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Home OR Away

WILL IT BE A DESTINATION WEDDING OR ONE CLOSE TO HOME? IT'S A DECISION MANY BRIDES AND GROOMS PONDER.

BY MARYBETH BIZJAK

It's one of the first (and certainly one of the trickiest) questions a couple has to answer when planning their wedding: whether to get married at home or out of town. We spoke with three experts—two wedding planners and one recent mother of the bride—about that all-important decision.

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The Experts

DEBRA HIEBERT
WEDDING PLANNER
TRES FABU EVENT PLANNING AND DESIGN

KATE MILLER
WEDDING PLANNER
KATE MILLER EVENTS

SUZY RIEHL
MOTHER OF THE BRIDE

WHAT FACTORS DO COUPLES CONSIDER IN DECIDING WHERE TO GET MARRIED?

MILLER: Typically, there are a couple of things that help us determine home wedding or destination. Usually it's centered on the guest list. Sometimes both bride and groom come from big families in the area. To offset the cost of a big hometown wedding, they decide to do a destination wedding. They know many will not be able to attend, but that those who are closest to them will make the effort.

HOW DO YOU HELP A COUPLE DECIDE WHETHER TO GET MARRIED AT HOME OR AWAY?

HIEBERT: I give them a list of things to consider—things like airfare and hotel costs. They may have to rent a car. They may have to pay to shuttle their guests around. A local wedding is a little less imposing on the pocketbook.

MILLER: From a practical standpoint, I recommend creating a budget for both here and away. Say you're considering getting married either here in Sacramento or in San Francisco. There are big price differences between the two places. Budget always helps make the decision easier and less stressful.

SO IT'S A FINANCIAL DECISION.

MILLER: Often, yes.

HIEBERT: Money is the driving factor behind every wedding. Everybody has a budget; I don't care if it's $25,000 or $125,000.

WHY OPT FOR AN OUT-OF-TOWN WEDDING?

HIEBERT: One reason is the couple wants to get away from their hometown: been there,

done that. They want someplace completely different and fresh. But the most popular reason is it's a great way to narrow down the guest list. I know a couple with 180 family members they have to invite. If they add friends, they're at 500 or 600 people. So they decided to have their wedding in Santa Barbara next spring. They're inviting only immediate family and maybe 20 friends.

DO PARENTS WEIGH IN ON THIS DECISION?

MILLER: They always do. In some cases, the parents aren't very supportive.

SUZY, YOUR DAUGHTER, HILARY, RECENTLY GOT MARRIED DOWNTOWN AT THE CATHEDRAL OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AND HAD HER RECEPTION AT THE FIREHOUSE IN OLD SAC. HOW DID YOU CHOOSE THAT COURSE?

RIEHL: We have a lot of family, especially older family members, who would have had a hard time traveling if Hilary got married out of town. I have a nephew who got married last year in Boston. He was the first grandchild to get married, and the grandparents missed it.

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IF YOU HAVE A GUEST LIST THAT'S PRETTY LARGE—ANYTHING OVER 50—I RECOMMEND KEEPING IT LOCAL. IT'S A HEADACHE ORGANIZING BLOCKS OF HOTEL ROOMS AND OTHER LOGISTICS.

Kate Miller
WEDDING PLANNER
KATE MILLER EVENTS

DID YOU EVER CONSIDER AN OUT-OF-TOWN WEDDING?

RIEHL: We threw the idea around. We considered a small wedding in Hawaii—how much fun would *that* be? But for Hilary, it was more important to have her favorite people be there. We also thought about Lake Tahoe, so our guests wouldn't have to fly in. But we worried about people drinking and driving home.

HOW DO LOGISTICS FACTOR INTO THE DECISION?

MILLER: If you have a guest list that's pretty large—anything over 50—I recommend keeping it local. It's a headache organizing blocks of hotel rooms and other logistics. Plus the transportation costs are high for your guests. It's much more convenient to keep it local, because your vendors are local.

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SUZY, WHAT LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS DID YOU HAVE?

RIEHL: Hilary's sister, Molly, made the wedding cake. We were able to use a local photographer who's been taking pictures of my children since they were little. A good friend did the flowers. Another friend DJed for us, and we had a local band, The New Originals, whose drummer is a dear friend of ours. I'm not sure any of that would have been possible if the wedding had been out of town.

HOW DO GUESTS FIGURE IN TO THE DECISION?

MILLER: Some guests will mind having to travel. If there's somebody close to you that you really want to attend your wedding, have a conversation with them in advance, so they're not surprised.

HIEBERT: Guests are definitely concerned about the expense of an out-of-town wedding. I've known a few instances where guests on a tight budget fly in on the day of the wedding and leave the reception early

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so they can fly out that night. At a Carmel wedding I did on a Sunday, a lot of guests left early because they had to be at work on Monday morning.

RIEHL: We were recently invited to a wedding in Hawaii. We had to say no, mainly because of cost. It's expensive to take off from work, and then you've got to pay for flights and accommodations.

WHAT ARE THE PROS OF HAVING A WEDDING IN YOUR HOMETOWN?

HIEBERT: It's just easier to marry locally because you're familiar with everything.

RIEHL: We have a huge family—my family alone is more than 100 people. Since we did the wedding here, we were able to have 225 guests.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF GETTING MARRIED AWAY?

MILLER: Destination weddings are a lot of fun. If your circle of family and friends is adventurous and likes to travel, it's a great idea.

ANY SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO MAKE AN OUT-OF-TOWN WEDDING EASIER TO PLAN?

MILLER: I use online planning tools so brides planning from afar can keep track of things.

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IF YOU GET MARRIED IN A VACATION DESTINATION, YOU'LL WANT TO BOOK HOTEL ROOMS WAY IN ADVANCE SO YOU DON'T LOSE OUT TO OTHER TOURISTS. YOU ALSO HAVE TO KNOW IF YOUR WEDDING IS GOING TO COINCIDE WITH A MAJOR EVENT, LIKE A FOOD FESTIVAL OR A FAIR.

Debra Hiebert
WEDDING PLANNER
TRÈS FABU EVENT PLANNING AND DESIGN

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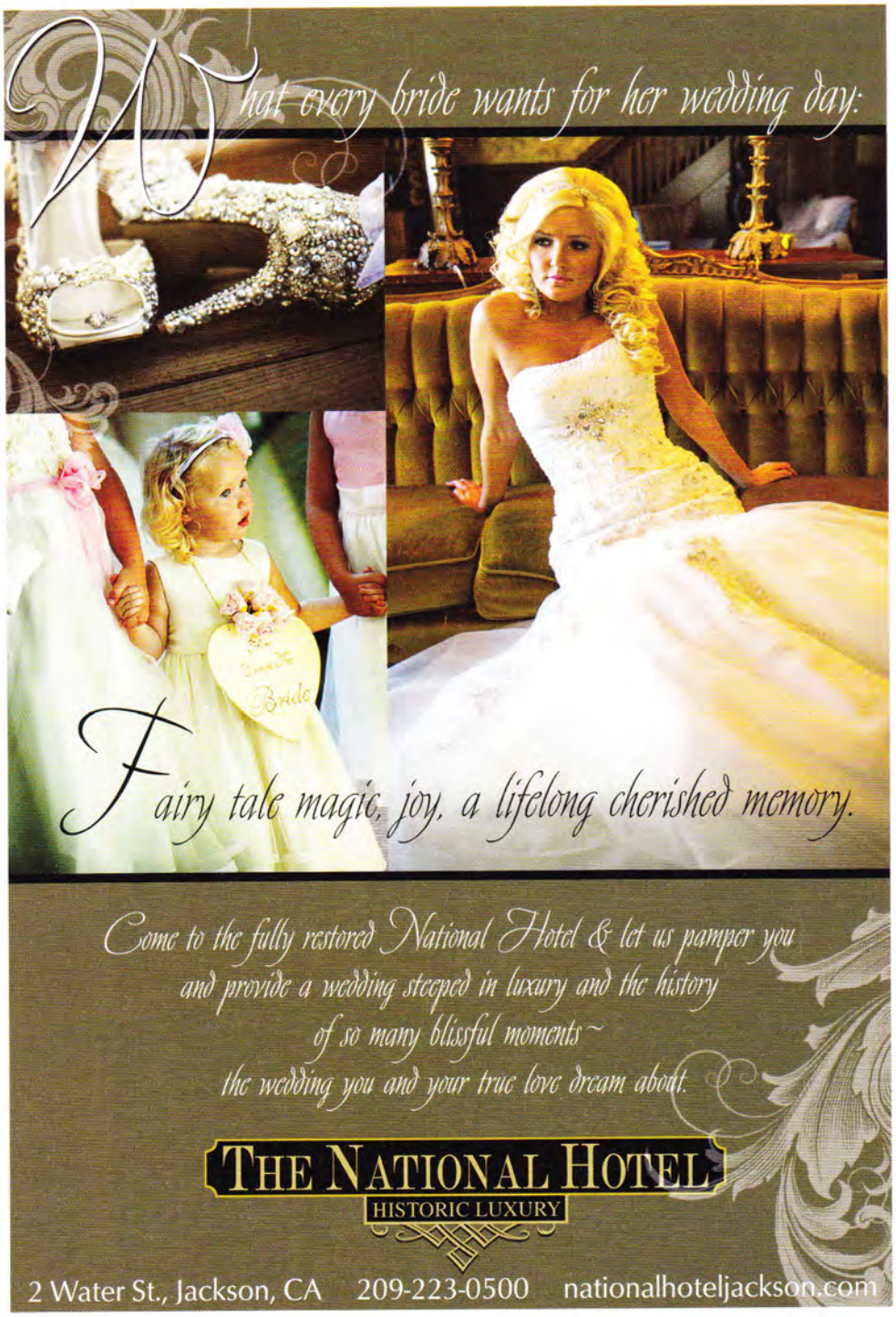
WHAT ARE SOME THINGS COUPLES NEED TO CONSIDER?

HIEBERT: If you get married in a vacation destination, you'll want to book hotel rooms way in advance so you don't lose out to other tourists. You also have to know if your wedding is going to coincide with a major event, like a food festival or a fair. If you want to get married in Carmel, you don't want to go when the AT&T Pebble Beach golf tournament is taking place. If it's Napa Valley, you don't want to get married during the mustard festival. You need to know about anything that's going to drive up the numbers of vacationers.



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