

Vandalia Poole Gorrell and Stephen Caison Morisey wed at the Biltmore estate, in North Carolina. Opposite: Chelsea Clinton and Marc Mezvinsky.



# WED LIKE A celebrity

BY JILL FERGUS

OK, confess — who doesn't like to drool over famous weddings in the pages of *US Weekly*? They're great for inspiration but rarely practical if you don't have celeb status yourself. But with some inside knowledge, you can have your dream wedding in the same fab locales where they've gotten hitched. Whether you choose a hilltop villa in Tuscany a la Emily Blunt, a genteel Southern estate like Carrie Underwood, a Caribbean resort that would suit Penelope Cruz or a Gilded Age manse worthy of Chelsea Clinton, you're sure to enjoy star treatment at these spectacular wedding venues.



## Bella Italia

When Emily Blunt and John Krasinski tied the knot in Italy, they chose Villa D’Este, a 16th-century estate on the shores of Lake Como (prewedding, they bunked at their pal George Clooney’s nearby mansion). But even if you don’t have Georgio on speed dial, Italy’s beautiful countryside, delicious cuisine, robust *vino* and historic villa hotels make it a can’t-miss wedding locale.

### GRAND HOTEL VILLA SERBELLONI, BELLAGIO

If your heart is set on Lake Como, consider the 95-room Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni, in the charming village of Bellagio. The inspiration for the luxe Bellagio casino in Vegas, this neoclassic lakefront villa has been the scene of many a wedding on the stone terrace, and you’re sure to feel like a *principessa* in the gilded ballroom. Stellar service is assured (it’s the only five-star hotel in Bellagio), as is an unforgettable meal: Chef Ettore Bocchia has earned a Michelin star with his interpretation

of Italian cuisine via molecular gastronomy. *Rooms from \$499; weddings custom.*

### VILLA MANGIACANE, FLORENCE

Tuscany’s medieval villages and Renaissance churches have long inspired romantics. For a truly splurge-worthy wedding, there’s 27-room Villa Mangiacane, a 15th-century estate outside Florence (a free round-trip shuttle runs to Florence from the villa). Say your I do’s on the fresco-lined loggia with the Duomo as a backdrop, then toast each other with the estate’s own Chianti (produced onsite, as is the

olive oil — a great welcome gift). The hotel can arrange wine tours and tastings, day trips to Siena and San Gimignano, and even a hot-air balloon ride over the vineyards and olive groves. *Rooms from \$375; required wedding buyouts approximately \$12,900, all-inclusive.*

### VILLA SAN MICHELE, FIESOLE

Although Villa San Michele, outside Florence, got its start as a 15th-century monastery, there’s nothing austere about a wedding here. Couples can marry in a nearby church or alfresco in the formal gardens amid lemon and orange trees. Afterward, indulge in plenty of prosecco on the colonnaded loggia before retiring to the elegant Michelangelo suite, once the headquarters of Napoleon Bonaparte. The 46 rooms and suites at this Orient-Express property feature unique furnishings, en suite bathrooms and amazing views. *Rooms from \$1,113; weddings custom.*

OPPOSITE: JOSHUA SAWYER GIBSON; PREVIOUS PAGE: FROM LEFT: SCOTT LESSING HUBBNER; BARBARA KINNEY/COMBIS

## Southern Grandeur

When Carrie Underwood and pro hockey player Mike Fisher got hitched, they headed to The Ritz-Carlton Lodge, Reynolds Plantation, in Greensboro, Georgia (outside of Atlanta), for an elegant but down-home Southern wedding that appealed to her Oklahoma roots. If a low-key but sophisticated vibe sounds tempting, consider these Southern spots.

### THE INN AT PALMETTO BLUFF, BLUFFTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

With May River views from its arched windows, the onsite chapel at this South Carolina resort, near Savannah, Georgia, is a couple favorite. Sip mint juleps served in Mason jars, then celebrate in the ballroom or the rustic Moreland’s Landing pavilion, where folks can enjoy a traditional oyster roast. In lieu of cake, serve peach cobbler or homemade moon pies. Guests can stay in cottage accommodations at the inn, or they can rent out private homes in

the walkable Norman Rockwell-style village. *Rooms from \$355; weddings from \$9,650.*

### THE HOMESTEAD, HOT SPRINGS, VIRGINIA

High society originally flocked to this Virginia resort, built in 1766, for its therapeutic mineral springs. Today it’s still a first-class retreat on 3,000 acres, with golf, bridle paths and a spa. There’s no shortage of top-tier wedding venues: the Casino Lawn, Fishing Pond and Grand Ballroom, to name a few. Customize your menus (perhaps baked Virginia ham and

butter milk biscuits), and have master pastry chef Michel Finel whip up a yummy cake — red velvet is a perennial fave. *Rooms from \$175; site fees from \$1,500; wedding packages from \$175 per person.*

### BARNSELY GARDENS RESORT, ADAIRSVILLE, GEORGIA

It’s hard not to feel swept away in some *Gone With the Wind* fantasy at this resort in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, an hour’s drive from Atlanta. An alpine-style chapel and original 19th-century-mansion ruins (beautifully lit at night) make for ultra-romantic venues, and the Rice House, an 1850s farmhouse with two crackling fireplaces, is ideal for a low country feast of spicy Gulf shrimp and Savannah crab cakes. Some packages even come with a complimentary honeymoon night in an Arbor cottage. *Rooms from \$299; weddings from \$5,250.*



THE INN AT PALMETTO BLUFF, SOUTH CAROLINA

## Caribbean Seclusion

Following Penelope Cruz's marriage to hunky actor and fellow Spaniard Javier Bardem on a private estate in the Bahamas, celeb rags tried to get details of the sun-kissed nuptials — but the publicity-shy couple steered clear of tabloid fanfare. If you're looking for a similarly private and intimate affair, consider these fabulous Caribbean hideaways where discretion is key.

### MONTPELIER PLANTATION, NEVIS

This 18th-century sugar plantation, now a posh 19-room inn, has a long history of weddings, including that of Nevis' first celebrity couple, British naval hero Horatio Nelson and local girl Fanny Nisbet, in 1787. Couples can continue that tradition by saying their vows on the manicured grounds under a huge ficus tree. Receptions for up to 60 in the inn's enormous stone sugar mill with original walls feature top-notch cuisine befitting the inn's membership in elite Relais & Chateaux. A location 750 feet up in the hills ensures privacy and great

views (there's also shuttle service to the private beach down below). Soothe prewedding jitters with a his and hers massage, comped for wedding couples. *Rooms from \$345; wedding package \$1,650.*

### ROUND HILL HOTEL & VILLAS, JAMAICA

Celebrities ranging from Grace Kelly to Paul McCartney have enjoyed this exclusive villa resort, a former pineapple plantation set on a 110-acre peninsula near Montego Bay. With acres of tropical gardens and an oceanfront setting, it has no shortage of scenic I do spots

— perhaps the lawn at sunset or a secluded stretch of beach? Accommodations vary widely, from multibedroom villas with private pools (past owners include Oscar Hammerstein and Babe Paley) to the 36-room Pineapple House, with newly redone interiors by part-owner Ralph Lauren. *Rooms from \$335; weddings from \$3,000.*

### ROCK HOUSE, BAHAMAS

Harbour Island is straight out of a storybook, with pastel cottages, pink-sand beaches and golf carts rather than cars. In the center of town is the 10-room Rock House hotel, a former private home imbued with British colonial decor. Many couples opt for a church wedding — perhaps at pink-hued St. John's, within easy walking distance — followed by a candlelit poolside reception. Staff can arrange a pre-nuptial picnic lunch on a deserted Bahamian island. *Rooms from \$300; required wedding buyouts from \$20,000.*

MONTPELIER PLANTATION, NEVIS



BILTMORE, NORTH CAROLINA

## Historic America

First daughter Chelsea Clinton married Marc Mezvinsky in the town of Rhinebeck, in New York's Hudson River Valley, a bucolic area where many American blue bloods built Gilded Age estates. The former president's daughter chose Astor Courts, a Beaux Arts mansion that once belonged to the Astors, one of the country's richest and most storied families. If you're also keen on an all-American wedding, consider these red-white-and-blue options.

### THE POINT, SARANAC LAKE, NEW YORK

A "summer camp" for the Rockefellers in the late 1800s, today The Point is an exclusive 11-room retreat in the Adirondacks. The Upper Saranac Lake shoreline is a favored nuptials spot, while a festive house-party atmosphere takes hold in the Great Hall. Sip rose champagne and feast on caviar and filet mignon; late night, roast s'mores by a blazing bonfire or play pool in the pub. Newlyweds can sleep in Mohawk, the original master bedroom of William Rockefeller and his wife

Eliza, or take over the super-private Boat-house. *Rooms from \$1,350; required wedding buyouts from \$26,890, all-inclusive.*

### GLENMERE, CHESTER, NEW YORK

It's not uncommon to see helicopters depositing guests on the lawn of this hilltop Italianate mansion, built for real-estate tycoon Robert Goelet in 1911. Now a Relais & Chateaux country-house hotel with 18 rooms, the estate is set on 150 acres just an hour-and-a-half drive from New York City. Say vows in the formal gardens, designed by Edith Wharton's niece,

serve a locavore-style dinner (chefs use ingredients from Hudson Valley farms) in the Supper Room, and host dancing in the courtyard. *Rooms from \$550; required hotel wedding buyouts from \$30,000. (The Meadow at Glenmere is also available for tented affairs of up to 400 guests, priced with or without hotel facilities.)*

### BILTMORE, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Built in 1895 by George Vanderbilt, America's largest private home is now a museum showcasing the fairy-tale-like Biltmore House, a 250-room French chateau. Whether you marry in a garden, courtyard, ballroom, stable or winery — or on the expansive Diana at Biltmore lawn, with prime views of Biltmore House — make a grand entrance via horse-drawn carriage. Customized menus can feature gluten-free desserts à la Chelsea, and packages include a complimentary night at the onsite Inn on Biltmore Estate for the bride and groom. *Rooms from \$299; site fees from \$1,500.*

COREY MCNABB PHOTOGRAPHY; OPPOSITE: JAMES SCHNEFF



## Mexican Escape

Former *The Bachelor* contestant Melissa Rycroft fled the glare of reality-TV cameras when she married insurance agent Tye Strickland on Isla Mujeres, a funky, off-the-beaten-path island near the coast of Cancun, Mexico. If lounging on sugar-soft beaches, sipping frozen mango margaritas and taking long afternoon siestas together sounds good, these Mexican resorts are for you.

**HOTEL VILLA ROLANDI, ISLA MUJERES** If you want to follow the Stricklands' lead to Isla Mujeres, consider the beachfront Hotel Villa Rolandi, where all 35 rooms and suites come with an ocean view and guests arrive from Cancun in style via luxury yacht. Marrying under a white gauzy canopy as Melissa did is an option, but you can also add your own touches like tiki torches, a rose-petal-lined aisle, a butterfly release and even firewalkers for your reception entertainment. A bottle of bubbly with strawberries, breakfast in bed the next morning and room upgrades

(if available) come gratis. *Rooms from \$290; weddings from \$1,650.*

### THE TIDES, ZIHUATANEJO

This fishing village on Mexico's Pacific coast boasts a laid-back groove and chic reverts along crescent-shaped Playa la Ropa — the ideal setting for a barefoot ceremony. Zen-like decor in the 70 rooms and suites comprises white linens and natural accents backed by terra cotta. A tequila tasting, a barbecue buffet with grilled lobster, dancing beneath a thatch palapa and late-night

fireworks over Zihuatanejo Bay are just a few fun options. When the Mr. and Mrs. retire for the night, a rose-petal message on the bed and a comped bottle of bubbly await. *Rooms from \$355; weddings custom.*

### MAROMA RESORT & SPA, RIVIERA MAYA

Couples can have traditional nuptials at this whitewashed 65-room resort on Mexico's Riviera Maya, but those seeking something more spiritual can also have a symbolic Maya ceremony, led by a local shaman, incorporating centuries-old traditions. Festivities — on the beach, in El Sol restaurant or in Las Ranas courtyard — might include a specialty margarita bar (try the tamarind or cactus fruit) and a lively marimba or mariachi band. Post-party, detox with a *temazcal*, an ancient Maya purifying steam ritual available at the sumptuous Kinan Spa. *Rooms from \$765; weddings custom.*

## Hawaiian Tropic

Waterfalls, volcanoes, black-sand beaches — what's not to love about Hawaii? This Pacific island chain is one of the earth's prettiest paradises, so it's little wonder couples flock here to pledge their eternal love. Actors Megan Fox and Brian Austin Green tied the knot at the Four Seasons Hualalai, on the Big Island; if tropical bliss is on your mind, consider these Hawaiian resorts.

### GRAND WAILEA, MAUI

With its exotic gardens, gazebos and manicured lawns, this elaborate 40-acre Maui resort isn't lacking venues — but the Seaside Chapel (pictured) is a favorite for destination dos. Hawaiian accents range from conch blowers and lei exchanges to hula performances on the tiki-lined Molokini Garden, where a giant *imu* pit (earth oven) sets the stage for a fabulous luau reception. Don't miss the vast Spa Grande, one of the best in Hawaii. *Rooms from \$369; weddings from \$5,900.*

### FOUR SEASONS RESORT LANAI AT MANELE BAY, LANAI

Lanai is one of Hawaii's least developed and most remote islands (visitors can take a ferry from Maui or fly from Honolulu), making it irresistible to privacy seekers like Bill and Melinda Gates, who married here. The isle has just two resorts, both operated by Four Seasons. Tops for weddings is the oceanfront Manele Bay, where you can be as low-key or formal as you wish. The Luau Gardens and Hulopoe Beach are postcard-perfect sites. After the big

event, enjoy a honeymoon hide-out at The Lodge at Koele, in Lanai's upcountry, while your guests unwind below. Bonus: A two-night stay on your first anniversary is included with select wedding packages. *Rooms from \$425; weddings from \$9,200.*

### THE ST. REGIS PRINCEVILLE, KAUAI

From hiking past waterfalls to exploring lava-rock beaches, Kauai's offerings are all about being outdoors — and that holds true for weddings at The St. Regis Princeville as well. As the sun casts a golden glow and Pacific trade winds gently blow, say your vows on the sand beneath a plumeria-draped canopy surrounded by indigenous kamani trees. Swap sand for stellar views from the Bay Terrace, which accommodates up to 200. Golfers in your group will love getting a chance to try the Prince course, deemed Hawaii's best by *Golf Digest*. *Rooms from \$375; weddings from \$10,000.* ■

FOR MORE INFO, SEE THE 411 ON PAGE 125.

GRAND WAILEA, HAWAII



MACQUEL EVERSON; OPPOSITE: SCOTT HUGHES