

style file

for weddings on the go

Three premier planners share what's hot on the destination wedding scene.

the experts

TARA SOLOWAY, cofounder and president of LUXE Destination Weddings, plans weddings for some of North America's most discriminating destination brides and grooms. With offices in New York and Toronto, her company orchestrates custom events at luxury properties in the Caribbean and Mexico.

GABRIELLE LONGHI, owner of Blue Sky Weddings, specializes in planning oceanfront weddings and seaside receptions at private estates, luxury hotels and other unique venues in Hawaii. Focused primarily on Maui and Oahu, Blue Sky opened a new Los Angeles office this year.

ALISON HOTCHKISS is the San Francisco-based owner and creative director of Alison Events, an event-planning company specializing in high-end destination weddings. Her book *Destination Wedding Planner: The Ultimate Guide to Planning a Wedding from Afar* (Chronicle Books), arrives in bookstores this April.

Like fashion and home decor, weddings follow of-the-moment trends that keep the age-old tradition fresh. To help today's brides and grooms stay au courant, we asked three leading trendsetters to weigh in on everything from the latest in invitations to bridal attire, food, drink, music and photos. So what's the bottom line? Trends are always a good guide, but to stage the most memorable event, let your personal style shine through. BY ANNETTE BURDEN



Themes add a rich layer of significance to the wedding experience. Whether it's something as simple as a splash of color woven through the decor and attire or as extravagant as this Beatles Go to India-themed ceremony, it's sure to be remembered.

Q Should we set an overall theme for our wedding?

A Some of Soloway's clients do, some don't. Oftentimes, colors take over and tie everything together. You can let the wedding grow organically from the environment—the sand, surf and sunset are often thematic enough—or draw from the local culture. For instance, even though the luau style is popular in Hawaii, according to Longhi, "some brides want no Hawaiian touches at all—just the ocean backdrop and gorgeous sunset."

A few couples take it a step further. Hotchkiss recently designed weddings around themes like the Beatles Go to India and a Midsummer Night's Dream.

Q Does a destination wedding require a special kind of invitation?

A The invitation gives you a great opportunity to generate excitement and get everyone onboard. Longhi's clients often send something tropical, Hawaiian or travel related. Hotchkiss cites examples modeled after paper airplanes, airline tickets and ski-lift tickets. No matter what the theme, her clients often pull out all the stops for custom-designed, letterpress or screen-printed invitations.

Soloway says traditional paper invites still rate high—especially with parents. But many of her couples send Evites instead. The couples who use them feel it's permissible because of their close relationship with the invitees and preferable because of the time savings and ecological concerns. (Be sure to send save-the-date notices even

before the invitation, Soloway adds. They're a must for destination weddings.)

Q What's the latest look for brides?

A It seems that anything goes. Most of Hotchkiss's brides wear sexy, low-cut dresses in comfortable fabrics. Soloway sees more vintage gowns—off-white, feminine, floor-length, with satin, lace and even brooches. Longhi's brides prefer off-white to white-white as well. "Blush or very pale colors are also popular," she says, "either in the whole dress or part of it." Basically, there's more color, "especially in sashes, everything from platinum and blue to bright orange and pink."

As for hairdos, the beach brides of all three planners lean toward loose, natural styles to reflect the relaxed setting. But, Soloway warns, the updo can be your best friend

if your hair reacts badly to humidity. While Soloway notes a trend for jeweled clips and combs in shapes like starfish for the Caribbean and Mexico, Longhi's brides tuck Hawaiian flowers in their hair, especially orchids.

Q What are the grooms wearing?

A "We don't recommend suits in sunny destinations," Soloway says. "They're simply too hot." She says the standard destination groom wears khakis with a light white linen shirt. "It gives a fresh, clean look and avoids discomfort." The guayabera is very popular for weddings in Mexico, she adds.

In Hawaii, grooms sport everything from black tie to shorts and flip-flops. "But most wear suits," Longhi says, "nice linen, khaki, tan, white or dark." Hotchkiss's grooms go for light or dark suits as well—some lined in stripes, polka dots or paisley.

Q And for the bridal party?

A Destination brides often invite their bridesmaids to choose cocktail dresses they'll feel comfortable in. "A unifying accessory, like matching parasols, can tie all the dresses together," according to Soloway.

Hotchkiss agrees. "Destination bridesmaids are going less traditional," she says, "more simple and easy. They find things at J. Crew, Anthropologie and even Gap and Old Navy."

Q What accessories make sense for an outdoor ceremony?

A Hotchkiss says her couples love to tie the knot under simple chuppahs with flowers running up and down the legs. Longhi and



Q What's hot in flowers?

A Soloway points to two schools of thought: bright colors or all white with greenery. For 2009, she recommends the crisp white look or a single bright color, such as all fuschia or all orange. Hotchkiss, too, prefers the monochromatic look. "Loose and wild and natural is best," she says.

Longhi's brides revel in Hawaii's rainbow of floral hues. "But the number one combo seems to be brown, cream and green with a touch of orange."

Soloway both see a trend toward shelters made of bamboo poles with sheer fabric flowing on top. For guests, Soloway and Longhi recommend natural or covered Chiavari or white garden chairs. "We suggest barefoot, au natural for any beach bash," Soloway says, "but if the bride wears heels, a rustic wooden runner is appropriate."

Q What shall we do for the reception?

A Beach barbecues are wildly popular, according to Soloway. Also, some of her sites have lovely restaurant terraces, which lend themselves to more formal events. For decorations, she favors seashells, sand, water and twigs. "Less is more when you have the Caribbean Sea as a backdrop."

Longhi's couples often hold their receptions on the beachfront lawn of a private estate or house overlooking the Pacific. This allows her to set up outdoor living rooms with sofas and seating next to the ocean.

When it comes to favors, Soloway likes Mexican candies, Caribbean jellies and spices, luggage tags, local artwork and even a cookbook on Caribbean cuisine. In lieu of favors, some of her couples donate to local community groups in guests' names. Longhi recommends Hawaiian cookies in *lahala* boxes dressed up with ribbon and shells. Hotchkiss likes favors tied to the location as well—olive oil and

vinegar or a half bottle of wine in the wine country, Ugg boots in the mountains or flip-flops at the beach.

For music, Soloway suggests local musicians—like a mariachi band or a Mexican trio—to get the party started. Then, she says, "in today's world of iPods, so many couples just make their own playlists and have a friend or two act as DJ."



Flower-topped cupcakes are a popular alternative to traditional wedding cakes.

Q How about food and drink?

A First, designate a signature drink that picks up the colors of the wedding, Soloway says, and give it a new name—something like Romance in Paradise. She recommends a menu of fresh fish or surf and turf for a seated dinner or buffet on the beach. Hotchkiss narrows it down even further to fresh fish, a starch and local veggies. In contrast, the sky's the limit for a wedding feast in Hawaii, according to Longhi. The only must: a signature drink and passed appetizers.

For dessert, Hotchkiss likes cupcakes or petit fours versus a big cake. Soloway and Longhi suggest a classic multilayered cake with clean lines and an accent of tropical flowers. "We did a blue sea urchin cake that was fun," Longhi adds, "and the surfer cake is always a hit." Plus, she notes a growing number of requests for groom's cakes.

Q What's the latest in photos and video?

A All three planners agree on the popularity of the photojournalistic approach to photos. "We're seeing a more casual style," Hotchkiss explains, "with less posed shots of family and informal shots of friends." Soloway's clients lean toward black and white, Hotchkiss's to color.

Again, all three note a trend for mixing Super-8 footage into the video. "This creates a vintage look for the wedding," Soloway says. "It's just amazing to watch."