

# Unveiled

St. Louis Magazine's

2010

## Plan the Perfect Wedding

Stunning gowns,  
the latest reception trends,  
and much, much more



# Unveiled 2010



65

## THINGS WE LOVE, BRIDAL EDITION

Great gifts for brides and grooms

*By Nicole Benoist Edgerton*

69

## WISE COUNSEL

Some important words from those who do the marrying

*By Margaret Bauer*

72

## BLISSFUL EXPRESSIONS

St. Louisans open up their wedding albums.

81

## ON THE MENU

Cutting-edge food ideas for the reception and beyond

*By Shera Dalin*

85

## UNFORGETTABLE...IN EVERY WAY

Readers share truly memorable moments from their big days.

*By Jeannette Cooperman*

92

## STATE OF GRACE

A modern take on the traditional bride

*Styling by Nicole Benoist Edgerton*

*Photographs by John Fedele*

101

## HACK YOUR WEDDING

Make the Web your planning resource.

*By Kim Aubuchon*

102

## SOMETHING NEW

Venues you didn't think were an option

*By Shaila Wunderlich*

104

## POWER SHOWERS

Sophisticated parties for modern brides and grooms

*By Jeannette Cooperman*

## Wise Counsel

Planning a wedding isn't easy. But there's more to preparing emotionally than you might think.

By Margaret Bauer. Illustration by Moira Millman

Whether you've turned to the Unveiled section for advice on fashion, food, or venues, you may notice that a lot of wedding planning concerns, well, the *material*. Where to splurge, what to save on, how to make the most of what you've got—all are important considerations for any recently engaged couple.

But that information doesn't quite satisfy the soul. Or at least, it didn't satisfy mine.

When I got engaged this past October, it was gratifying to find that my fiancé and I were truly on the same wavelength about the practical things. Band or DJ? Not a problem. Choosing the wedding party? Barely even a question. And no, we're not forcing anyone to wear teal or chartreuse.

But as a former psychology major, I found myself seeking data on things beyond the tangible. "What should we be doing to plan for our *emotional* future?" I wondered. "My fiancé and I are happy together—but are there conversations we should be having now to lay the foundation for a happy marriage?"

To find out more, I consulted a trio of local experts: a rabbi, a priest, and a therapist.

All three were in strong agreement: Premarital counseling of some sort is essential. "It's not the same as couples counseling, where they're coming to solve all their problems," says Rabbi Lynn Goldstein of congregation Kol HaNeshama in West County. "Premarital counseling is for the couple about to start their lives together to strengthen their relationship and to help them forge better ways, because *all* couples can improve."

In the Catholic Church, engaged couples prepare

for marriage through a course such as Pre-Cana, which helps them learn more about each other and the role of marriage in the church. The Rev. Bill Kempf, director of the Catholic Newman Center at the University of Missouri–St. Louis, says he begins with the FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study) inventory, a test that helps couples discover areas of relative strength and weakness, agreement and disagreement.

"When I prepare couples, I also have them take the Myers-Briggs personality inventory," says Kempf. "You don't want to have personality issues make what is already difficult in what they are dealing with more difficult. You want to have them just as free as possible to be attentive to whatever life throws at them."

Therapist Renee Gebhart administers the PREPARE/ENRICH inventory, which couples can take online, and moderates a class called





# Unveiled 2010

H.E.A.R.T. (Heal Emotions and Resolve Relationship Troubles).

"I teach a lot of communication skills that I find most people aren't aware of, such as learning to speak with 'I' versus 'you,'" says Gebhart. "But this goes a little bit further." She recommends that couples find ways to leave their old baggage behind: "Teaching communication skills is not going to be sufficient if both of them have past hurts, either from earlier in that same relationship or from past relationships or their family of origin."

All three experts stressed the importance of developing a shared sense of narrative and purpose for the relationship, whether derived from religion (Kempf says 90 percent of couples who commit to shared religious practice stay together), other beliefs (such as "Divorce is not an option"), or dreams for the future.

"One of the questions I ask couples when I meet with them is, 'What was your dream for your relationship? And do you have a dream now?'" says Gebhart. "I know for a lot of folks who are just starting out, the dream is sort of their wedding day. But what's your dream beyond that? Have you talked about what you want your relationship to look like in five years, 10 years, 30 years? When I talk with couples about how to resolve conflicts, one of the keys is to keep them focused on what each other's dreams are." The point is to figure out how each fits into the other's dreams.

When it comes to outlining goals as a couple, the experts identified five crucial areas of discussion:

**Finances:** Who handles the checkbook? Who pays the bills? Are accounts shared or separate? How much will you save or invest? How much will you tithe or give to charity? What kind of lifestyle will you lead—and can your finances support it? How do you feel about credit? Do your saving and spending styles mesh? How much can each spend without telling the other?

**Household:** What's the division of labor? Who cooks? Who cleans the bathroom? Who washes the windows? Who mows the lawn? How often will you dine with parents or relatives? How much time should be spent with the family? How rigid or spontaneous are you about making plans?

**Children:** Will you have 10 children? Zero children? Some number in between? Who will be the children's primary caregiver?

Do you have strong beliefs about the way they should be raised? Will they go to private schools or public schools? Will you save money for their education?

**Religion:** How passionate is each individual about his or her faith? In what tradition (if any) will any children be raised? For interfaith couples, which religion will be practiced at home? What holidays will be observed—and with whose family? What daily or weekly rituals will you observe together? What does it mean to represent your religion to the world through marriage?

**Sexuality:** What are each person's experiences in this area? What are you each comfortable with? How do day-to-day conflicts manifest themselves in the bedroom? How do your sex life and your spiritual life match up?

Ah, and those are just the *easy* questions. All of those decisions and priorities mean little without an appreciation for—and willingness to work with—each other's quirks. One's dreams, after all, can change, but one's personality remains mostly the same.

"As homework, I'll ask the couple, 'OK, when you come back next time, I want you to tell me: How do you know when your fiancé is having a bad day, and what are the steps that he goes through to resolve whatever that issue is?'" says Kempf. "I want them each to be able to answer that about the other. Then they share, and I check: 'OK, does that sound right? Is there anything you need to add to her or his awareness about how you deal with stuff?'"

Certain problems *will* crop up again and again. "About 69 percent of marital upsets arise from things that are in conflict—such as values, beliefs, personal tendencies—where there's no generally accepted standard," Gebhart says. "So it's there; it's not going to go away. The key is, how are you going to live with it?"

"I always tell couples, 'What you see is what you get,'" says Kempf. "Don't go into it presuming that they'll change upon getting married. It's just not gonna happen."

Gebhart lists five areas of conflict outlined by noted therapist Brent Atkinson: independence vs. togetherness, investing in the future vs. living for the moment, predictability first vs. spontaneity first, being slow to upset vs. readily upset, and problem solving first vs. understanding first. In each area of conflict, she says, there's a dream that's at stake and

a corresponding fear that arises when that dream is threatened. And then there's how your reaction comes across to your partner.

"When you're relating with your spouse or your partner, look at the behavior," says Gebhart. "Oftentimes, it's fear-driven. And if you can get past the outside of that behavior and find out what's driving it, there's so much information there to learn about your spouse."

A lot comes down to the way our brains work. Sometimes one partner becomes so upset when discussing their fears that they become "flooded" with emotion. "If you can be the calm one in the midst of that and give better back, you're going to have the power to help right that interaction," says Gebhart.

Both she and Goldstein praised the work of John Gottman, a world-renowned therapist and researcher who's made a science of predicting—and heading off—divorce.

"One of the things he talks about that I love is the concept of an emotional bank," says Goldstein. "Just as we put money into the bank and save it to withdraw when we need it later, Gottman says we make deposits into our emotional bank to be able to withdraw them when we have problems later."

"The deposits that we make are the things we get to know about each other and the little things we do for each other," Goldstein explains. "So for example, a deposit in the emotional bank could be taking time to get to know who your partner's best friend in elementary school was. That's not something that impacts your relationship, but it shows that you are interested in that person and everything about them, and it makes them feel cared about and loved."

Above all, our experts agreed that engaged couples should seek to develop an active connection that can sustain them throughout their marriage.

"The questions to ask of each other aren't just, 'What are you doing for me in the relationship?' or 'What is the relationship in this exact moment?' but 'Who are you as an individual?'" says Goldstein. "And wanting to know more and more about this person who you love and wanna spend your life with." ■

*This is SLM managing editor MARGARET BAUER's second year helming Unveiled. And this time, she's taking notes.*