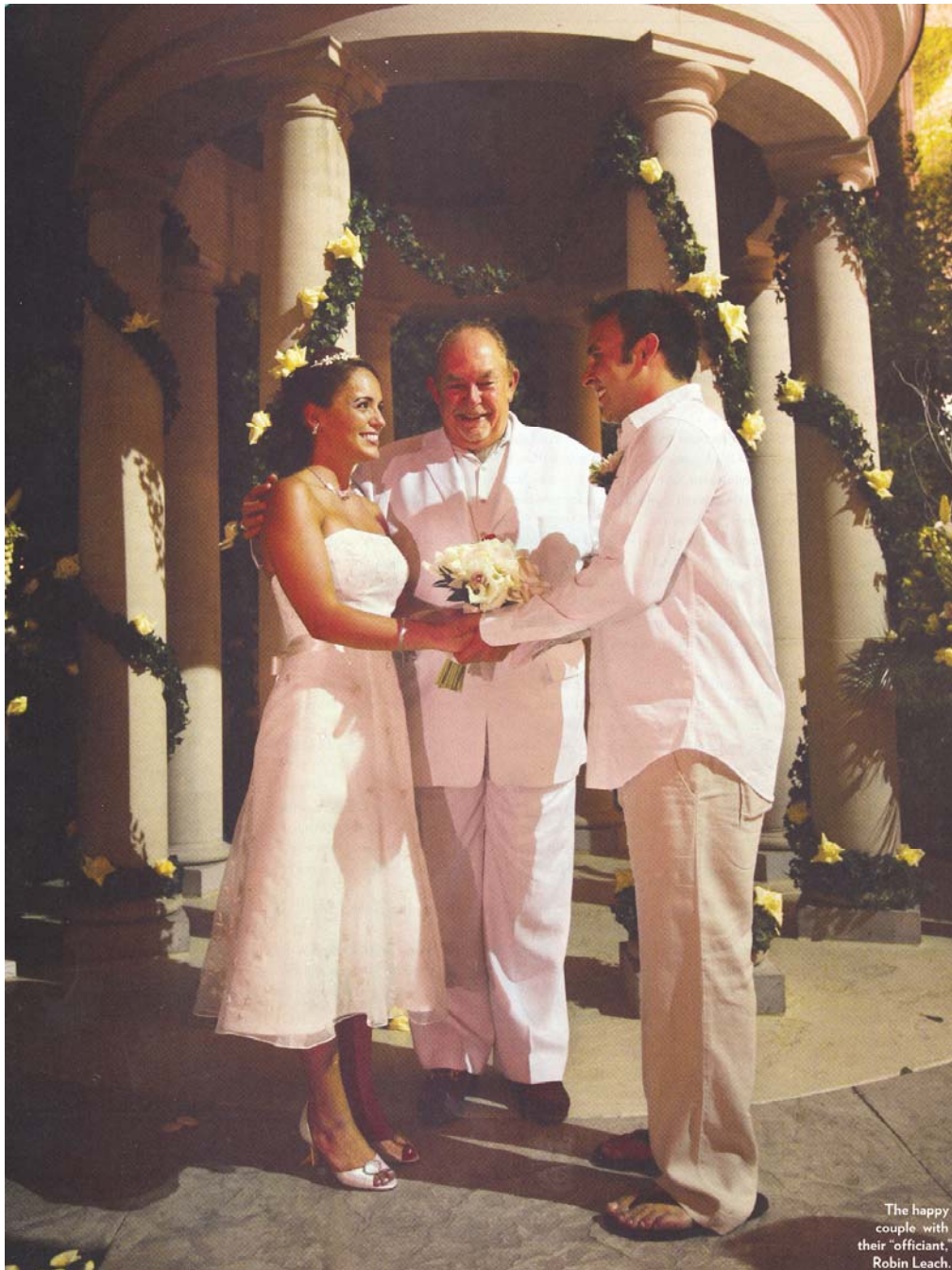




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The happy couple with their "officiant," Robin Leach.

a very Vegas wedding

WHEN YOU LIVE IN
LAS VEGAS, THERE
ARE COUNTLESS
WAYS TO MAKE
YOUR NUPTIALS
MEMORABLE —
AND AFFORDABLE.

BY JUSTIN JIMENEZ

"Until death temporarily separates us before we meet again in our next life," I said, looking into the eyes of my true love, our vows askew, matching our equally nonconformist ceremony. In a gorgeous outdoor chapel lined with candles and lush flowers, filled with the most important people in our lives, my childhood sweetheart, Tammy, returned the iconoclastic covenant. Judging by the surroundings we could have been in Greece, or Italy. Looking at our wedding officiate, the venerable Mr. Robin Leach, we might have been in a Bel Air retreat. Yet in truth, we were tucked away in the Venus Gardens at Caesars Palace ... just 15 minutes from our apartment. It was the climax of a perfect three-day Vegas wedding. We found the superlative spot to join our lives — right in our own backyard.

While nuptial bliss in this city is well known for its instant (and sometimes inebriated) gratification, it is not known for its grace (think Elvis hitching you, or a drive-thru). As a result, many locals shy away from the Strip, which is akin to a New Yorker ignoring Central Park. The Strip is the epicenter of Las Vegas, the place where every-

one wants to come. It's something to be embraced, not ignored.

A day of connubiality in Vegas is a weekend of fun. A wedding "at home" suddenly becomes a vacation and a treat for all involved, including us. Elegance can be wed with fun; you can have your wedding cake and gorge on it, too. We fell in love a long time ago, but our relationship solidified here. What happened in Vegas we wanted to finish in Vegas.

IF YOU INVITE THEM, THEY WILL COME

An English proverb says marriage halves our griefs, doubles our joys, and quadruples our expenses. Find a budget and then plan on going beyond it. I've always thought it was silly to see engaged couples bickering about money to begin their life together, and while Tammy and I shared our moments, once we ironed out what we could afford, the planning process became half the fun.

The largest hurdle, more of a steeplechase really, was the invite list. A word of caution: If you invite somebody to a wedding here, they will come. That third cousin

from Chicago your father wants you to invite as a mere formality will show up — and likely ask to bring his whole family along. No one needs an excuse to go to Vegas, so invite only who you *truly* want to be involved.



"Ring security"

Second, set a date with an eye toward the budget. We saved a decent chunk of change by throwing our monogamous promise bash in late July, one of the slower times of the year on the Strip. We chose to avoid the blistering Mojave summer and held our events at night, so properties were more than willing to give us an extra break when it came to the bill.

ONE-STOP SHOPPING

We craved a full weekend of action and, while exhausting, it was well worth it. Jam-packing three days worth of events gave us plenty of time to get acquainted with our in-laws; as a result, we didn't

feel the pressure to schmooze everyone on just the day of the ceremony. Tammy fell in love with the **Venus Gardens** at Caesars Palace, so everything grew from there. To avoid car rentals, we made sure all the events were in the same resort neighborhood, easy to do no matter where you decide to do the deed.

We started with the rehearsal dinner (which we coined the "welcome dinner" as we weren't really rehearsing anything) on the third floor at **Margaritaville** inside Flamingo; it was stupendous. The food was perfect, the view of the Strip was amazing, and the energy set the tone for the weekend. Most of our "crew" stayed there as well,

since wedding guests received 10 percent off any Harrah's property, making the location ideal. (Several hotels have comparable offers.)

PARTY TIME

Next we made a dangerous decision: We decided to have a joint bachelor and bachelorette party the night before our wedding — something rarely done anymore as grooms have a knack for having too much to drink, making brides-to-be a little apprehensive. That's why we decided to do it together. It was a bit much to ask our buddies to make two trips out if we wanted to do it separately, and this allowed us all to have fun and take

the next day slowly. It was actually a great release of party steam that helped us avoid the cliché drunk-fest at the reception. We opted for the **Absolut Suite** at Caesars, a two-floored pad with six rooms, each themed after a flavor of the piquant vodka. It served as the ideal playground for both our younger guests looking to let loose and our older ones to get a little crazy in a comfortable environment. We considered the **Palms' Fantasy Suites**, and even **The MGM Sky Lofts**, but again, proximity was key.

The next morning, the **Flamingo Pool** gave people plenty of time to recoup from the party before gearing up for the hysteria to come.

RESOURCES FROM THOSE IN THE KNOW

Vegas has an abundance of bridal designers, consultants and suppliers. Here are just a few more of our favorites.

BRIDAL & FORMAL WEAR

All About You Bridal Galleria
2470 E. Pebble Rd., 269-9333,
allaboutyoubg.com

This store offers lines that are exclusive to their salon. They are proud of the designers they carry, which include Casablanca, Alfred Sung, Sposa by St. Pucchi, Pronovias, Justin Alexander and many more.

Couture Bride

950 S. Durango Dr.,
647-7778, couturebridelv.com
An exclusive retailer for Vera Wang, Carolina Herrera, Oscar de la Renta, Monique Lhuillier, Elizabeth Fillmore, Ulla Maija and Platinum Collection.

Something Blue Dress House

6345 S. Rainbow Blvd.,
243-2226, somethingbluelv.com
An alternative to warehouse-style bridal stores. Authorized retailer for Henry Roth, Anne Barge, Jenny Lee, Alvina Valenta and Rivini. You can also get your designer bridesmaid dresses and custom flower arrangements.



CAKES

The Cupcakery (above)
9680 S. Eastern Ave.,
207-2253, thecupcakery.com
You have a selection of 14 different flavors not including flavor of the month!

Fantasy Wedding Cakes

3720 W. Tropicana Ave., 362-9280, fantasyweddingcakes.com
You can add fresh flowers and mix any cake flavors.

Freed's Bakery of Las Vegas

9555 S. Eastern Ave.,
456-7762, freedsbakery.com
Freed's bakes more than 2,500 wedding cakes per year.

CAKES (continued)

Jean Philippe Patisserie
Inside the Bellagio,
693-7111, bellagio.com
Your cake can be layered in silk or embellished with edible flowers.

CONSULTANTS & EVENT PLANNERS

CLM Weddings

982-2129, clmweddings.com
Consider it a custom wedding. Award-winning designers sit down with you and create the exclusive designs for your special day. It will reflect who you are, your culture, beliefs, family and friends.

DECOR

Vegas Props

5530 S. Arville St.,
933-4050, vegasprops.com
More than just a place for movie props, the new division — Weddings By VP — offers full-service decor, floral, photography and catering for any size occasion, including special events and corporate parties.

INVITATIONS

Annabelle's All Occasions
4280 S. Hualapai Way,
364-1184, shopannabelles.com
Best known for their three-dimensional invitations: boxes and tins filled with silk tissue and topped with a couture brooch. Your guests receive a gift before arrival.

Las Vegas Paper Doll

231 W. Charleston Blvd.,
385-7892, lvpaperdoll.com
This store carries exclusive lines such as Delphine and Prentiss Douthit. Owner Anne Kellogg says, "We bring a wealth of event planning knowledge and experience to the table, which becomes really important when you create invitations."

PHOTOGRAPHY

LV Photo Party

5047 Lime Kiln Ave.,
427-3711, lvphotoparty.com
While there are many fine photographers in town, the latest craze is to have a "photo party," where a super-size photo booth is brought to your reception and photos are printed on the spot.

CHAMPAGNE DREAMS

The bottom line is that anyone can marry you, if you are willing to do a little legal legwork beforehand. After a quick stop downtown at the marriage license bureau, and then over to the Justice of the Peace, we were already legally hitched; the leprechaun from O'Sheas could have performed the formality at that point. Yet modern-day Vegas icon Leach agreed to be our master of ceremonies. We wanted to set the tone of the wedding: fun yet romantic, loose yet elegant — everything this city is.

PLAN NOT TO PLAN

Take full advantage of the staff; they are more than willing to help out. Brooke Prather of Caesars Wedding Services was a godsend. From flowers to music, she took care of everything and took away the stress that went with it. Almost every hotel has wedding packages available with a la carte options, so let them bear the brunt of the planning. Just a word of advice: These people deal with hundreds of weddings a month, so don't expect them to be hands-on all the way through. Just be assured that the week or two leading up to your day will be all about you.

We had our reception at **Rao's**, which backed up marvelously to the Venus Gardens, allowing all our guests to enter the patio through a private entrance. Party coordinator Michelle Dattilo took care of every detail from the table linens to the champagne toast. Because Caesars and Flamingo are owned by the same company, she even made sure we had line passes for the brunch at the Flamingo

buffet the next day, providing a nice recap of the weekend and one last cheer. Anything the restaurant can't do, several other local companies can. **Vegas Props** took care of our décor at the reception. They both dropped off and cleaned up and worked seamlessly with the staff at the restaurant. It was beautiful, it was easy. This town is built on hospitality. Let them do the work while you enjoy the night.

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS. SO IS THE FUN

Tammy and I entered our wedding laughing, and we can only hope that will echo through our marriage. Our ring bearer was the 3-year-old equivalent of high-roller security, wearing a badged T-shirt from **David's Bridal** and carrying a sterling case with our fourth-finger symbols of devotion. Our cake was actually cupcakes from **The Cupcakery** — a tiered, red-velvet masterpiece with delicious, edible flowers that made people smile. The options are limitless here; some of the best pastry chefs in the world live next door. Everything we needed was right under our noses and everything we wanted was accessible.

Monday morning we waved goodbye to our family. It was a brilliant wedding, a perfect vacation. Vegas is not just our home anymore, it is also our honeymoon and a snapshot of the best weekend of our lives. The lights on the Strip make us smile like they did the first time we ever visited, and remind us why we moved here in the first place — love. ■



SPEND A LITTLE, SPEND A LOT

Ideas for a wedding on any budget

\$1,000



«Little Church of the West all-inclusive wedding, packages starting at: \$199
Dinner for 12 at classic Vegas eatery Battista's: \$350
Massive cheesecake from Carnegie Deli at the Mirage: \$80

Stretch Hummer from CLS Las Vegas, per hour: \$150
Champagne toast in Romance Lounge atop Stratosphere, per bottle: \$150

\$50,000

Welcome dinner for out-of-town guests at Lupo, Mandalay Bay: \$7,000
Private party at major Strip nightclub: \$10,000-\$40,000
Spa Well package at Platinum Hotel, includes hot stone massage, mani-pedi and facial for the bridal party (10 people): \$3,600
Cosa Bella all-inclusive wedding package at Bellagio, overlooking the Bellagio Fountains: \$15,000
95-person tiered wedding cake from «Chocolate Swan at Mandalay Bay: \$450

\$100,000

Siegfried and Roy Dolphin Habitat site rental: \$18,500
Five-course 100-person dinner prepared personally by celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse with catering staff: \$42,000
Four Cirque De Soleil performers, two shows, approximately 6 minutes each: \$10,400
An Elegant Affair wedding ceremony at the Wynn: \$19,350
«Vegas Vino wedding favor for guests (available in red or white), per 100: \$1,300

\$1 MILLION

Hugh Hefner Sky Villa at the Palms, per night: \$40,000
A custom-designed wedding cake by world-renowned Pastry Chef Jean Philippe: \$2,000
Private party on Mandalay Beach: \$10,000-\$60,000
Celebrity entertainment from Gloria Gaynor to «Bon Jovi, from BookingEntertainment.com: \$25,000-\$1 million+
Four-minute custom-designed fireworks show (plus \$5 million liability coverage): \$8,000