

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

BY AMANDA N. WEGNER

WISCONSIN OFFERS AN ARRAY OF UNIQUE VENUES FOR CEREMONIES AND RECEPTIONS.



WEDDINGS AND REAL ESTATE HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON: Location, location, location. While many considerations come into play when choosing where to hold your ceremony and reception, having a great backdrop can transform the event from good to amazing. If you're looking for something a little more unexpected than a hotel banquet room, here are five unique Wisconsin spaces for your big day.

Traci and Charlie Burke held an elegant wedding reception at the House on the Rock in Spring Green. The attraction's Infinity Room, above top left, can accommodate up to 25 guests for an intimate ceremony.

PHOTOS BY: WEN PHOTOGRAPHER

HOUSE ON THE ROCK

What could be more unusual than exchanging vows "suspended" 100 feet over the forest floor? It's possible at the House on the Rock, a definitively Wisconsin tourist attraction in Spring Green.

The House is an architectural marvel perched on a 60-foot chimney of rock. Designed and built by Alex Jordan, it overlooks the Wyoming Valley, which was also Frank Lloyd Wright's Wisconsin stomping ground. A maze of collections and curiosities, the House has two areas for ceremonies: First is the Infinity Room, which accommodates 25 people, including the bride and groom, standing room only. This 200-foot-long space that tapers to a point offers a spectacular view high above the valley.

"People really like the symbolism of that," says Sarah Bartash, sales associate for the House on the Rock properties, which include the Wintergreen Lodge and House on the Rock Resort.

The second ceremony space is the Carousel Room, which features the largest carousel in the world (and unlike your garden-variety carousel, none of the "animals" are horses.) This room can accommodate about 100 people, standing room only.

Because House on the Rock is an attraction, ceremonies are not private. "It's a special place to get married," says Bartash, "but the House is not for everyone. It's a very different but interesting experience."

Only a handful of wedding ceremonies are held at the House on the Rock each year; the other two properties see the bulk of the bridal events. The lodge and resort can each accommodate about 250 for receptions; both indoor and outdoor spaces are available.

MADISON MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

As one of Madison's architectural gems, a wedding at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art gives couples the opportunity to marry surrounded by art, says Jennifer Holmes, associate director of executive affairs.

Ceremonies and receptions are both available in MMoCA's unique spaces, including a three-story lobby with floor-to-ceiling windows, and the rooftop Sculpture Garden that overlooks State Street and offers a bird's-eye view of downtown Madison. A lecture room is also available as a third option.

The lobby can accommodate 230 standing



and 75 seated for dinner. On the rooftop, it's 230 standing or for an informal reception, 65 for a seated dinner. "The rooftop is fabulous," says Holmes, "and the lobby space is beautiful in any weather." Bridal events require little decoration, she notes. "The simple elegance of the space is all you need."

Also on site is Fresco, the museum's rooftop restaurant, which can be rented for additional space; all catering is provided through the restaurant. Weddings can be scheduled throughout the day, but couples are asked to end the festivities by 11 p.m.

In addition to rental fees and catering costs, a museum membership is required. This contribution, says Holmes, "is a way to give back to the community and share the joy of the museum with others."

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MUSEUM

Chrome and leather are part of the package at Milwaukee's Harley-Davidson Museum, but you needn't be a card-carrying member of your local chapter of H.O.G. (that's Harley Owner's Group, for the uninitiated) to have

your wedding here. "Weddings can be fun to formal. You don't have to come in looking Harley," says Jackie Timm, the museum's director of business development.

The museum, which opened in 2008, is available for ceremonies and receptions and can accommodate groups from 15 to 15,000 (with a whole property buyout). A favorite spot for weddings is the 10,500-square-foot Garage, which can seat 620 people. The Garage features three huge garage doors that expand the space and open it up to the street. The property covers 20 acres and is nestled in a mini-peninsula of the Menomonee River. In the distance, the Milwaukee skyline provides a sophisticated urban backdrop for photos.

Much like motorcycles, weddings at the museum are highly customizable. From surf and turf to BBQ, one entrée or two, kids' menus, even temporary tattoo stations and Big Wheels to keep the little ones occupied, planners at the Harley-Davidson Museum want to help you make your wedding all your own. "We thrill for customization," says Timm.

Catering is through Levy Restaurants, the museum's exclusive food and beverage provider. The museum also has a list of preferred vendors for tents, audiovisual equipment, and more.

Timm reiterates that the museum isn't just for Harley enthusiasts. "It's more than bikes and motorcycles. It's the arts, pop culture, history. Age doesn't matter. We have a great children's imagination station, and seniors really enjoy the history."

"Indoor or outdoor, weddings here can be really exceptional," Timm says. "You focus on the fun, and we'll take care of the details."



From catering to décor, the staff at the Harley-Davidson Museum is all about customization.

Amazing architecture is the big draw among couples hosting their nuptials at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art.



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Wedding guests at the 120-year-old Pabst Museum have full access to the exhibits in addition to dining the night away.



PABST MANSION

The historic Pabst Mansion isn't a "lace doily" sort of place, says executive director Dawn Hourigan. Showcasing outstanding Victorian interiors for more than 120 years, this Flemish Renaissance Revival mansion, completed in 1892 and originally the home of beer baron Capt. Frederick Pabst, is perfect for small weddings.

Available for ceremonies and receptions indoors and out, the Pabst Mansion can accommodate about 125 standing for receptions, up to 70 indoors for a sit-down dinner, and up to 50 seated for a ceremony.

There is no on-site catering, but the mansion does have a list of preferred off-site caterers. One caveat: Weddings at the mansion must start after the facility closes to the public,

usually around 5:30 or 6 p.m., says Hourigan.

Wedding guests also get full access to explore the museum. "When you rent the mansion, you rent the museum," says Hourigan. "You get full access to all the public floors just as you would if you came in for a tour."

For many brides, the mansion's built-in décor is its main selling point. "It's stunning and grandiose. It has a high-Victorian feel," says Hourigan.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: AMBER CORRAO

The mansion's beauty is what sold West Allis' Amber Corrao, who married husband Ian Feb. 6 at the Pabst. "It's so beautiful; the architecture is amazing; the history is interesting. I love everything about the place," says Corrao. "It really is a unique experience, especially if you want to feel like royalty on the day you get married!"

PAINE ART CENTER AND GARDENS

Revered as one of "America's castles," Oshkosh's Paine Art Center and Gardens offers "a fairytale ambiance and backdrop for your special day," says special events coordinator Michelle Rector.

The estate of Fox Valley lumberman Nathan Paine and his wife Jessie, the property was designed with a museum in mind. Built to showcase architecture, art, fine furnishings, and the area's natural beauty, this Tudor Revival manor house sits amid more than three acres of beautiful gardens.

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- MICHELLE RECTOR
SPECIAL EVENTS COORDINATOR
PAINE ART CENTER AND GARDENS

"The beauty of the property is appealing to everyone," says Rector. "And the possibilities are endless."

The Paine offers ceremony and reception packages indoors and out. In the mansion, the Great Hall, which was where the Paines entertained, can accommodate 125 for a ceremony or cocktail reception, or 72 for a seated dinner.

With more than 10,000 tulips and other bulbs planted each year, plus plenty of perennials, greens, pools and pergolas, the gardens are available for events May through October—200 is the magic number for ceremonies and receptions. Because the Paine Art Center and Gardens is in a residential neighborhood, receptions must end by 10 p.m.

Wedding packages at the Paine include Rector's event planning services, as well as rehearsal time, photographs on the property, and guest admission to the gardens or mansion (depending on where the event is on the property). There is no on-site catering, but Rector can provide brides with local recommendations. "We have a great list of vendors who have experience working here," she says, "but we'll work with any and all." *

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