

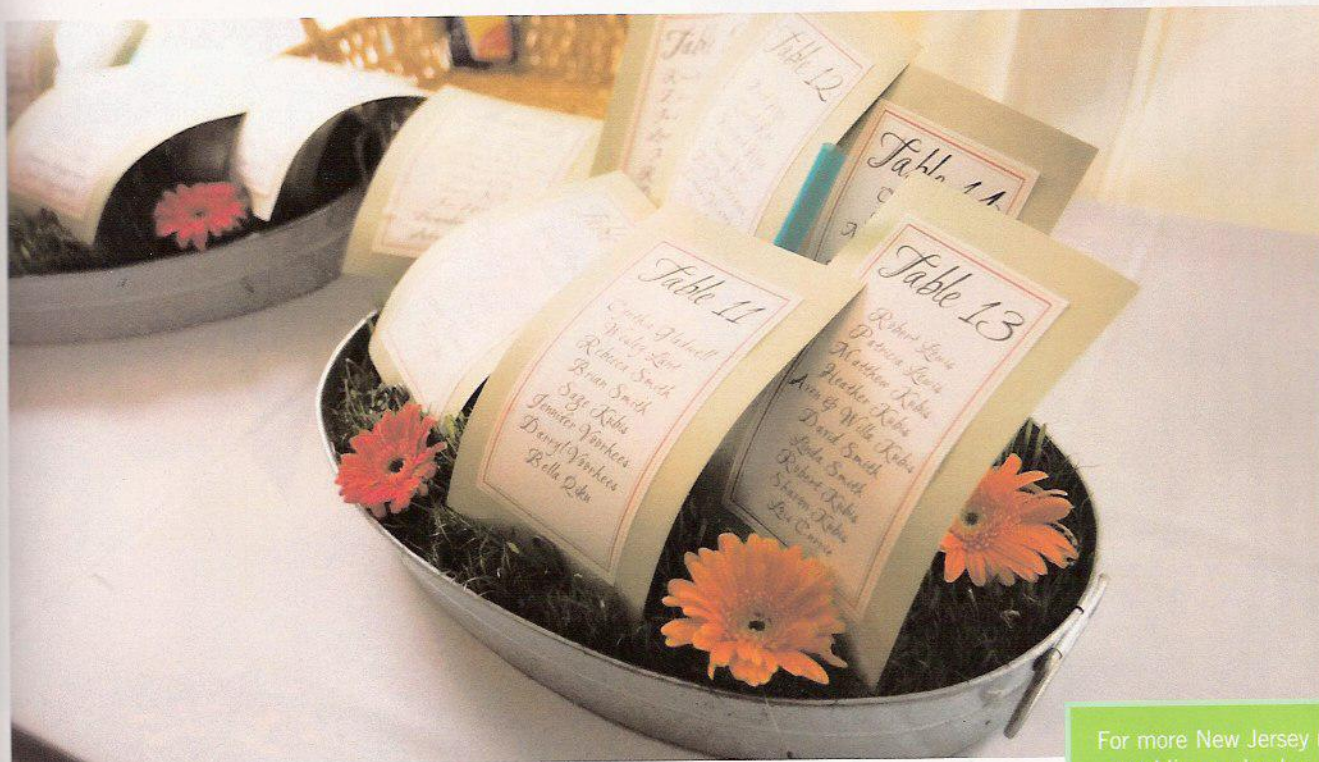
# A Personal Touch

Melissa Hagerman and Rob Lewis

BY LISSA POIROT



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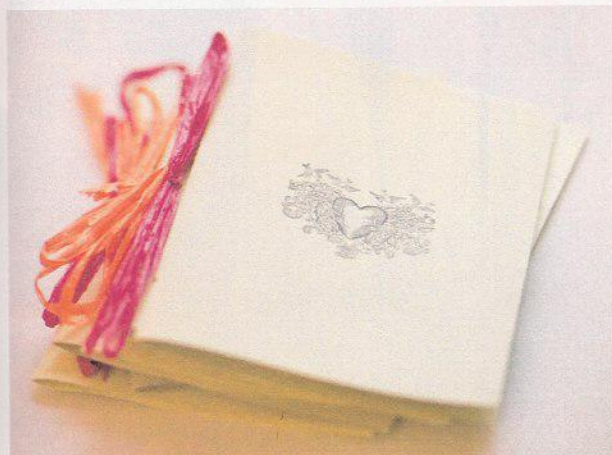
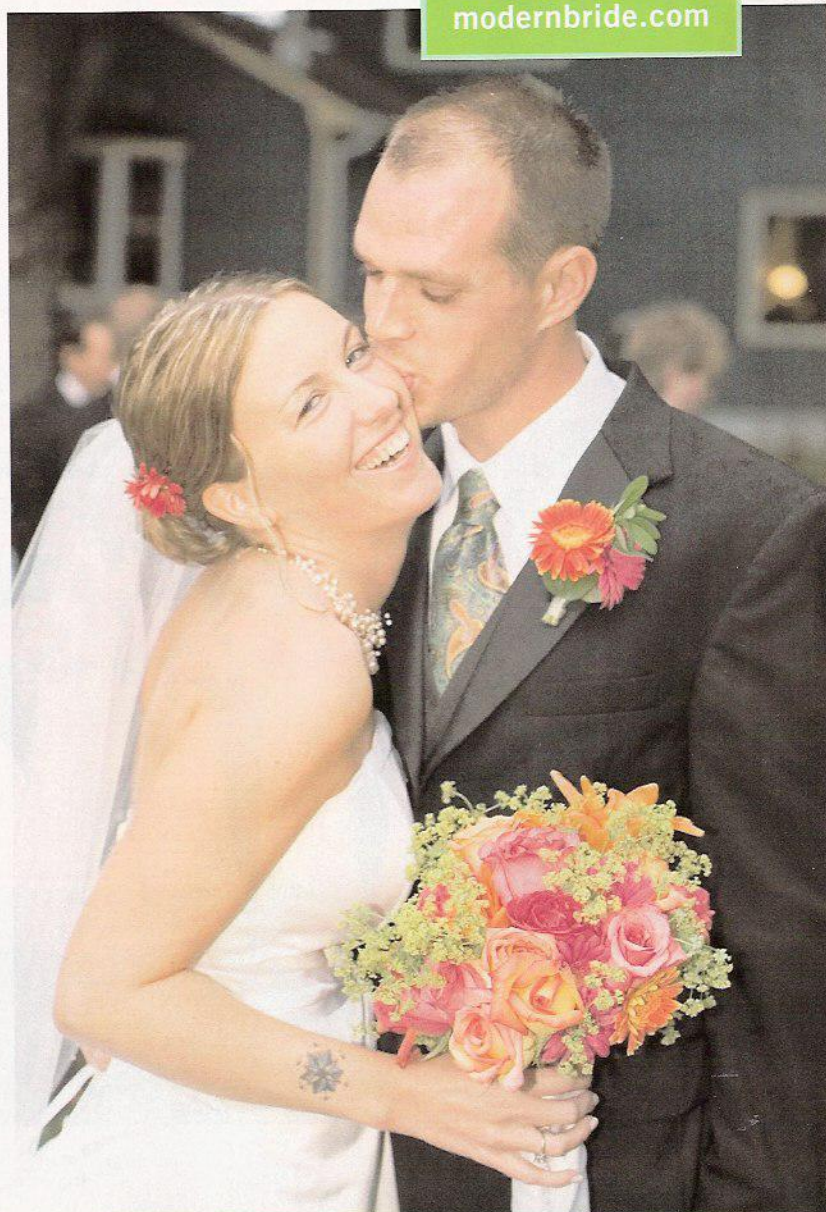
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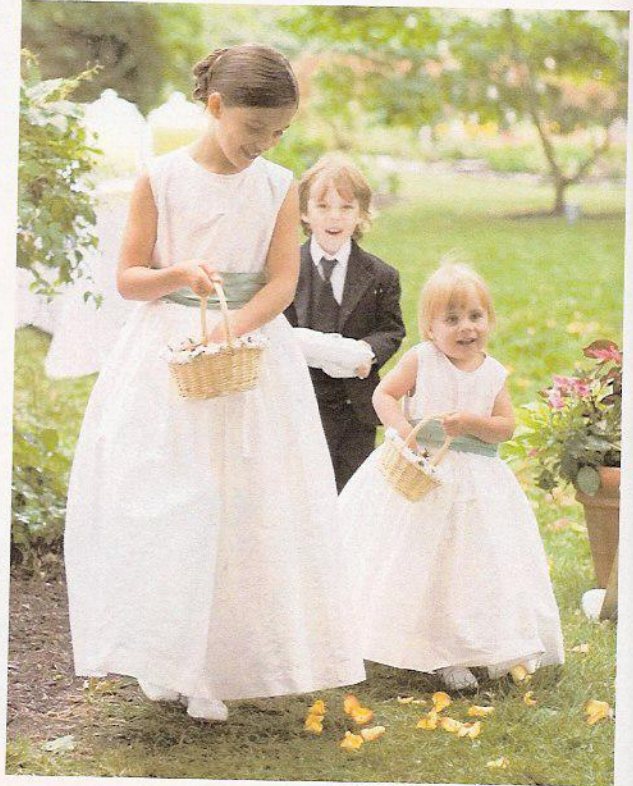
Opposite, Melissa's vibrant bouquet included orange tiger lilies, gerbera daisies and fuchsia roses. This page, clockwise from top, Guests' table assignments were nestled in "fields" of grass and colorful gerbera daisies set in oval metal bins. The happy bride gets a kiss from her new husband. Programs were tied with bright orange and fuchsia raffia.

**NINE YEARS AFTER THEY MET AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, FORMER** classmates Melissa Hagerman and Rob Lewis were determined to wed on their own terms. They created a very strict budget for their outdoor wedding and reception, and Melissa, admittedly a bit of a "control freak," planned every detail from decor to flowers to music. Sure, there were hitches along the way—including a downpour on the big day—but the event was every bit as perfect as they could've hoped.

**a not-so-surprising engagement**

The pair met outside a dorm at Rutgers; they were friends first, but their friendship soon blossomed into a romance. After graduation, Rob and Melissa lived together for two years before they got engaged in 2002. »





*This page, clockwise from top left, Melissa created the 14 floral centerpieces for the reception herself, arranging orange and fuchsia gerbera daisies and roses into antique pewter vases. The wedding party's youngest members precede the bride down the aisle, scattering flower petals. A summer rain shower didn't stop the bride and groom from getting a group photograph in the elegantly landscaped garden at Rob's parents' farm—the guys simply held umbrellas over the wedding party.*



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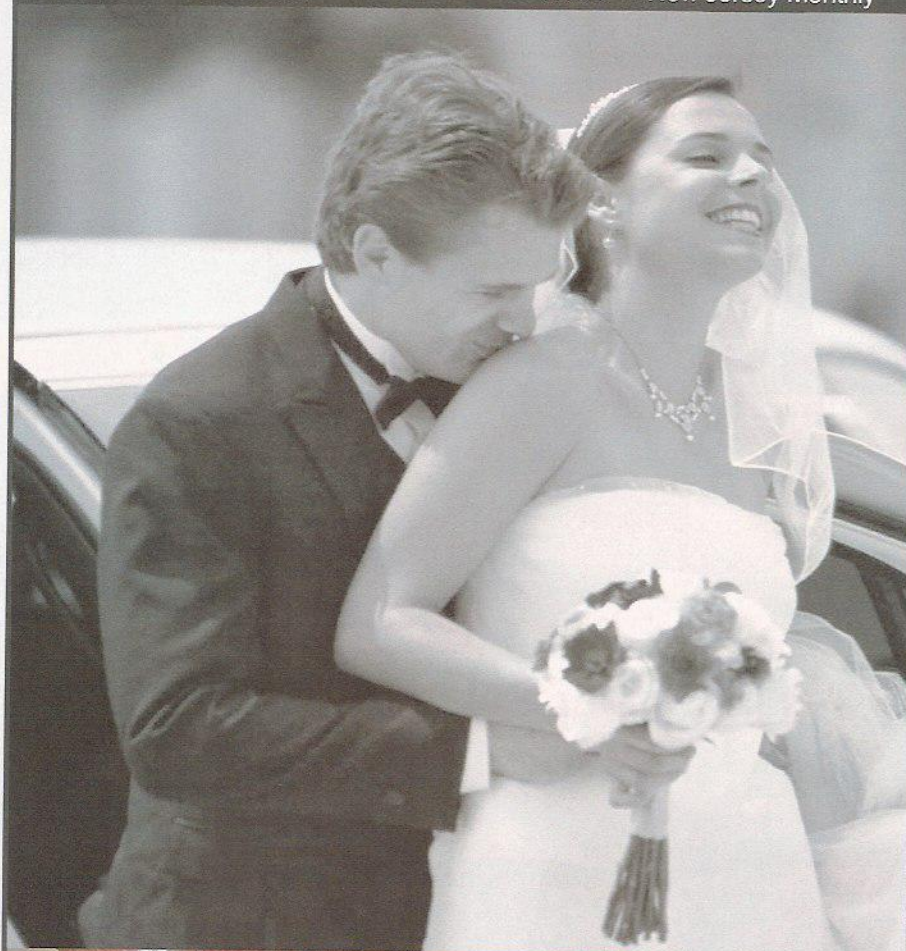


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*The First Date... The Engagement...  
The Rehearsal Dinner... The Bridal Shower...  
The Wedding.*

## REAL WEDDINGS

"Rob tried to find a way to propose where I wouldn't know. But how was he going to do that when I walked in on him and his mother looking at the ring?" laughs Melissa. "He took me back to the dorm where we met. I knew what he was going to do and it felt so funny to pretend we both didn't know what was happening!"

But Melissa waited until Rob had his moment on the dorm's steps, proposing under twinkling lights on Christmas Eve. Of course, the answer was "yes," and their wedding was planned for June 5, 2004. "We wanted an early summer wedding, so we could host it outdoors," Melissa says. "To do it the following June wouldn't give us much time to plan, so we had a long engagement. We had already been together for so long it wouldn't hurt to wait and plan it right."

### doing it their way

From the beginning, Melissa took the reins in planning the wedding. "I had a vision in my head of what I wanted," the bride says. "It would be more difficult to explain my vision to vendors than to take care of it myself. People thought I was crazy to plan it all, but I wanted what I wanted."

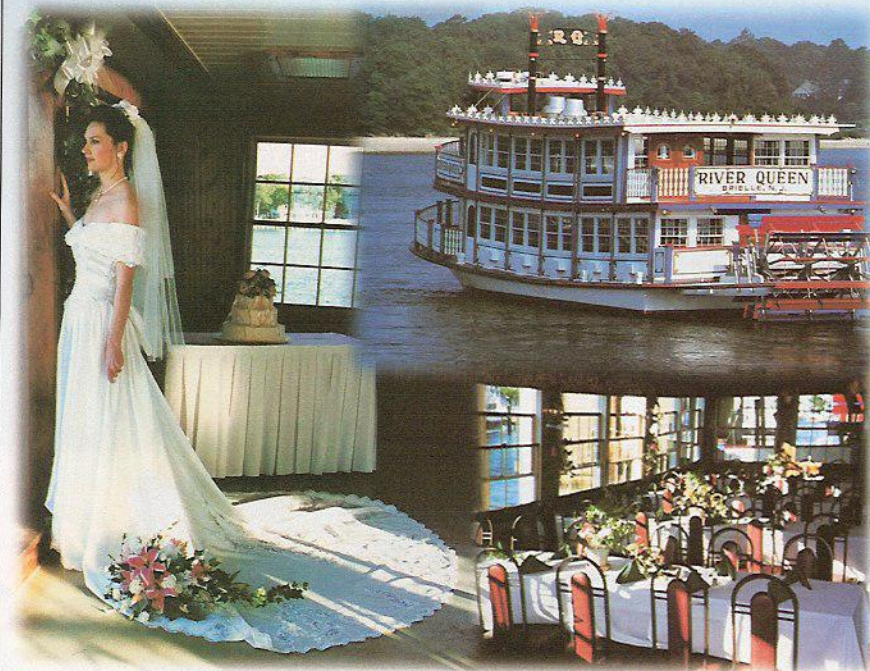
The couple had a hard time finding a space that fit their budget and vision. So they decided to host their celebration at Rob's parents' farm, which had acres of land to accommodate the 125 guests. As a landscape supervisor, Rob created the ideal garden setting for the ceremony.

Melissa created spreadsheet after spreadsheet to keep her plans organized, and the couple took a week off before the wedding to work on the final details. The groom spent the evening before the wedding stringing star- and ball-shaped lanterns in the tent. Melissa was also working hard the night before, creating 14 centerpieces of blooms bought at Costco. The orange and fuchsia gerbera daisies and roses were arranged into antique pewter vases.

But there was one thing Melissa didn't plan on for her big day: the weather. Rain interfered with the original plans to say "I do" in the garden, but the bride didn't mind losing control to Mother Nature.

"I didn't anticipate rain. I had a tent for the reception, but didn't plan an alternative spot for the ceremony. The guests were seated in the garden when rain started to »

# The River Queen

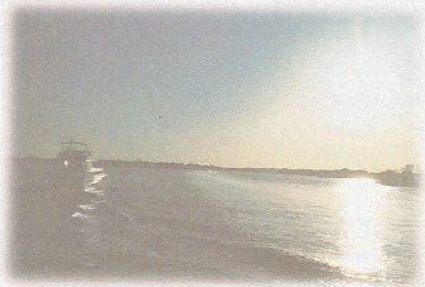


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fall, so everyone ran for cover under the tent to wait it out. As soon as it stopped, everyone headed back to the garden, but then it started to rain again. Eventually, we just got married on the dance floor under the tent. By that time, I didn't care because I was just so happy to be marrying Rob."

## simply sweet

On her wedding day, Melissa wore a simple, strapless gown with a crisscross bow at the waist by designer Marissa. Her six bridesmaids were dressed in sage green v-neck gowns with chiffon overlays. Rob and his six groomsmen wore tuxedos with green ties to match the bridesmaids. Melissa hired a florist to create the bouquets, featuring orange and fuchsia gerbera daisies, roses and lilies.

Following the ceremony, guests enjoyed a buffet dinner featuring beef tenderloin with horseradish sauce and grilled vegetable kebabs. The cake was inspired by an image Melissa had seen in a bridal magazine. She asked the caterers to re-create the tiered cake, topped with orange and fuchsia flowers; inside, the cake was buttercream flavor with berry filling.

The couple kicked off the dancing to the Association's "Never My Love." Soon, everyone grooved to selections from the couple's 300-song play list. "I'm very particular about music," Melissa says.

As the reception wrapped up, Rob and Melissa hopped aboard one of the rented shuttles to celebrate back at the hotel with some of their guests.

The couple spent seven days in Mexico, where the rain followed and kept them indoors. "There were torrential downpours. We spent our honeymoon watching a lot of 'Full House' reruns," she laughs. But a second honeymoon isn't scheduled just yet, as the couple is busy with their first anniversary gift: a baby girl named Ella. ■

## BEHIND THE SCENES

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