

Reception style

Getting the reception look right is hugely important, says wedding planner Beth Stretton

Over the many years of styling weddings in the southwest of France all our couples have one thing in common: they come here to celebrate their love in natural, beautiful surroundings. And creating the right look to complement and enhance their chosen space (be this a château, countryside *manoir* or mum and dad's back garden) is one of the most crucial elements of any wedding. So here are some helpful and simple tips that can make a big difference to how you plan your event styling.

FLOWERS

'Have a clear starting point whether this be a broader wedding theme, a particular type of flower or a general colour scheme. New fashions emerge with each passing wedding season but I find there are other far more important issues.

'The first of these is local influence. Opting for flowers that are synonymous with France absolutely does work and there is no doubt they are more admired if the displays are fitting, such as sunflowers in full bloom, or lavender, both of which evoke romantic notions of French warmth and sunshine.

'The second major influence is budget. Here wedding flowers are generally quite expensive. I suggest you stick to flowers in season or look to less expensive alternatives. Why not purchase pot-plants for table centres? Or if your wedding is scheduled for a time of year when foliage and flowers are naturally bountiful, the exterior spaces will need very little dressing or alteration in daytime. And avoid key dates (particularly *fête des*



A marquee reception organised by Beth

Mères) when the price of flowers can rise dramatically.

DECORATION

'Decide what you really want. Is less more? Are you going the whole nine yards or will you strive to strike a balance? I genuinely believe the latter is the most difficult to achieve (despite being perhaps the most obvious) and that the best decorated events are either very simple or done to the max. Take bunting - it is rarely worth hanging a few metres of it. Keep it clean or go to town as anything in between is less likely to work.

'If you are on a limited budget, consider having a key object made bespoke so you have one thing that is special. For example, wedding stylists CK and Bea commissioned hand-made table runners that stole the decor show. Or how about a table plan board that people will remember?

LIGHTING

'Never underestimate how crucial lighting is to creating the right ambi-

ance. It is particularly important for marquee-based receptions - but it needs to be practical and safe.

'For the quintessential *al fresco* evening candlelight is fundamental and there are some inexpensive and easy ways to achieve the basics. Tealights and candlebags are popular examples (though I always make sure the latter are in plain sight at all times).

'As spring and summer can be very dry here a more full lighting display is best left to experienced and insured technicians. And it will almost certainly be more cost-effective to use an expert who provides the tools than to purchase them yourself.

'Finally, never underestimate the amount of time and effort for both preparation and execution. Accept it and embrace it - or perhaps sit back and let the experts take care of it!

Beth runs Get Married in France: www.getmarriedinfrance.co.uk. CK and Bea - Wedding and Event Styling and Lighting: telephone 06 76 73 33 02 or email ckandb@gmail.com

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