

JUGGLING ACT
Smith makes
an art of
multi-tasking.

THE MAESTRO

Bernadette Smith helps gay couples tackle the challenges of planning a same-sex affair.

BY RACHEL STRUTT

As Bernadette Smith ticks off the list of customized wedding packages offered by her Boston-based event-planning company—"the Alexander the Great, the Oscar Wilde, the Virginia Woolf"—a theme emerges. Smith launched It's About Time Events in 2004, shortly after gay marriage became legal in Massachusetts. Here, she discusses her speciality: nontraditional weddings. >>



617 448 9999

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THE EXPERTS WEDDING PLANNING

What's the difference between planning a same-sex and a straight wedding? The planning process is about the same, yet it's different in terms of emotions. Sometimes couples struggle with whether or not to come out to various family members, or worry about whom to invite. I've had weddings where the bride didn't invite her mom. You want to provide support.

How do you find your clients? Some clients come to me after they've had bad experiences picking out a ring or a dress. It can be really stressful having to come out every time you work with a new vendor.

Tell us about your experiences working with vendors when planning a same-sex wedding. I've experienced some really bad vibes from certain vendors—various types of churches, for example. I've also found that in different parts of the state, like the Worcester area, the vibe isn't always great. I can tell someone's comfort level with a same-sex couple right away.

Do you ever just walk away? I'm definitely an advocate for my clients and take good care of them, but I'm not going to try to change someone's opinion. I'm not an educator. People make assumptions about weddings. I had a wedding at the Museum of Science where the waitstaff used the expression "bride and groom." I told the waitress, "It's actually two brides." People can so easily fall into the traditional way of thinking about weddings—whether you're gay or straight.

Do you try to work with gay vendors? If I can support the community by working with gay-run vendors, I will. Yet I guarantee my clients the best service and the best price possible, regardless of sexual identity.

Is it difficult to find certain products or decorations for a same-sex wedding celebration? It used to be difficult to find wedding cake toppers—of two grooms or two brides—but not anymore. It's even possible to find gay wedding cards now. Yet most of my clients don't look for groom-and-groom or bride-and-bride themes.



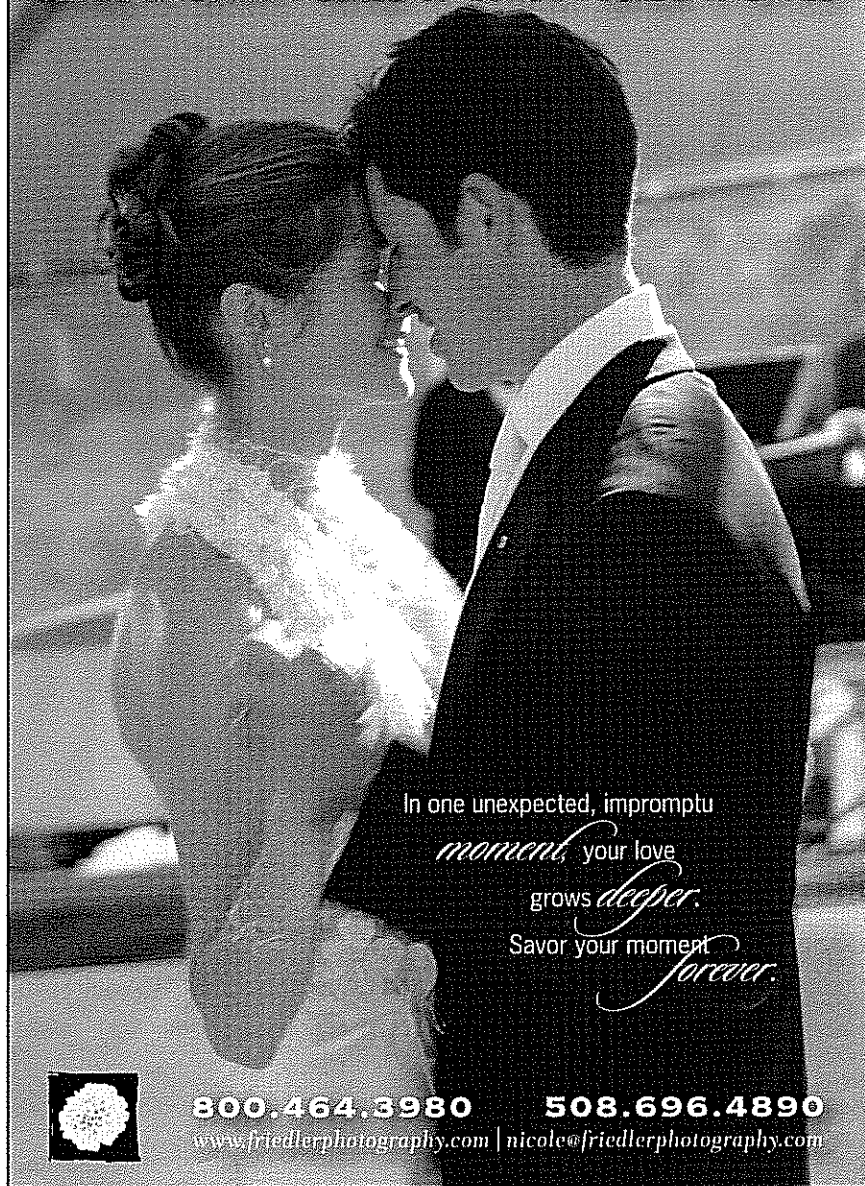
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here's some sweet relief.*


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THE EXPERTS WEDDING PLANNING

They're looking for things that are creative or colorful. Couples are looking to represent themselves and their culture, not necessarily their sexual identity.

It's About Time Events, 617-733-2965, itsabouttimeevents.com.

WHY EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE A GAY WEDDING

GRAPHIC DESIGNER DAVID CUCINOTTA AND HIS PARTNER, JIM COVE, RECENTLY MARRIED IN PROVINCETOWN WITH BERNADETTE SMITH'S HELP. BELOW, CUCINOTTA OFFERS THREE REASONS WHY A GAY WEDDING IS WAY MORE FUN THAN A STRAIGHT ONE.



1. GAY COUPLES THROW TRADITION OUT THE WINDOW. "We had no obligations to do anything," says Cucinotta, above right. "We were paying for the wedding, so we didn't worry what Mom and Dad thought." The couple made sure *not* to seat friends or family together. "We placed people in interesting combinations at small tables." And instead of a formal sit-down dinner, they had a buffet, "which mentally unlocked people from their seats and got them moving around."

2. THEY FOCUS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE NIGHT: THE PARTY. "Our ceremony was 18 minutes. Dinner was just an hour and 20 minutes. The dancing was four hours, interrupted only by cake-cutting." Oh, and the open bar? Seven hours.

3. THEY PLAY MUSIC THAT GETS PEOPLE DANCING. Cucinotta's playlist: 1) "Excited" by M People. "Any track by People sets a very cool vibe for dancing," he says. 2) "Always There" (David Morales remix) by Incognito. "A great big, feel-good toe-tapper." 3) "I Just Want to Be Happy" by Gloria Estefan. "I defy any music snob to stay in his seat when this classic track is played." 4) "Stay This Way" (Club Mix by David Morales) by the Brand New Heavies. 5) "Heaven Knows" by Donna Summer. "Classic anthem status!" **JULIE SURATT**

The perfect location for intimate rehearsal dinners and showers in Cohasset Village.