

Site Layout

Unit 6

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The Venue

The reception may be casual or formal or it may be elegant one, all depends upon the couple.

Regardless of the setting for the reception venue, your aim should be to keep it in line with the overall formality, theme and style of the wedding.

Choosing the Venue

From elegant mansions to casual outdoor marquees, there are various options to choose from when it comes to planning the reception venue. Think about the style and formality that the couple desires and the overall mood that you wish to create when first considering the venue. Do they want a traditional sit-down dinner, or a casual cocktail affair? Whatever is desired, deciding on this is a good place to start.

Once you've decided upon the style for the reception, it's time to start searching for the ultimate venue. Take some time to browse through wedding magazines, your local phone books, the internet, and of course.

You should be aware that the things that you plan from this point forward may be influenced by the reception venue, its style and its location. As an example, your choice of a grand formal mansion as the reception venue may not necessarily tie in with a casual beach ceremony or vice versa.

Take some time to consider all of the options and paint a picture in your mind of a perfect wedding. This will help you to choose a venue that fits in with your ideas for the wedding.

Inspecting Reception Venues

Once you have found some potential venues, it's time to give them a call to arrange an appointment to personally inspect them. It's a good idea to choose 3-5, if possible. It is advisable that you do not book a venue without inspecting it first. Whilst the photos in the magazines may look impressive, looks can be deceiving.

Take your time when inspecting the venue, taking into account the size, layout, cleanliness, lighting, furnishings, gardens, special features and overall ambience of the venue. Ask plenty of questions and be sure that you write everything down.

Questions To Ask the Reception Venue

Before you head out to inspect your venues, take the time to make a list of questions to ask during your appointment. Ensure that you have an idea of the style of reception you would like to have (sit down dinner, buffet, cocktail etc), the number of guests, a rough wedding date, wedding budget, and any special requirements for the wedding reception.

You should feel free to ask as many questions as you wish during your inspection. The following list may be of assistance to you.

- How many guests will the venue accommodate?
- What style of reception does the venue cater for (sit down dinner, buffet, cocktail etc)?
- Will you have exclusive use of the venue, or will you be sharing it with others (either; before, during or after your reception)?
- Does the venue provide food and beverages, or do you require a caterer?
- Does the venue provide wait staff?
- Are all furnishings, cutlery and crockery etc. provided by the venue?
- What exactly is included in the venue's wedding packages?
- Are there any special offers available with the venue's wedding packages (reduced price for off-peak, winter or Sunday weddings etc)?
- Are you able to alter the packages to suit your needs?
- If alcohol is included in the packages, is it based on the number of guests or by the amount consumed? Are spirits included?
- Will the venue cut your cake and serve to your guests? Is this included in the package? Do you need to provide a cake stand, knife or cake bags?
- Does the venue allow for special dietary requirements for you or your guests (diabetic, gluten-free meals etc)?
- Will the venue provide a reduced-cost meal for your photographer, band members, children etc?
- Are there any additional expenses that you should be aware of?
- Are there any optional extras available (extra courses, extra time, upgrades for wines etc)?
- Is a Master of Ceremonies included?
- Does the venue provide any decorations (table settings, chair covers, candelabras etc)? If not, will they set them up if you are to provide them?
- Is there a dance floor?
- Is entertainment included in the package? Are there any restrictions or requirements if you are to arrange the entertainment (such as noise restrictions)?
- How long will the reception run for and are there any fees for running over time?
- What time does the venue close?
- Is there a bridal room that will be available to you and your bridal party throughout the reception?
- Is the venue heated and air-conditioned?
- Are there any cleaning costs/requirements associated with your reception?
- When are deposits, instalments and final payments due? How much will they be?
- Are there any cancellation fees?

Additional Considerations

In addition to these questions, you may wish to consider the following:

- Is the venue within your budget?
- Is it in keeping with the style and theme of the wedding?
- Is it available on the wedding date?
- Are there areas at the venue that will provide for photo opportunities?
- Is the venue close to your ceremony venue and photography locations?
- Is it accessible for the guests?
- Are the staff professional and experienced, and do you warm to them?
- Is the layout appropriate for your band/entertainment or other aspects of the reception?
- Is the reception venue appropriate for all types of weather?
- Are the facilities appropriate for the couple, the guests and others (such as caterers, a band/DJ etc)?

With all of these considerations in mind, you should be able to choose an appropriate setting for the reception.

Things to Consider

Once you have found a venue for the wedding ceremony and reception, you'll probably be wondering where to start in terms of decorations and equipment hire. There are a number of things that you should consider first. These include:

- Ceremony venue
- Ceremony venue layout
- Reception venue
- Reception venue layout
- Items that you must have
- Items that you would like to have

Ceremony Venue

When considering the ceremony site itself, you should take into account the following when planning for your decorations and equipment to hire. Firstly, if it is to be held outdoors, ensure that there is shelter nearby, or arrange an alternate setting or marquee in the case of inclement weather (rain, hail or shine). Also consider the time of day in which your ceremony is to be held, so that you can position your backs to the sun. You'll have much better photos if you're not squinting from the sun being in your eyes.

Consider what equipment you will require for the ceremony itself, taking into account:

- Your entrance/processional.
- You may wish to hire a red carpet, or similar runner to walk upon.
- The point where the couple will exchange the vows.

- Wedding arches and other decorative items are available to hire, and may add a romantic touch to the ceremony.
- Whether there will be any readings. If so, a lectern or stand may be required for the reader to position himself or herself.
- A location for the signing of the register.
- You may wish to hire a table and chair set by which to sit at to sign the register.
- How many seats (if any) you will need to hire for your guests, and where you wish to position them.
- Any other decorative items you may wish to have.

Venue Layout

The most important factor is the venue itself and its layout. If it is possible, ask the venue manager whether they have a copy of a floor plan or map that you may keep. If not, you may wish to sketch an approximate drawing yourself. In doing so, you will be able to work out what equipment you will require, where it should be positioned and the quantity and size that your venue will allow for. On the plan, take note of the areas in which you may wish to place a DJ/band, the caterers, bar (if required), dance floor, gift table, guest seating etc. It may also be handy to mark down the location of electrical points, so that you can plan for lighting, or any other services that require a power outlet. Lastly, take note of the location of the toilets (you obviously don't want to set up the caterers next to the toilet door)!

Outdoor considerations

Beyond weather, two significant considerations when planning outdoor weddings are bathrooms and bugs. In terms of bathrooms, if the wedding is in someone's backyard rather than at a rented space that already has restroom facilities, it is in the best interest of the homeowners to rent bathrooms. Even if the house is large, having hundreds of people traipsing through to use their facilities can put an enormous amount of pressure on the sewer system. Homeowners have had their plumbing systems literally wiped out by having a tent wedding on the property and not investing in washrooms. Bathroom rental from well-known companies can be as simple as a holding tank or as luxuriously equipped as their Executive Restroom Trailers which have lighting, music, carpeting, air conditioning, heating, flush, and running water with the sinks. Make sure to get at least one rental washroom for every 100 guests and carefully position them away from the main activities.

A second outdoor consideration is bugs, which in warm climates can move beyond a nuisance to extreme discomfort and leave-taking. Imagine an outdoor, Southern wedding in July: mosquitoes, flies, wasps, ticks, gnats, yellow jackets, and no-see-ums, just to name a few. They swarm around the food and bite the guests. They smell sugar and go crazy. They are drawn to the light for evening weddings. Citronella candles help but have a pungent smell, so they should be kept out of the immediate vicinity of the tent to avoid interfering with the meal. Machines that zap bugs can be rented, but they have an irritating sound. Tent entryways, on the other hand, are very helpful because they control the flow of people and other outside elements.

You could also spray the surrounding area, but you have to be careful because children will often run in grassy areas and the chemicals then present a safety issue. A final option is to have the wait staff walk around with trays of wipes or bottles of bug repellent. A supply should also be available in the restroom facilities.

Your site layout does not need to be a masterpiece that any architect would envy; instead, it is a straightforward drawing that offers a concise overview of placement and spacing. If there are no online site maps available of the venues, start with a blank page for both the ceremony and reception sites and fill in the applicable essentials covered in Table.

Site layout is straightforward when weddings are held in established venues that offer few options for variation. As the planning space becomes more open and the number of rentals increases, the site layout becomes more complex. For example, outdoor weddings and receptions held in tents require more attention to detail and increase the number of decisions that must be made

Site Layout Essentials for Weddings

TABLE 6.1

Ceremony

- Parking
- Room dimensions
- Entrances and exits, with special marks for accessible paths and ramps and indications of controls (e.g., metal detector, security check)
- Restroom facilities
- Number of rows, with marks for reserved areas, and indications if the areas are separated for the bride's guests versus the groom's guests
- Waiting area for bride, groom, and wedding party prior to ceremony
- Indicators for the location for floral décor and other special ceremony elements
- Space to be used for central focus (e.g., altar, arch, or other visually accessible area)
- Fire lanes and other emergency information

Reception

- Parking
- Room dimensions
- Entrances and exits, with special marks for accessible paths and ramps and indications of controls (e.g., metal detector, security check)
- Restroom facilities
- Cocktail hour area, if separate from reception space
- Number of guest tables with marks for reserved tables
- Head table and/or sweetheart table
- Service stations for wait staff
- Tables and areas associated with seating stationery, gifts, the cake, and favours
- Kitchen and/or food-related areas
- Bar area
- Music and dance area
- Areas for the placement of specialized lighting
- Indicators for the location for specialized floral décor and other special reception elements
- Fire lanes and other emergency information

As discussed earlier, tables come in different shapes and sizes, so you must understand the floor plan and the square footage of a room to determine how many tables will fit and how to space them. Be sure to leave at least 48 inches, and preferably 54, between tables so there is adequate space for movement, allowing guests not to feel cramped and the wait staff to easily move around while carrying large trays. Understanding the spacing of the venues for each wedding you plan will help you maximize the safety and comfort level of the guests and staff.

Wedding Ceremony Equipment

As mentioned, there are so many options to choose from today, that planning your decorations and equipment for hire may seem an overwhelming task. The lists below may be of assistance for you.

To make the ceremony a truly unique and memorable one, you may wish to consider the following list of items to hire or purchase.

- Aisle runner/carpet
- Back drops
- Balloons
- Baskets (for ceremony booklets etc)
- Birds (to be released)
- Butterflies (to be released)
- Chair/Pew bows
- Chair covers
- Candelabras
- Candles
- Candle holders
- Columns/pillars
- Confetti/flower petals/bubbles
- Flooring
- Floral arrangements
- Flower pots/vases
- General decorations/banners
- Heating/cooling
- Lectern/stand (for readings or seating plans etc)
- Lighting
- Linen/fabric
- Marquee/shelter
- Piñatas
- Plants/pots/trees
- Rotunda/gazebo
- Special effects/fireworks etc
- Steamers/ribbons
- Tables/chairs
- Table decorations
- Trellis
- Umbrellas
- Wedding arch

Reception Venue Equipment

Once you have noted on the floor plan where everything is located, you may begin to plan for what you may wish to hire for the reception. If the reception is a sit down dinner, consider how many you wish to have seated at each table. From this number you can work

out the amount of tables and chairs that may be required. Note that if your venue is short on space, round tables take up more room than rectangular tables.

You may also wish to discuss with your entertainers or DJ (if you're having any) what their requirements are in terms of equipment. In most cases, entertainers come prepared with all of their necessary equipment; however, it's always a good idea to double check.

Consider any other services in which you are employing for the wedding reception and be sure to contact them in regards to whether anything may be required on your part, in terms of equipment.

The following list will provide an idea of what items may be required for the wedding reception:

- Back drops
- Balloons
- Bar
- Cake stand
- Cake table
- Candelabras
- Candles
- Candle holders
- Catering equipment
- Chair covers
- Columns/pillars
- Crockery
- Cutlery
- Dance floor
- Easel/stand for seating plans
- Flooring
- Floral Arrangements
- Flower pots/vases
- General decorations/banners
- Glassware
- Heating/cooling
- Jukebox
- Lectern/stand (for speeches and the MC)
- Lighting
- Linen/fabric
- Marquee/shelter
- Microphone / P.A. system
- Napkins
- Napkin rings
- Piñatas
- Place card holders
- Plants/pots/trees
- Refrigeration and eskies

- Special effects/fireworks etc
- Steamers/ribbons
- Tablecloths (Bridal table, cake table, guest's tables, gift table)
- Tables/chairs
- Table centrepieces
- Table decorations
- Table runners
- Wishing well

Equipment Hire/ Rental

Rentals allow couples to set the stage for their wedding in a way that would not be cost effective if they had to purchase all of the items. Rentals such as tents, lighting, tables, chairs, linens, tableware, equipment, and other specialty items serve dual purposes. First, each rental will have a specific function. Second, rentals add to the theme and mood of the wedding, varying from traditional sophistication to funky modernity. This section offers the essentials that consultants need to know about wedding rentals and layout, including;

- tents;
- tables, chairs, linens, and tableware;
- lighting;
- other outdoor considerations; and
- Bringing it together with the site layout.

Tents

For outdoor ceremonies and receptions, tents are a common rental item because the weather is seldom perfect. Rain is not the only worry; cold, heat, humidity, wind, and bugs can also lead to uncomfortable guests. This section will cover three aspects of tents: (1) styles and accessories; (2) size and setup; and (3) cost.

Tent Styles and Accessories

The two primary styles of tents are pole tents and frame tents, and many subcategories fall under these two broad groupings. Davis Richardson of Sugarplum Tent Company (2006) offers the following information that will allow you to distinguish between different styles of tents. He explains that pole tents are held up by exterior and interior poles and then anchored in the ground by staking. Modern pole tents are referred to as tension tents, since high-tension winches or ratchets are used to create the taut appearance. Pole tents are the classic choice for weddings, allowing for dramatic, high peaks and a sweeping, billowy look. However, the interior poles can be unattractive and obtrusive, so they are often wrapped with fabric or greenery and decorated with flowers.

Frame tents, in contrast, eliminate the need for interior poles because they are supported with aluminium piping that frames the top and sides of the structure. Frame tents become necessary when the installation is on concrete, asphalt, or any surface where poles cannot be anchored. While the frame tent is more self-supporting, it typically still must be staked

down. Installation of frame tents is more time consuming; thus rentals are more expensive. Furthermore, the mass of aluminium supporting the top of the tent can be unattractive, so fabric liners are often used to make the interior aesthetically pleasing.

Picking the style of tent is the first of many decisions that must be made for tent rentals. Other considerations include flooring, sidewalls, entrance canopies, lighting, liners, electricity, heating or air conditioning units, and staging. If the ground is wet, uneven, and/or gravelly, flooring will keep guests from stumbling or getting covered with mud.

Flooring can be wood, plastic, carpeting, or an all-weather artificial turf. If your clients are planning on having dancing, they will want to minimally select a dance floor. Sidewalls and entrance canopies offer an elegant touch and extra protection from the elements. Sidewalls, canopies, and the ceiling can be clear, allowing for an open look that can be complemented with lighting and decorative liners. Electricity is essential for lighting as well as generators used to heat or cool the tent. Finally, staging and steps are often used for the head table and musicians. Taken together, it should become clear that selecting a tent is not done to save money on a ceremony or reception site, because the tent and additional rentals are often much more costly than renting a ballroom or other venue. Instead, tents offer a unique opportunity to truly tailor an event space.

Guidelines for Selecting the Correct Tent

	Tent Size If	Tent Size If
Number of Guests	Seated at Tables	Standing or Buffet
50	20x40	20 x30
100	30 x50	30 x30
150	40 x60	40 x40
200	40 x80	40 x60
250	60 x70	40 x80
300	60 x80	60 x 60

Tent Size and Setup

The Table above gives basic guidelines for selecting a tent size. Keep in mind that actual dimensions can vary, but in general tent sizes start at 10 feet x10 feet, with both length and width increasing in 10-foot increments. The guidelines in this table do not include the dance floor, which averages an additional 600 square feet. So, for example, if you were planning a wedding for 100 seated guests, this would suggest selecting a 30 x 50 tent, which gives you 1,500 square feet. However, if your client wants to include a dance floor, this would suggest a minimum of 2,100 square feet; thus you would consult with your tent vendor to determine the closest size available. Looking at the chart, you might be wise to select a 40 x60, giving you 2,400 square feet.

Bear in mind that it is better to have too much room than not enough, as you do not want guests to feel crowded. When discussing price with the tent vendor, make sure that the proposal includes tent rental cost as well as the amount of time needed to set it up and the number of workers who will be dedicated to the job. Advise your clients that it is also a

sound investment to pay for a technician who will stay for the entirety of the event to manage the tent as needed. If the sidewalls need to be raised or the heat level needs to be adjusted, a technician can efficiently and professionally handle the task. Reputable tent companies may cost a bit more, but they are well worth it, for the last thing your clients want is a tent that is unsafe.

Tables, chairs, linens, and tableware

When starting with a tent, your clients will also need to rent tables, chairs, linens, and tableware. At many indoor venues, some of these items need to be rented, or upgrades may be available for a price. Although some venues will require that you use their equipment, others will be flexible and allow rentals to be brought in for the wedding. It is important to know what they have available in advance so that you can gauge how the couple feels about the options and offer alternatives. For example, when visiting a reception venue, you may notice that the chairs all have mauve cushions, yet your clients' colours are navy and gold. Knowing this information, you can discuss the possibility of renting chair covers or alternative cushions with your clients.

Tables are the most straightforward choice and are available in a multitude of sizes. Common guest tables are 5-foot rounds, which seat 8 or 10, and 6-foot rounds, which seat 10 to 12, while an 8-foot oblong table can seat 8 to 10. Sweetheart tables have become more common for the bride and groom who want to be seated by themselves. Should they choose to sit with the wedding party, the trend is for couples to select a round head table rather than oblong. Square tables that seat two guests per side are another increasingly popular alternative. Tables of various sizes are also needed for items such as the escort cards, gifts, favours, and the cake, as well as wait stations for the catering staff. For escort cards, gifts, and favours, 6-foot or 8-foot oblong tables are commonly chosen, while the cake can be placed on a 4-foot round. Chairs are also relatively finite in terms of variety, with folding chairs offering a budget-friendly option. These chairs come in a variety of colours, with material options of wood, metal, or plastic influencing the price, as well as the presence of padding. For upscale weddings, Chiavari chairs are a popular selection. Chiavari chairs are formal, elegant, and enhanced by accompanying cushions which can be covered in a wide array of fabrics to match the table linens. As a point of comparison, a padded wooden folding chair averages around £3 to rent, while a Chiavari chair with cushion will run about £9 per chair in rental fees.

When bringing tables and chairs into a venue, it is extremely important to know the regulations. Some historic buildings will not allow tables to be rolled on the flooring, and each table and chair leg must have rubber or felt-tipped bottoms. Policies such as these mean the room has to be laid with pads and each item must be carefully prepared and placed; accordingly, staffing costs will go up significantly.

Selecting linens and tableware can be a time-consuming endeavour, as seemingly endless options pertaining to colour, style, and material are available. Advise your clients to have their theme, colour scheme, and floral décor in mind when selecting items like china, glassware, flatware, and linens. Of these, linens are traditionally the most overlooked; couples often do not think past the traditional white tablecloth. On the contrary, linens offer

one of the least expensive ways to make a huge impression, and most reception venues allow clients to bring in rented linens. Top rental companies offer hundreds of styles and cuts from which to choose, available in fabrics such as damask, lace, organza, satin, silk, taffeta, toile, twill, and velvet.

Linens are available in an endless array of colours and styles such as embroidered, floral, fringed, iridescent, pin-tucked, and striped. A current trend is layering linens to create a dramatic and memorable effect. If the linens are bold and patterned, it is a good idea to go with simple floral décor to create a balance so that the elements will not “fight.” Keep in mind that you will need linens for areas such as the cake table and escort table, which may also require table skirts. Longer linens that do not require skirts are a current trend. The linens should be long enough to cover the legs of all tables, which are often rough looking from use.

When selecting linens, once your clients have narrowed down their options, you can work with the company specialist, who will often send you samples. You can then schedule an appointment with the reception venue to set three tables with three different sets of linens and decide which looks best. This is a good time to work with the floral designer so you have a sample of the centrepiece on hand. When placing the order, if the budget will allow, have your clients order a few extra napkins and an extra table cloth. Spills are common, so it is helpful to have spares just in case. When the linens are delivered, always double-check the order. Make sure you received the correct pattern and correct number, as your clients will be accountable for any missing pieces. This same advice applies to any rental item. Generally, the rental or catering staff will set the tables for you, because tableware shouldn't just be thrown on randomly. The correct placement of plates, glasses, flatware, and the intricate folds that are common to napkins for formal weddings can be time-consuming endeavours.

At the end of the reception, you need to re-count the rentals. If a linen order was for 12 tablecloths and 100 napkins, you are responsible for getting those exact numbers back to the rental company. Invariably, someone throws a napkin away, and your client will be charged. If it costs £3 to rent a napkin, it will cost £6 or more to replace that linen. Specialty table linens are much more expensive, with rental fees averaging £30 and higher and replacement fees at least double that amount.

Lighting

Lighting is used to establish the mood of a setting, and innovative lighting can bring a ceremony or reception venue to life. Just as a coat of paint and new carpeting can transform a house, professional lighting can take a bland venue and make it look like a glamorous Hollywood movie set.

There are three areas of concern with lighting: (1) centrepiece lighting; (2) dance floor and wall lighting; and (3) tent lighting.

Centrepiece Lighting

In a ballroom, where existing lights are in place, the first lighting consideration pertains to the centrepieces, which can include pin spotting or a wash of light. Pin spotting is a tightly focused beam of light directed on the table centrepieces, which allows the centrepieces to “pop,” as the light does not spill over onto the rest of the table. Pin spots can even be placed underneath a table to shoot up through a clear glass centrepiece for a unique effect. The wash of light came about as a response to the fact that centrepieces started getting larger and taller. For large arrangements, the pin spotting would allow for one hot spot on the arrangement but couldn’t capture the whole piece. A wash of light is a wider beam that will light up the whole table. This light is particularly effective when the linens are spectacular, as the wash will pick up any shimmer or play in the tablecloth. LED (light-emitting diode) lights are the latest trend because they offer an even wash of light with very little electrical usage. Regardless of the lighting style, white light should never be used because it does not look becoming on people. Lighting should make the room, the flowers, and the guests look great. In order to achieve this effect, lighting specialists choose from a range of pinks and ambers that are subtle and flattering.

Consultant Checklist and Reminders for Rentals and Site Layout

- Prior to meeting with a tent rental company, familiarize yourself with the different types of tents and accessories and prepare a draft of the desired site layout.
- Have too much room rather than not enough in a tent.
- Note that the cost of a tent and the necessary associated rentals is often significantly higher than renting a ballroom or other venue.
- Impress guests with creative linen selections.
- When placing the linen order, add a few extra napkins and an extra table cloth in case of spills.
- Count rentals upon delivery and before pickup to make sure there are no missing items.
- Use lighting to transform a space from bland to glamorous.
- Recognize that bathrooms and bugs are two significant considerations with outdoor weddings.
- Understand that site layout offers a concise overview of placement and spacing.