

marisa and michael 10.07.06
charleston, sc



Marisa Hernandez and Michael Budds wanted their wedding day to celebrate their lifelong commitment and dedication to each other, the commitment they share to the environment and their dedication to preserving Marisa's Mexican heritage. Their thoughtful efforts resulted in a weekend of meaningful moments, family traditions and simple romance.

Marisa and Michael were high school sweethearts many years earlier when they attended Bishop England High School in downtown Charleston, S.C. Marisa went away to college in Arizona and Michael went to college in the Rocky Mountains of Montana the next year. "We were still friends, but we didn't date for those four years," says Marisa. Despite their official status, Marisa says they were still "crazy about each other" and they began spending more time together at the end of college. "I joined Michael in New Zealand and we spent a month together," says Marisa. "That's when we really started talking about planning the next stages of our lives." With that in mind, they both applied for jobs in the northwestern U.S., an area they both loved. "We ended up in the small town of Bellingham, Washington, about fifteen miles south of the Canadian border."

Michael used their geographically rich surroundings when plotting his perfect proposal weekend, but kept his plans secret until the last possible moment. "It was the week of Valentine's Day and we planned to just celebrate it on the weekend," says Marisa. "The weekend came and he didn't really have *anything* planned and I was kind of disappointed, but didn't want to show it." Michael asked Marisa to go for a run and she obliged. "We were driving up to one of our favorite trails and he pulled over so we could get out and look at this view of the ocean," she says. "We were just standing there, looking out over the water and he totally sprung it on me!" Michael knew better than to try to give his picky lady the perfect ring, so he opted instead to give her the perfect diamond. "We'd been to look at rings before and I couldn't make up my mind, so he gave me the diamond and said, 'Make it whatever you want it to be.'" The diamond wasn't the only surprise Michael had up his sleeve. "He ended up having this amazing day planned!" laughs Marisa. "He chartered a plane that took us over to the San Juan islands where we stayed at a bed and breakfast. It was amazing."

During their 8-month engagement, Marisa made several trips to Charleston to plan the wedding with her mother and didn't have to look far for the perfect venue. "My parents have a beautiful home," she says, "and I've always known I wanted to get married there." She worked with Michael's mother to plan a uniquely themed rehearsal dinner at the historic Old Exchange Building downtown. "Michael's mother named each table after places in the Lowcountry that are under environmental protection," says Marisa. "When you walked into the building, there were all these pictures of each area with the names of the people at that table written underneath." Guests found cards at each of their seats detailing donations made in their name to help preserve one of the protected locales. "It was so unique and out of the ordinary," says Marisa, "but perfect for us."

Back on the west coast, Marisa found a perfect wedding dress that was also a tad out of the ordinary. "I went all over - to Vancouver, to Seattle - and tried on all these dresses, but nothing was quite right," says Marisa. "Then I found this lady, Sandra Sung, who makes custom dresses and the first time I met with her she just went crazy pulling out all these beautiful fabrics and laces." Marisa and Sandra worked to create the perfect dress in a rich shade of gold with an overlay of romantic lace. "It turned out to be just what I wanted."





With the perfect gown underway, Marisa focused on the details that would bring the color of Mexico to her parents' backyard in Charleston and others that would keep Mother Nature smiling. She found tree-free paper that she used for all the invitations, programs and place cards. She chose to use a very limited amount of flowers, in part to highlight the natural beauty of her parents' home, but also to minimize the effect on the environment. During the ceremony, Marisa and Michael draped their shoulders in classic, Mexican wedding tradition but with a new, earth-friendly twist. "In Mexico, you would encircle the bride and groom with a leather lasso," says Marisa. The circle formed by the lasso signifies "infinite love" and is placed upon their shoulders by their parents. "We wanted to reinterpret that in a more natural, environmental way so we had a lasso made out of oak leaves and Spanish moss."



During the week leading up to the wedding, "There was so much female energy around," says Marisa, whose father proved an invaluable asset, managing to keep everyone sane. "My dad just had this method of calmness and he made sure that anything that needed to be done got done. He was just so calm and it really rubbed off on me all week, right up until it was time for him to walk me down the aisle. He just made it all so easy." The balanced bride made her way down the aisle where Michael waited for a ceremony that they wrote entirely on their own. "Michael and I came up with every word," says Marisa. "We spent a lot of time thinking about it and we really wanted references to nature and the environment." They pledged to be each other's shelter from wind and rain and to live not on separate islands, but for the tides of their lives to change as one.



Once officially joined, Marisa and Michael spent a few moments alone to, "freak out about what we had just done," she laughs, then they joined their families for a Mexican-inspired reception. In addition to flavorful Mexican and Charleston Lowcountry cuisine, Marisa requested an "aguas" table, or "table of waters" where a family friend, dressed in traditional Mexican garb served flavored waters including hibiscus, tamarind, lemonade and iced tea. By the light of a roaring bonfire, Marisa and Michael danced the night away to a lively Cuban band. "Everyone loved the Cuban music! It was a huge hit," says the bride. As the initial celebration was winding down, the bride and groom boarded a boat along with their bridal party and several friends. They made their watery getaway and continued the festivities on the water where the good times lasted well into the wee hours.



The next morning the newlywed couple attended a farewell brunch, then boarded a second boat with friends for a visit to nearby Capers Island, a protected wildlife refuge where houses, cars and roads are totally non-existent. "It was nice to just get away from it all," Marisa remembers, "and be somewhere that was so completely untouched." Their island excursion created a tranquil end to a wedding weekend tribute to Marisa and Michael's family, environmental and cultural passions. Above all, it was a fitting celebration for a couple even more passionate about each other. JLT

Ceremony and Reception Site: The home of the bride's parents. Officiant: Judge Joe Mendelsohn. Ceremony Musicians: Lee Barbor. Invitations: Custom by bride. Gown Designer: Custom design by Sandra Sung. Bridesmaids' Dresses: J.Crew. Men's Attire: Mexican Guayabera Shirts. Event Design and Printing: Weddings Elegantly Designed (W.E.D.). Florist: Lotus Flower. Catering: Meditera Catering. Baker: Wedding Cakes by Jim Smeal. Reception Music: Havanason Band. Rentals: Snyder Event Rentals and Staffing. Accommodations: The Harbour View Inn. Favors: Home-made chocolate covered coffee beans from the bride's mother and friends.

Photography: Leigh Webber Photography,
www.lwebber.com.

