



An Island Affair

With a little help from family and friends, a Seattle couple finds that do-it-yourself makes a simple and elegant celebration. By Hillary Quinn



TESSA FRANCIS AND JAMIE LOPEZ
AUGUST 8, 2000

Tessa Francis knew something was up when she went to get her gym bag from boyfriend Jamie Lopez's car and was sternly told to stay out of the trunk. That admonishment, followed by a romantic, home-cooked meal of Dungeness crab and beef tenderloin, put Tessa's engagement antennae on alert. Sure enough, during dessert Jamie dropped to one knee and asked her to become his bride.

The engagement came as no big surprise to Tessa; the couple had been dating for almost two years and both felt certain they'd met their future spouse. "I was at an age where I'd had long-term relationships, and knew what



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: The bride, Tessa Francis, and her father descend the stairs to the waterfront ceremony, held at the groom's parents' house on Vashon Island. The newlyweds, Tessa and Jamie Lopez, bask in longtime family friends Sue and Rich Wiley's cherry orchard, the reception site. It was Sue's idea to hang mason jars containing little candles in the trees and along the fence of the pasture. Wildflowers were gathered from the island to make impromptu bouquets placed throughout the yard, on the deck where Tessa and Jamie were married and along the fence of the "parking pasture." TOP OF PAGE: The couple purchased dozens of dahlias from a Skagit Valley farmer to fashion tabletop bouquets in rustic mason jars

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHERI PEARL

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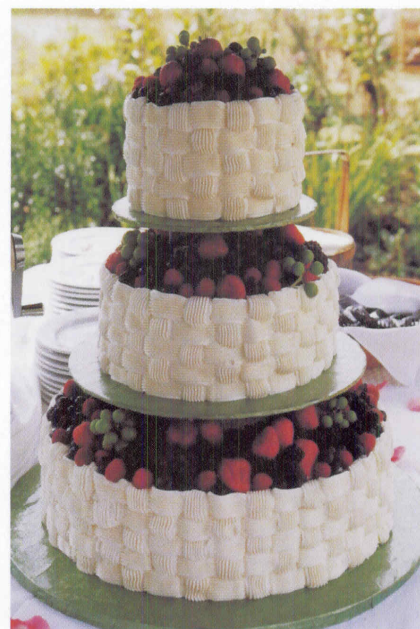


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worked and what didn't work," explains Tessa, a 29-year-old California native and ecology student at the University of Washington. Jamie, a 32-year-old Vashon Islander, who works as a talent agent and co-owns the Actors' Group in downtown Seattle, agrees. "We had discussed marriage off and on for about five months," he remembers. "But it was always vague—and with a bottle of wine nearby!"

After celebrating their new engagement over ice-cream

sundaes at the Coastal Kitchen ("The best in town!" raves Tessa), the search for the site of their August 2000 nuptials—a mere eight months away—began.

"The big wedding machine was a turn-off," says Jamie, who spent some time checking out traditional rental halls, complete with gaudy balloon arches and all the intimacy of a Las Vegas casino. "Those [sites] just sucked the romance out of the whole thing."

"We wanted to get married in the summer,"

Tessa adds, "and our vision was a simple, elegant, country-garden wedding—a compromise between a large, traditional affair and a private elopement. Most of the rentable locations really cheapened what should be one of the most meaningful and intimate days of our lives."

Enter Sue and Rich Wiley. Longtime friends of Jamie's family and owners of a stunning Victorian farmhouse on Vashon Island, the Wileys offered their home, cherry orchard,



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pastures and the world's best red barn for the couple's outdoor, Mediterranean-style reception, partly inspired by Jamie's Italian heritage. His parents' house—just minutes from the Wileys'—was chosen for the couple's private, family-only nuptials.

Once the site was nailed down, plans fell into perfect place. Tessa's brother Todd, an artist living in Santa Monica, California, generously handpainted an original design for 200 invitations, maps and reply cards. Jamie's sister, Anita, helped fashion wedding favors out of tulle-wrapped Italian amaretto cookies. Sue Wiley had the clever idea of illuminating her garden with votive-filled mason jars hung from tree branches.

The day before the wedding, a "work party" was held at the Wileys' farm. Friends and family staying on the island convened to set up tables, chairs and a "just-in-case" tent to protect reception guests from Seattle's unpredictable weather. The mason jars were hung and Jamie's father, Cornelius, brought 50 dozen multicolored dahlias from a farm in Skagit County. "We have good friends who have a summer home there, and when we visited them, we noticed the acres of dahlias grown by the locals," explains Tessa. "We believe in supporting small, local farmers, and the idea of working directly with a dahlia farmer was more romantic than going through a florist."

These fresh blooms were fashioned into impromptu bouquets in mason jars for each table. In addition, island wildflowers were gathered into eclectic arrangements for the most unexpected places—in the

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crook of a tree trunk, on a fence post and over an archway in the "parking pasture."

Instead of being unraveled by last-minute decorating tasks, Tessa, who made her own bouquet of red roses, bupleurum and green satin ribbon, found the work soothing.

"The physical exertion of setting up became a stress release," she recalls. "Putting the flowers together helped me connect emotionally to something I would be holding all day."

At one o'clock on the afternoon of her wedding, Tessa, in simple ivory separates she'd found at local boutiques, began her walk on Dad's arm to a waterfront deck overlooking Puget Sound. Minister Amanda Aikman, who is affiliated with the University Unitarian Church, officiated, incorporating elements from different faiths and traditions into a nondenominational ceremony. While Tessa's other brother, Evan, played an adagio on the flute, she and Jamie exchanged personalized vows—and tears.

Then it was time to get serious: not about each other, but about the food—a passion that has cemented this couple since the early days of their relationship. "We've always bonded with food," says Jamie. "Simply put, it was our highest priority. It had to be fabulous!" While members of the Seattle-based European folk group The Midnight Trio played accordion, guitar and mandolin, the newlyweds and their guests sat down to a catered Mediterranean menu: olive-and-fig crostini, roasted pork loin and caprese salad—a perfect mix of ripe summer tomatoes, fragrant basil and fresh mozzarella. Dessert, made by a Bainbridge Island baker, arrived in the form of a three-tiered basket-weave cake filled with fresh fig jam and almonds, with berries cascading temptingly from layer to layer.

As dusk fell upon the garden, compact discs and a simple home-stereo system were called into service, bringing the couple and their spirited guests to their feet. "One of our friends told us that every wedding takes on a character and life of its own," recalls Tessa, "and the key to a successful wedding is letting that happen." The couple took this advice to heart: When Jamie's mom requested a traditional Jewish folk dance, wedding guests began a spontaneous dance circle that wound through the cherry trees, where everyone lifted the newlyweds onto chairs above their heads. "There we were, looking out at this garden and everyone we love," remembers Tessa. "The feeling was overwhelming." *

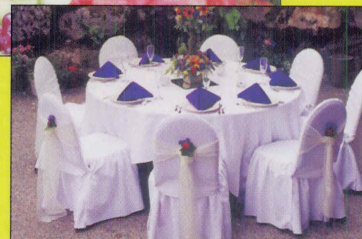
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