provide a very romantic, cozy and intimate environment," she adds. "Couples who decide to have their wedding here want something different – a very romantic, intimate setting," says Debbie Gilmore, Chakra's event coordinator.

SIZE MATTERS

Evaluate your guest list and book a reception site accordingly. "The dance floor is always important," says Orsini. "Brides should make sure there is ample dancing space for their guests." Brides should note that live bands take up more room than a deejay booth, but both entertainment services should have ample space for their equipment.

If you have a large group of attendants, it's also important to find a reception facility that has a large bridal suite. Orsini believes, "Far too often, large bridal parties are forced to retreat to a very small room and it's very cramped and hot."

CATERING CONCERNS

Katharina DiMartino, catering consultant for The Brownstone, stresses the importance of a relationship with your catering director. "Because you will be dealing with a consultant on such a personal level, you want to ensure that he or she will be helpful and patient. No question is too far out there," she says. "Couples may ask thousands of trivial questions and you need to find a consultant that is eager and willing to be helpful." >

MORE QUESTIONS TO ASK

Review the basic accommodations of a reception hall:

- What is the reception site's policy on time restriction? Many times, weddings run over and you need to be aware if the venue charges extra.
- How can drinks be served? Bar service can range from a full open bar to only certain drinks offered, to a cash bar with guests paying for their own drinks.
- What is the ratio of bartenders and servers on hand to the number of guests? Ideally, there should be about one server to every 10 guests.
- What is the refund policy? This can be an important question to ask in the unfortunate case an emergency arises.