

National park nuptials

Majestic vistas, elegance await bridal party

BY KARALEYNS OIT
SPECIAL WRITER

If one were designing the perfect setting for a wedding, it would be difficult to create somewhere better than one of America's National Parks and Forests. After all, these expanses were preserved because of their dramatic natural splendors — and they come camera-ready for the perfect photo-op backdrop.

Imagine exchanging vows among the rugged granite cliffs and waterfalls of Yosemite Valley, Calif., or alongside the yawning chasm and ambrosial hues of the Grand Canyon, Ariz.

And that's just the outdoors. Then there are the great western lodges that were erected within these parks — built to mirror the majesty of their surroundings.

Most of these grand gems were built in the decades between 1900 and 1940, and most that are left are now registered as National Historic Landmarks.

They were built with native materials and by local artisans, incorporating immense timbers and stonework and filled with forged ironwork and hand-made fixtures and furniture. And while they were designed to showcase Great Halls and Great Lounges, they were also outfitted with numerous fireplaces, charming bars and nooks that offer weekend wedding guests places for

down-time.

The dilemma for many metro Detroiters is that many of these great lodges are located far from home. But many of them have expert catering and special event staffs that take such predicaments in stride.

Cynthia McFann, banquet sales manager for Yosemite Concession Services Corp., in Yosemite National Park, Calif., estimates that about 275 of the 320-plus weddings and wedding-related events her team assisted with in 1999 were held at The Ahwahnee lodge. And the majority of those, she said, were planned from afar.

"People who are nervous about that," she says assuringly, "don't need to be."

Beyond offering top-notch banquet services, McFann's team can help recommend ceremony sites, local florists, photographers, musicians — even babysitters.

(I must admit that I experienced trepidation when planning my June, 1999 wedding at The Ahwahnee from metro Detroit. But the arrangements moved along like clockwork and on my wedding day I was howled over by the food and service, which were superb.)

As for the ceremony itself, many National Parks have small chapels available for public usage. Many couples also choose to hold their ceremony

at a special site outdoors.

Each park has its own guidelines and rules for locations, and most will require a special use permit. Contact park headquarters for details. The National Parks Web site is www.nps.gov.

Among the very best great lodge wedding locales are:

- The Ahwahnee, Yosemite National Park, California. Opened: 1927. Grand, elegant and majestic — The Ahwahnee is considered by some to be a great American castle — replete with cathedral ceilings and enormous stone hearths. From the lodge, guests can catch glimpses of some of America's best-known wilderness landmarks: 2,425 feet-high Yosemite Falls, Yosemite Park's signature Half Dome and the awe-inspiring Glacier Point. Contact: Yosemite Concession Services Corp. 559-253-5673.

- Old Faithful Inn, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. Opened: 1904. Set alongside the famous geyser whose name it bears. This, the first of the Great Western Lodges, is fittingly located in America's first National Park. Its Great Hall is dominated by a 500-ton lava rock fireplace studded with eight hearths. Gnarled lodgepole pine supports and rails lend the inn a decided western feel. Guests at the Inn can wit-

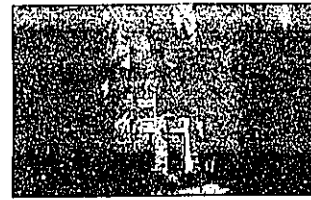


PHOTO COURTESY OF YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Grand scale nuptials: The Ahwahnee Hotel at Yosemite National Park offers a picture perfect landscape for weddings and receptions.

ness the hourly eruption of Old Faithful from a large veranda. Contact: Yellowstone Park special reservations office: 307-344-5519.

- Timberline Lodge, Mt. Hood National Forest, Oregon. Opened: 1938. Timberline Lodge hugs the flank of Mt. Hood, a majestic 11,235-foot volcanic peak that overlooks the city of Portland. The silver gray Timberline was built during the height of the Great Depression and made entirely by hand, inside and out, by unemployed craftspeople hired by the Federal Works Progress Administration. A soaring hexagonal lobby forms the heart of the lodge and artistic animal carvings abound throughout. Contact: Timberline Lodge catering: 503-219-3192 or visit the Web site: www.timberlinelodge.com

Please see PARK, 10

A Magical Experience



King's Court Castle Restaurant • 2425 Lakeside Court, Lake Orion, MI 48064



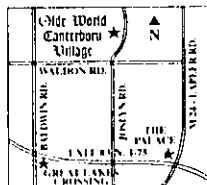
King's Court Castle Restaurant showcases unique varieties from France, European antiques, tapestries, unique collectibles from around the world and the chandeliers from the Michigan Theatre, since 1924

King's Court Castle Restaurant is located at historic Olde World Canterbury Village in Lake Orion, Michigan.

It offers unique elegance and the highest quality service you deserve on your special occasion.

For details on complete wedding packages and assistance in planning your special event, call

248-391-5780



Located just off I-75, exit 684
Lakeside Rd. • 4 miles south of Livestock
Market • Lakeside Mall

Julie's Bridal

Setting the Standard of Style

We invite you and your entire Bridal Party to visit us at either location and select from our wide selection of Bridal, Bridesmaid, Flowergirl and evening wear gowns.

FEATURING SUCH DESIGNERS AS:
ST. PUCCHI, PALOMA BLANCA, LAZARO,
DEMETRIOS, CHRISTO'S, JASMINE,
PAULA VARSANOVA, MONIQUE
LEHILLER, JIM HIGLEY, EVE OF
MADRID, WATERS & WATERS,
BIANCHI, DIAMOND COLLECTION,
BILL LEVICKI AND MANY MORE.

**OVER A 100 DESIGNERS
TO CHOOSE FROM.**

www.juliesbridal.com

REDEEM THIS AD FOR 15%
OFF YOUR BRIDAL GOWN
(VALID UNTIL 3/31/2000)
previous orders excluded

Julie's Bridal Imports
OF PLYMOUTH
570 S. Main • Plymouth, MI 48170
(734) 455-1100

Julie's Bridal Couture
OF BIRMINGHAM
14000 Woodward • Birmingham, MI 48110
(248) 645-0500