

Washington Jewish Week



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Wonderful Weddings

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Rustic venues bring weddings down to earth

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By [Dan Schere](#)

Ryan and Cydney Studner were married at Aix La Chapelle in Poolesville, which has a barn, wedding gallery and orchards. Photo courtesy of Cydney Studner

Ballrooms are out, barns are in. That's the thinking among wedding professionals when they size up the trends in places to tie the knot in 2018.

"No one wants the traditional hotel wedding anymore," said Marci Etman, a consultant with Bethesda-based Creative Parties, an event planning company. "It still happens, but when we first meet with couples they want something unique, and it's of their budget."

Many couples Etman works with are electing to hold both the ceremony and celebration at the same venue, because it removes the need to transport the guests. The couple can save money that way. But Etman says a barn wedding can require expenditures on tents and porta potties.

One of Etman's favorite venues is Aix La Chapelle, a 200-year-old estate in Poolesville that has a barn, gallery, ponds and orchards. She said the gallery's concrete floors and exposed ceiling beams create a picturesque setting for weddings.

"People like the juxtaposition of the rustic with wedding elements," she said.

Washington residents Cydney and Ryan Studner got married at Aix La Chapelle in 2016. They wanted a large, but informal, venue that could accommodate 300 guests, and could offer several spaces for various activities. At the Studners' wedding, the ceremony was outside, dinner was in a tent and dancing was in the barn.

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“We didn’t want it to be overly traditional,” Cydney said. “We wanted it to be more free-flowing where we could all mingle, instead of being in your own designated zone. It wasn’t like you were thrown in a room and had to stay in that room.”

She said the rural location was also a pleasant getaway from the hustle and bustle of downtown Washington.



The Greek Revival-style architecture of the former Patapsco Female Institute in Ellicott City has become a popular setting for outdoor

“When you have something outdoors, it’s a lot more calm and people are happier,” she said. “You don’t hear cars honking.” Couples these days are thinking about how all of the bells and whistles that come with a wedding play into the experience for guests, said Glynis Keith, sales and event manager for College Park-based Catering by Seasons. The venue, décor, entertainment and food all play a role in creating the feel of a wedding, she said.

“We see couples who not only want to plan a celebration of their marriage but they want to plan an unforgettable experience for their guests as well,” she said. “I see a lot of couples moving away from traditional ballrooms and looking for spaces that reflect their personal style or spaces that allow them to customize such as barns, warehouses, wineries, distilleries, industrial spaces, art spaces and private properties.”

Keith said one of the more interesting wedding locations the site of the former Patapsco Female Institute in Ellicott City. The Greek Revival building is in ruins, but the remaining front steps and large columns give an outdoor wedding there an authentic touch.

Camps have also become popular among some wedding clientele, said Silver Spring event planner Donna Lawrence. Lawrence has helped plan weddings at the Pearlstone Conference and Retreat Center in Reisterstown and at Capital Camps and Retreat Center in Waynesboro, Pa. She said one wedding ceremony at the Pearlstone Center featured a particularly unusual set of props.

“That ceremony was way out in a field, and they had pitchforks and bales of hay that held up the chuppah,” she said. And for those who do like the big-city feel, art galleries and former warehouses are the way to go. Etman said Dock 5, a renovated warehouse near Union Market in Northeast Washington, has become a popular destination. The space at Dock 5, she said, can also easily be divided with drapes if a couple wants to separate the meal from other entertainment.

Etman added that social media has allowed wedding couples to share their experiences with others, which can provide future couples with ideas. Ultimately, she said, couples want to give their guests something to remember in addition to giving themselves some peace of mind.