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Destination Dossier

Celebrity chef Tyler Florence, 36, and his bride, publicist and event planner Tolan Clark, 33, wanted to spend more than a few hours—and one meal—with their wedding guests. So they turned their December nuptials into a getaway for all to their favorite vacation spot, the Inn at Palmetto Bluff, in Bluffton, S.C. Now, the duo share their strategy for pulling off a weekend's worth of entertaining

WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH JENKINS ■ PHOTOGRAPHED BY SQUIRE FOX



Going to the chapel meant a short walk from the inn's cottages to its on-site Low Country church, overlooking the May River in Bluffton, S.C.

location, location, location

If you're planning a destination wedding, choose a hotel or resort that can accommodate your entire list of attendees. That way no one has to go far for any of the festivities. "We really wanted people to unpack, unwind and mingle," Florence says of the vibe Clark and he hoped to create. With a chapel, clusters of cottages and a ballroom all located on the property, guests had to think about little more than having fun.



COME PLAY

Rather than require participation in any daytime activities, the couple had the hotel invite their guests by voice mail to join them on the lawn for Bloody Marys, bocce and croquet.



NO CARS ALLOWED

Guests can explore at leisure—the resort provides vintage-style his or her bikes.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Though Florence had visions of marrying in Italy, Clark convinced him that the Inn at Palmetto Bluff would be a more meaningful location. Not only did Florence grow up in nearby Greenville, but the couple (who met two years ago at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah) had spent many blissful vacations at the resort during their courtship. Florence concedes the choice was right on. "Once you get there," he explains, "you park your car, a bellman takes you to your house in a golf cart, and you get a bike." In addition to croquet and bocce, there's swimming and kayaking, if one is up to it. "We didn't want there to be anything for anyone to have to do. It was complete forced relaxation," Clark says.



the rehearsal dinner

Chances are, some friends and even family members will meet for the first time on the night before the wedding. The best way to make them feel comfortable? Keep the evening casual, from the venue and meal to the attire and entertainment. Pay attention to the details—provide transportation, put food and drink at guests' fingertips, accommodate children—but avoid the temptation to fuss.



GET GUESTS MOVING

There's no need for a 10-piece band when Elvis is in the house. Clark, a huge fan, hired an impersonator to loosen things up before the DJ began to spin. It worked: The fully relaxed guests did the Electric Slide—twice!

SET THE TONE

The couple offered up a healthy dose of Southern comfort, starting with the invitation. It suggested that formal attire be worn for the wedding only; the rest of the weekend called for jeans and T-shirts. The buffet-style rehearsal dinner allowed guests to eat as much as they liked. Similarly, no one had to worry about enjoying one more drink; the pair rented old-time trolleys from Savannah, Ga., to ferry folks to and from the dinner, at Moreland Landing, about 3 miles from the cottages.



EASY RIDERS

Trolleys ran all night so guests could come and go—and indulge—as they pleased.

TYLER'S TIPS: A Southern Feast

Guests slurped back fresh oysters roasted over a fire pit before enjoying finger-lickin' fare from friend and restaurateur Paula Deen's executive chefs: cheesy meatloaf, fried chicken, barbecue pork and collard greens. Dessert was a *Steel Magnolias*-inspired groom's cake.



Roasted oysters



Fried chicken dinner



Armadillo groom's cake

- **FORGET FORMALITY** If the reception is a sit-down affair, keep the rehearsal dinner seating open.
- **SERVE LOCAL SPECIALTIES** Getting married in Louisiana? Have a crawfish boil. In San Francisco? Do a Dungeness crab feast.
- **CONSIDER THE KIDS** Keep young taste buds in mind when planning the menu, stock the bar with child-friendly drinks, and provide a gathering spot just for the little ones.



Moreland Landing's five-story tree house was the big draw for young attendees, not least because it featured a bar complete with Moon Flies and sofas in old-fashioned bottles.

The bride followed tradition and forbade her groom (here, in a Brooks Brothers tux) to see her frothy Pina Torna gown before their wedding day.



a poignant ceremony

The newlyweds may have exchanged vows in a classic clapboard chapel, but when it came to planning the details of their walk down the aisle, the expected gave way to the unexpected. Florence and Clark incorporated family traditions, some surprising musical notes and hallmarks of their heritage into the program (Clark honored her stepfather's faith by saying "mazel tov" at the ceremony's conclusion).



KEEP DECORATIONS SIMPLE

Glass vases, hung from each pew and filled with lilies and hydrangeas, sat low enough to allow each guest an unobstructed view of the couple.



PLAY IT UNSAFE

Pachelbel's "Canon in D"? Not for this bride. Clark asked the musicians to perform the Cure's "Just Like Heaven" before the processional.

INCLUDE EVERYONE

Clark's father *and* stepfather escorted her down the aisle, the couple's tuxedo-clad terrier carried the ring, and Florence's son, Miles, joined the bride and groom in lighting the unity candle.



WALK THIS WAY

The choir led the wedding party from the church to cocktail hour at the inn.

TAKE TO THE STREET

To keep spirits high after the recessional—and to avoid the anticlimactic lull before the reception—Clark surprised her husband with another local specialty. A Gullah choir, made up of slaves' descendants who have lived on the islands of South Carolina and Georgia for generations, sang chapel-side.



a formal reception

For a celebrity chef with an international following, hosting close friends and family is a rare opportunity. Florence treated guests to a multicourse menu worthy of a four-star restaurant. Attired in black tie and cocktail dresses, they dined in the inn's candlelit ballroom, then moved downstairs, where a live band played two sets: one dedicated to the seventies (for Florence), the other to the eighties (for Clark).



CONTROL CLUTTER

Florence has an aversion to crowded tables. "When we're eating out, I give half of the stuff on the table back to the wait-staff," he says. To prevent such pileup the pair designed a menu that did double duty: each had a guest's name written in calligraphy, eliminating the need for a separate place card. Ever the event planner, Clark kept extra personalized pieces handy in case they needed to make last-minute changes to the seating plan.

TYLER'S TIPS: Elegant Wedding Fare

Though he stood at the altar—not in front of a stove—on his wedding day, Florence was involved in planning every part of the meal. He fused local ingredients with crowd-pleasing standards like strip steak and oysters, and kept messy sauces to a minimum.



TIERS FOR TWO

Unable to decide on one flavor, the couple alternated layers of lemon and vanilla genoise.



Baby-beet salad



Prime New York strip sirloin



Slow-roasted grouper

► **CONSIDER THE SEASON** "You can't go wrong with beet-and-goat-cheese salad," Florence says, "but adding citrus fruit and toasted hazelnuts gave it a wintry spin." Guests also enjoyed parsnips, currants, pears and squash.

► **VARY THE MENU** Offer at least two main courses. "We chose steak because it's not polarizing the way lamb is, as well as grouper, a not too fishy-tasting fish," Florence says.

► **PROVIDE LATE-NIGHT SNACKS** "We served mini peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches with shot glasses of milk at midnight," Florence says. "Another great combination is tiny grilled cheese sandwiches with cream-of-tomato soup." ■



PB&Js with milk



One of Florence's favorite memories of his wedding? Surprising his guests with a fireworks show. "It was really spectacular," he says.