





ellen and dave 06.16.06

st. john, us virgin islands

Ellen Cohn has planned hundreds of beautiful Charleston weddings. As a designer and coordinator for Weddings Elegantly Designed (or W.E.D. as it is affectionately acronymed), Ellen knows the ins and outs of putting together a perfect, sophisticated Southern wedding in the timeless, Carolinian port city, which is exactly why she wanted her own June, 2006 nuptials to David Robinson as far away from Charleston as she could get. "It didn't take me long to realize that if I planned my own wedding in Charleston, it would have to be perfect. It would be expected," laughs the one-year-wed bride. "Not to mention that all of my friends can go to Charleston whenever they want and I planned a lot of their weddings there!" Instead, Ellen and David wed on the Caribbean island of St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands, one of David's favorite destinations, also where they were vacationing when he popped the question. "We were at a local bar on the island called Woody's and since he is a nice boy from Boston, it was very fitting that we were sitting right underneath a Red Sox poster on the wall," says Ellen. One of David's favorite songs, the Hawaiian-inspired Israel Kamakawiwo'ole version of the classic tune, 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' began to play and the moment was right.

Their engagement in St. John prompted Ellen and David to ponder what it would be like to get married there. "Having the wedding in the Caribbean really helped me to focus, because I was having such a hard time deciding what kind of wedding I ultimately wanted. I know how to plan them all, big or small," says Ellen. In the end they settled on an intimate event honoring their small families and close friends, and that is exactly the wedding Ellen set out to plan. Of course Ellen has the skills to manage even the most high-maintenance matrimonial weekend, but that didn't mean she necessarily wanted to use them. They chose the Caneel Bay Resort for their wedding celebration, a full service resort with an adept on-site staff and fabulous food that they knew everyone would enjoy. "Choosing the resort saved me from multiple visits to the island and I didn't have to worry about accommodations," says Ellen, "though I'm sure I was a bit more intense than most of the brides they work with because I could see the big picture and ask all the right questions."

Though happy for the help of the resort staff, the wedding professional in Ellen wasn't about to hand over the entire planning of her wedding

to an island far, far away. After all, she loves working with her industry friends in Charleston." I had so much fun with the printed materials," says Ellen, who worked with Studio R in Charleston. Ellen and David planned a weekend that would truly embrace and entertain their guests from start to finish, giving them plenty of opportunity to enjoy their tropical location. Thanks to Ellen's creative talents, the all-encompassing experience began before the guests even boarded their equator-bound planes. "I kind of went overboard on the guest bags," admits Ellen, whose packages were sent out before the wedding to each guest's home. "We mailed them to our guests all over the United States," she says of her chic Euro totes filled with information and welcome guides for St. John, sunscreen, lip balm, and maps. Special ladies received pearl shell necklaces and purses and gentlemen were gifted with a custom made deck of cards featuring the wedding's signature image, a charming sea turtle. Their gifts came in handy as guests arrived on the island. "The Wednesday before the wedding, we planned some fun 'Welcome' events," says Ellen. "We set up a poker night for all the guys and the girls got dressed up and went out in downtown St. John."

Ellen also arranged for her linens and most of her décor elements to be shipped to St. John ahead of time. "Keith Snyder owns Snyder Rentals, which is the rental place in Charleston, and he is a personal friend," says Ellen. "He came to the wedding and did all of my linens for me as a gift." Ellen had to tell her clients to keep their paws off her pretty table swaths while they were stored in her office before the wedding. "Everyone wanted to know where they could get them! They were beautiful." The sea green and blue linens were only one element of her lovely wedding day décor, which fell under the tutelage of fellow W.E.D. designer (and close friend), Katie Huebel. "Katie really did the whole set up herself," says Ellen. Katie arranged delicate orchids in glass vases, and filled others with piles of whimsical shells, dotting each table setting with shimmering candle light. The resort's rattan chairs with fortuitously blue-hued cushions subtly enhanced the elegant-but-beachy theme. "They were the perfect touch to make it all come together."

Unfortunately, everything wasn't quite that easy. Ellen, bridal pro though she may be, struggled to find the perfect dress. "It was kind of



a disaster at first," she says. "I've done everything else there is to do in planning a wedding, but I had never tried on a wedding dress until I was engaged." After looking several times in Charleston to no avail, Ellen went to Maryland to visit her sister. They searched for two whole days before making their last stop where Ellen spotted a floaty chiffon dress by Yolanda Couture that would set just the right tone for her Caribbean ceremony. "When it was all said and done, I didn't have a dress until about three and a half months before the wedding," says Ellen. "I would not recommend that time frame to any of my clients."

Ellen's bridal ensemble might have come down to the wire, but she remained impressively non-plussed about the entire wedding weekend. "Once I was there in St. John I just really didn't care what happened," says Ellen. "If the flowers didn't make it through customs, then fine, we wouldn't have flowers. I really didn't mind." David and Ellen kicked off the good times with a beachy rehearsal dinner on Friday night. "It was right on the beach, with a reggae band and was really quite the party!" The day of the wedding, the bride lounged on the beach and watched her groom snorkel off shore while Katie was busy setting up the reception décor. "We saw each other the day of the wedding," says Ellen. "We wanted to take pictures beforehand so we would be able to enjoy cocktail hour after the ceremony and spend as much time as possible with everyone." With family in mind, Ellen and David put a lot of thought into their ocean-view ceremony. "We wrote the ceremony and though David and I are both practicing Christians, my family is Jewish, so we incorporated a Jewish blessing from the Old Testament about the seven blessings of marriage," says the bride, who wanted the ceremony to reflect a blend of both religious and family traditions. David and Ellen both lost their mothers in years past and to honor them Ellen carried her mother's bridal bible and handkerchief as she walked down the aisle. She was also touched when David's father gave her David's mother's wedding ring to wear for the ceremony. Just before the ceremony, Ellen's 3-year old niece asked if she could be in the wedding and of course Ellen agreed. "She was so cute and she did such a good job walking down the aisle. It was just so sweet that she wanted to be a part of it." After the ceremony, guests retreated to a veranda overlooking the water. They sipped the locally infamous rum punch while dining on passed hors d'oeuvres before sitting down at two family-style tables to feast on Caribbean lobster and beef filet followed by a decadent bread pudding with rum chocolate sauce and charming sea turtle-shaped chocolates.

As their wedding day came to an end, the fun continued for the new husband and wife. "We essentially sacrificed a honeymoon so that we could do and afford other stuff for the wedding," says Ellen, "so we decided to stay around for the remainder of the weekend and really enjoy being with the people who had come so far to be there for us. I honestly don't think I would do it any differently. If David wasn't a doctor and I didn't have another wedding to come back for, we would have just stayed down there with our friends for a whole other week!" Ellen and David's proudest accomplishment of the weekend (other than ending up betrothed, of course) was helping their friends and family fall in love with St. John. "So many of our friends are dying to go back there now. It's nice to know that our wedding was that enjoyable for them." Ellen and David also have plans to return to St. John, along with Katie and her husband, "We are calling it our 'company retreat,'" she laughs. By that time, Ellen and David will introduce a new family member to the island of St. John. They are expecting their first child who is currently busy planning charming Charleston weddings from inside his (or her!) talented mommy. JLT

Ceremony Site, Reception Site and Catering: Caneel Bay Resort. Officiant: Captain Greg Fretias. Gown Designer: Yolanda Couture. Veil and Shoes: Kate Spade. Bridesmaids' Dresses: Lazaro. Groom and Groomsman Attire: Suits from Brooks Brothers. Ceremony Musicians: Greg Kinslow String Trio. Wedding Consultant: Ellen Robinson of Weddings Elegantly Designed. Linens: Snyder Event Rentals. Florist: Katie Huebel, Owner of W.E.D. Reception Music: DJ - Greg Kinslow. Invitations: Rachael Blessinger with Studio R. Accommodations: Caneel Bay Resort.

Photography: Nashan Photographers, www.nashan.com.

