

Wedding Guide

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About the cover: The cover photo is by Heather Saputo Photography, and it features Kansas Googe Bodiford, one of the brides highlighted in our "Engaged Couples" section last year. The cover design was created by Jana Schroeder.

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Finding the Perfect Venue

The wedding venue is the backdrop for your dream day.

It should reflect who you are as a couple and it should be able to comfortably host the wedding of your dreams. No matter where you're getting married, the perfect venue is out there.

WHERE TO FIND IT

Wedding website The Knot has a database of venues that you can search by category (reception venues, hotels, rehearsal dinners) or by name, and of course, by location. You can filter the results by price, capacity, outdoor space and more. Other websites, such as Wedding Pro, Wedding Wire and more have similar databases. Search as many as you can to find the perfect place to exchange your vows.

WHEN TO BOOK IT

Ideally, you should book the wedding venue 12-18 months out.

It's one of the first steps you should take after getting engaged because the venue controls so much else about your ceremony.

Online research is great, but you should also visit the venue in person. If you are using a wedding planner, have them come with you and look over the contract to make sure the venue can really accommodate the type of wedding you have in mind.



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BUDGET

The venue will take up a sizable portion of your budget. Know your bottom line before you sign anything. Nothing is more disappointing than finding the venue of your dreams and then learning you can't afford it. If you're finding the

budget a hardship, consider looking at locations in the off-season when there's less demand and prices may be lower.

CAPACITY

Have a rough idea of your guest list before you start

visiting venues. Each venue will have a maximum capacity and it's up to you to make sure you don't surpass that. Finalize that list before you secure a venue.

HAVE A BACKUP

Just in case, pick a venue

and a backup venue, especially if you're planning on an outdoor wedding that is subject to Mother Nature.

When booking a venue, ask whether they have an alternate space and make sure you can visualize your ceremony there, too.

Dr. Craig & Trina Wix: A marriage and business built on shared passion and commitment



Dr. Craig and Trina Wix in their dental office. The couple has successfully operated Palmetto Dentistry for 20 years.

Stephanie Shaver Reporter

In an era where both personal and professional partnerships face increasing challenges, Dr. Craig and Trina Wix stand as a testament to the power of shared vision and commitment.

Their story spans 35 years of marriage and a successful dental practice, offering valuable insights into balancing marriage, business partnership, and personal growth.

Building a Life and Business Together

Dr. Craig and Trina Wix are the owners of Palmetto Dentistry in Barnwell, South Carolina.

Craig transitioned from a career as a video producer at the Medical College of Georgia (now Augusta University Medicine) to dentistry, while Trina became a dental hygienist after graduating from MCG in 1992. The Wixes started Palmetto Dentistry in 2005 with an office in Bowman before adding a location in Holly Hill in 2007. They relocated their practice and home to their hometown of Barnwell in 2011.

Together, they've built a practice known for its patient-centered approach and family atmosphere, maintaining long-term relationships with both patients and staff members, some of whom have been with them for over 20 years.

Their journey as a couple began in 1984 when they started dating, leading to their marriage on June 17, 1989.

With their 36th anniversary approaching, they reflect on the qualities that have kept their bond strong. Trina admires Craig's generosity, noting how he selflessly helps others without seeking recognition. Craig, on the other hand, credits Trina for stepping up as the organized one in their partnership, balancing out their shared tendency toward spontaneity.

The Balance of Love and Business

Maintaining clear boundaries between



Mr. and Mrs. Craig and Trina Wix on their wedding day, June 17, 1989. The couple will be celebrating their 36th wedding anniversary this year.

home life and work has been key to their success.

"Private life stays at home, and business stays at the office," Trina explains. "We don't mingle those two together. When

we're home, we focus on family."

Craig echoes this sentiment, emphasizing the importance of keeping work stress separate from their personal

lives. Their ability to compartmentalize has allowed them to create a harmonious balance that strengthens both their marriage and their business.



The happy newlyweds, Craig and Trina Wix, enjoying their honeymoon in Hawaii.

Lessons from the First Year and Beyond

Reflecting on their early years, Craig recalls their honeymoon in Hawaii as a pivotal moment in their relationship.

"It was the first time we were really independent as a couple—going from renting to owning our own space," he said.

For Trina, it was her first time flying, making the trip even more memorable. She notes that modern relationships often come with excessive expectations, which can place unnecessary strain on couples. Her advice to newlyweds is simple but profound: "Put God at the center of everything. We grew into that understanding, and since then, our marriage has been wonderful."

The Strength of Working Together

While some might find working with a spouse challenging, the Wixes see it as an advantage.

"It has absolutely strengthened our marriage," Trina said.

Their shared passion for dentistry allows them to see their work as a hobby rather than just a job. They have also made it a priority to travel together for dental seminars, often turning these trips into family vacations.

Craig adds that working together has rejuvenated their relationship, especially since they had 18 years together before having children. With their daughters now 17 and 14, these trips have become special bonding moments for the whole family.

Creating a Positive Work Environment

One of the things that makes their practice unique is their ability to keep things lighthearted.

"We do quite a bit of practical jokes," Craig laughs. "We've hidden voice boxes that go off randomly, played pranks with the drop ceiling—it keeps the atmosphere fun."

This playful yet professional environment extends to their staff, many of whom have become like family. Their practice is not just about dental work—it's about creating a space where patients, employees, and even first-time visitors feel comfortable and welcome.

Future Plans and Expansion

Looking ahead, Craig and Trina have considered expanding their practice, possibly incorporating cosmetic services such as Botox and fillers. While they are currently at a comfortable pace for their town's demands, they are open to evolving with the needs of their community.

Advice for Couples in Business

For couples thinking of going into business together, the Wixes emphasize the importance of communication and resolution.

"Leave the private stuff at home," Trina advises. "You're going to have disagreements, but don't let it affect the workplace. Say what you need to say, resolve it, and move on. That's been a key to our longevity together."


Conclusion

The story of the Wixes demonstrates how a strong foundation of shared values, mutual respect, and common goals can lead to success in both marriage and business. Their journey from humble beginnings—starting in a single-wide trailer—to running a thriving dental practice is proof that success is built not on having everything from the start, but on growing together with patience and dedication.

Through faith, balance, and a commitment to their patients and staff, they have created a legacy of care, laughter, and love that continues to flourish.

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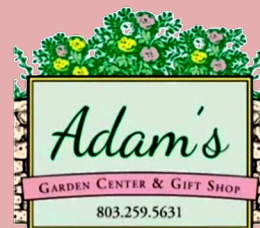


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Angela Cotton: A wedding coordinator's guide to a seamless celebration

Stephanie Shaver
Reporter

Angela Cotton is a veteran wedding coordinator with 38 years of experience in the industry. She has orchestrated countless weddings, from intimate ceremonies to large-scale celebrations, ensuring each couple's vision comes to life.

Her expertise spans venue selection, vendor coordination and crisis management, with a particular strength in navigating complex family dynamics—an aspect she playfully refers to as managing the “X’s and O’s.” Cotton’s approach blends traditional etiquette with modern sensibilities, ensuring a balance between timeless elegance and contemporary trends.

With nearly four decades of experience, Cotton has seen it all—wedding day mishaps, last-minute vendor cancellations, unpredictable weather and family drama. But through it all, her role remains the same: to make sure everything runs smoothly so couples can enjoy their special day stress-free.

This guide explores her insights, from essential planning steps to emerging trends in modern wedding celebrations.

Why a Wedding Coordinator Is Essential

Many couples don’t fully grasp the importance of a wedding coordinator until they witness one in action.

“We put out all the fires and fix things that don’t go as planned,” Cotton said. “Our job is to ensure the bride’s wishes are taken care of—what the bride wants, the bride gets.”

A coordinator works behind the scenes, handling seating arrangements, vendor logistics and last-minute surprises. They also help mediate family dynamics, ensuring everyone is where they need to be—whether at the ceremony or reception.

“Until couples see us in action, they don’t truly understand what we do,” Cotton said.

Choosing the Right Venue: Essential Questions to Ask

One of the first and most important decisions couples must make is choosing the right venue. However, many overlook critical logistical details.

Cotton recommends asking the following questions:

- Is the venue big enough to comfortably accommodate all guests?
- Does the venue require event insurance?
- Are tables, chairs and



Wedding coordinator Angela Cotton (left) with bride-to-be Natalie Nobles at a bridal shower for Nobles. Nobles is marrying Michael Sandifer on April 26, 2025.

linens included in the rental?

- Does the venue require a licensed bartender?
- Is there sufficient parking, or is a shuttle service needed?
- Are there nearby accommodations for out-of-town guests?

The size of the venue is especially important in smaller towns, where options may be limited. Cotton advises couples to book their venue early and ensure it can accommodate both the

ceremony and reception, if needed.

Wedding Day Emergency Kit: The ‘Uh-Oh Kit’

No matter how well a wedding is planned, unexpected mishaps are inevitable. That’s why Cotton swears by her “uh-oh kit,” a must-have for any wedding day.

This emergency kit should include:

- Straight pins and safety pins
- Masking tape and wire clippers



An important part of Angela Cotton’s role as a wedding coordinator is to ensure the wedding party stays on schedule during their walk down the aisle. She’s pictured directing the wedding party during the wedding of Whitney and Colton Sanders at Buck Ridge Plantation in Neeses several years ago.

- Mini sewing kit and scissors
- Batteries for candles and floral wire
- Corsage pins and fishing line
- A small glue gun for quick fixes

“Even something as simple as a missing button or a broken strap can cause unnecessary stress,” Cotton said. “Having these items on hand can save the day.”

Wedding Attire: Renting vs. Buying

One common dilemma grooms face is whether to rent or buy a suit. According to Cotton, the cost of renting a tuxedo is nearly the same as purchasing one. “If you buy one, you can continue to repurpose it for future events and anniversaries,” she said.

For bridesmaids, a growing trend is allowing each to choose a dress style in the bride’s



Angela Cotton (right) straightens out the dress of bride Mikayla Mulligan Halcomb as she prepares to walk down the aisle, escorted by her father Alan, at Pine Knoll Farms in Appling, Ga. a few years ago.

selected color. "This ensures each bridesmaid feels comfortable and confident while still maintaining a cohesive

look," Cotton said.



Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Cotton emphasizes three major mistakes

couples often make during wedding planning:

1. Budget mismanagement – Setting a realistic budget from the beginning prevents unnecessary stress later. Parents often contribute, but couples should set a clear spending limit. "Some parents give \$10,000 for a wedding," Cotton said. "Anything beyond that comes out of the couple's pocket."

2. Lack of a clear vision – Without a clear vision, it's easy to get lost in Pinterest inspiration and endless ideas. A vision board can help couples stay on track.

3. Not starting early enough – Cotton strongly advises couples to begin planning at least 18 months in advance to secure venues, vendors and accommodations.

2025 Wedding Trends

As wedding styles evolve, Cotton sees a shift toward more sophisticated and elegant aesthetics:

• **Move away from rustic themes** – The days of burlap and mason jars are fading. Couples are opting for timeless elegance over country-chic décor.

• **More venue flexibility** – Fewer couples are choosing traditional church weddings, instead favoring outdoor and unique event spaces.

• **Floral prints and classy themes** – Expect to see more floral-printed dresses and sophisticated, polished décor replacing rustic elements.

Final Advice: Focus on What Truly Matters

Wedding planning can be overwhelming, but Cotton encourages couples to remember what's most important.

"Always have a conversation with the bride about not sweating the small things," she said. "Little things will happen—just move past them and laugh it off."

She also reminds couples to think ahead about practical matters, like how to handle kids in the wedding (have a backup plan!) and what to do with leftover food and décor.

With careful planning, a clear vision and the expertise of a wedding coordinator, couples can enjoy a beautiful, stress-free celebration of their love.

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Questions to Ask Your Florist

Your florist is responsible for the blooms that are so important to making your wedding day perfect.

Those posies can cost a pretty penny, too, so you need to make sure you and your floral professional are on the same page. Here are some questions The Knot suggests you ask your florist.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A FLORAL DESIGNER?

Ask your florist about their years of experience. What kinds of weddings have they participated in? Do they have photos? Can you talk to the brides?

DO YOU EMPLOY SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES IN YOUR BUSINESS?

More and more couples are insisting on greener ceremonies. Florists, with their use of plants, water and other goods, need to use green practices. Talk to your floral professional about sourcing the blooms for your wedding and make sure they use responsible vendors.

WHAT FLOWERS DO YOU RECOMMEND FOR OUR WEDDING?

Ask florists what flowers you can use to maximize your budget and your style.



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Because florists have seen many weddings, they can recommend flowers to dazzle your guests and complementary decor.

HOW DO YOU SUGGEST WE MAXIMIZE OUR BUDGET?

Floral arrangements and bouquets are going to be a big line item in your wedding budget. Make sure you can cover everything you need by

asking your florist for seasonal blooms or other ways you can make the most of the money you have.

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICING?

Not only should you make sure you are crystal clear on the pricing, you need to know what's not included. Ask about any common service that there may be an extra charge for and make sure you factor

that into your accounting. Some florists might charge extra for design, setup or delivery.

WHAT IS YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE?

You and your florist will need to be in conversation in the days leading up to your wedding. Avoid any problems by making sure your communication styles sync. Ask whether your florist prefers

calls, texts or emails, and ensure that it works for you as well.

WHAT ARE THE DAY-OF LOGISTICS?

Know what your florist may need from your venue or any other vendors that you're working with. Ask when the flowers are arriving and whether the florist will need help unloading or setting anything up.

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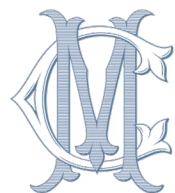
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Wedding Advice

We asked local couples to share their best wedding advice for newlyweds. Here are some of their responses.

Tammy Still (Married to Ricky for 39 years)

After 7 years of dating and 39 years of marriage to Ricky, our wedding advice is to pray together, trust God to work in your spouse, and prioritize communication



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and regular dates. Say "I love you," and compliment the other, too.

Beth Evans Miller (Married to Jeff for 33 years)

After 33 years I've learned to have/give a long hug each and every day. Do this regardless of what kind of day you've had. Sigh into it and your tension will release and stress will lessen with each breath.

Tonya Hammet (Married to Christopher for 23 years)

I married my husband after only knowing him for two weeks. We have been together for 23 years. Remember it is y'all two against the world. Never go to bed angry, and do not, I repeat, do not tell anybody y'all's business.

Shanon Bragg (Married to Ryan for 16 years)

Don't be serious and be selfless. Laugh continuously. Go to bed angry. Wake up in the a.m. with a fresh mind and go over what

made you mad.

Doris Chavis Rosier (Married to Daryl. April 14, 2025 will mark their 35th anniversary)

Advice?

1. Never go to bed angry.
2. Always be willing to listen to the other's thoughts or concerns.
3. Tell your spouse you love them every day.

Courtney Long (married to Joshua Long for 14 years)

Faithfulness, respect, loyalty and communication. I've been with my husband since I was 16 years old. There have been trials along the way and ups and downs, but we've made it.

Diane White Bodiford (Married to Allen Bodiford. June 23, 2025 will mark their 42nd anniversary)

Be open and honest with each other. Never stop helping each other. It's the simple things that keep it working (hold hands, kiss good night or goodbye every day, make their coffee, or fix their plate for supper). Simple!

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Reception Trends to Watch

Wedding receptions are a once-in-a-lifetime party. You'll be more likely to look back at yours with fondness if you choose classic themes and avoid fly-by-night fads.

Here, though, are some trends becoming popular for wedding receptions.

SPLIT DECISION

More couples are going with a ceremony on one day and the party on another. That way vendors, friends, family and the couple themselves can give each event their full attention. Of course, there may be more in travel charges, but you may save on venue rental by not having to reserve each space for as long.

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

Wow your guests with experiences at the reception such as drone performances, fireworks and shows. Live music is a great idea, but turn it into a vibrant concert rather than just an afterthought.

TO-GO BOXES

Make wedding cakes or other sweet stuff grab-and-go so guests can focus on dancing and having fun. Plus, it gives them a late-night snack.

LIVE STREAMING

Ask your photographer or videographer to live stream the ceremony and the party so that people who can't be there in person can still share in the love.

Have them record any comments so the couple can read them later.

DIGITAL GUEST BOOKS

Skip the old-fashioned paper book for a digital guest book that will give the happy couple a lasting, immersive experience. Allow guests to share photos, videos, audio messages and more.

SUSTAINABILITY

Look for greener options for your reception, such as recycled or recycling friendly dinnerware, favors that use less plastic and food and florals that come from close to home.

NON-FORMAL MENUS

Go for a more personal menu rather than sticking with a menu that's more formal but more generic. Use family recipes (and share them!) or pick a dish from a favorite dinner date.

SMOKE MINES

Go viral with TikTok craze smoke mines to express the sheer joy of being married. Colorful clouds of smoke can be seen in the daylight, unlike fireworks, and have the same wow factor.

ICE SCULPTURES

What's old is new again, and that means ice sculptures, obviously. Wedding ice sculptures can do dual duty as a shot luge or dessert display to make it an interactive experience for your guests.



Bridal Etiquette to Know

Social media is filled with tales of bridezillas gone wild. That doesn't have to be you. Stay calm and remember your wedding is a celebration.

Follow these simple rules of etiquette.

CONSIDER THE MEMBERS OF YOUR WEDDING PARTY

Particularly when it comes to the attire, keep the comfort of your wedding party in mind. If you allow them to choose their own outfits, keep your suggestions and comments kind and remember most of the eyes will be on the happy couple.

Also remember to properly thank the officiant and offer an appropriate fee in a sealed envelope along with a hand-written note of thanks from you and your spouse.

INVITATIONS

Allow plenty of time to address, assemble and mail your invitations. Try to develop a system to make sure each invitation gets sent on time, and don't be afraid to ask friends and family to help. Include registry information and any other appropriate inserts, such as maps or directions or hotel information.

If you don't want children to attend, do not put "no

children" or "adults only." Instead, address it to who is invited. An invitation sent to Mr. and Mrs. Jones includes only Mr. and Mrs. Jones, not their children. If children are welcomed, they'll be mentioned individually or the Jones family would be the addressee.

GIFTS

There are a lot of rules surrounding wedding gifts. The

late Emily Post, an etiquette expert, says the prohibition against asking people not to bring gifts in fact puts an emphasis on gifts. Remember that friends and family who have attended a first wedding and given a gift are under no obligation to give another wedding gift to the same person, even if the new marriage is to a different person.

Instead of including the disclaimer on the invitations,

Post says to take care of such a request personally. It should come from the couple or close friends and family.

SEND THANK-YOUS

Weddings are one of the biggest events in someone's life. Don't forget to thank the people who supported you with their presence or their gifts. Emily Post says the couple should personalize thank-you notes and reference both the gift and the giver. Be

enthusiastic, but don't gush.

WHEN IT COMES TO GUESTS

If guests RSVP with children written in, have the wedding host call and explain if children are not invited. Post advises to stay strong, but be clear.

Making exceptions isn't fair to other guests who found childcare for the duration of the event.



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Wedding Keepsakes to Save

Your wedding day is one you should remember forever, but between the jitters, the adrenaline and everything else going on, it could well be just a blur.

Keep that from happening by making sure to save these keepsakes.

GRAB A KEEPSAKE BOX

Grab a box that's sure to be large enough to hold everything you want to keep and pick one that is sturdy enough to handle moves, remodeling and, hopefully, decades of love. Consider having it engraved with the date or initials or both.

WHAT TO PUT IN IT

Now you need to fill it up. Choose items that will remind you of your special day, that you can pull out and go through together in years to come.

- **Vows:** Make or buy personalized vow booklets and write your own vows in them. Or consider having a calligrapher write them for you.

- **Flowers:** Preserve your bouquet or part of your bouquet, depending on what you have room for. The whole bouquet can be professionally preserved in a shadow box or glass dome — talk to your florist about where you can get this done.



© ADOBE STOCK

- **Attire:** Preserve part of your wedding gown, the groom's bowtie or pocket square, the bride's shoes or jewelry and more. Make sure the shadowbox or other container is acid-free and consider adding silica desiccant packets to control humidity.

- **Invitation:** Keep a wedding

invitation and frame it to hang in your new home or add to the box. Consider adding any ribbons from the ceremony, printed napkins or other personalized decor.

WRITE A LOVE LETTER

Write love letters to each other the night before the

wedding and put them in the box. Open them and read them after the ceremony, or even on a subsequent anniversary. Loss for words? Write about your excitement for your wedding day, your hopes and dreams and goals.

Include a wedding venue blueprint, map or illustration.

ADD LOCAL FLAVOR

Pick a bottle of wine or liquor from the city in which you got married, or choose another local treat such as candy, honey or coffee. Even if you plan to live in that city forever, life can take funny turns and this way, you'll have something to remember it by.

Menu Ideas for the Big Day

Love isn't just in the air at a wedding, it should also be on the plate.

Get away from generic menus and go with food you love to create a memorable meal on an even more memorable day.

START WITH THE CONTRACTS

Before setting the menu, check the regulations for your chosen venue. There may be in-house catering services you must use or a list of preferred vendors you need to choose from. If you do choose another caterer, you may also have to pay an additional fee, and that should be included in your budget.

CONSIDER THE VIBE

Think about what type of food you want to serve and whether it matches the style of the ceremony you have in mind. There's plenty of room to bend the rules, but bear in mind dietary restrictions, cultural requirements and the abilities of your vendors. Look for caterers that have prior experience with the type of menu you have in mind.

MAP OUT A BUDGET

Set a budget and stick to it. Talk to vendors and be honest about your resources and rely on their expertise to maximize what you can afford. Ask your catering team for ideas that match your ceremony's



© ADOBE STOCK

style and your personality.

Traditionally, a plated wedding menu will start with appetizers, then move to a salad course, entrée and wedding cakes and desserts. A buffet menu also starts with appetizers, then includes salads, sides, proteins and, lastly, wedding cake and desserts.

STATIONS

Serving foods that lend themselves to it, such as appetizers and desserts, at serve-yourself stations is a fashionable idea that also gives guests some control over their own dish.

Think things like a coffee bar, an ice cream station or crostini bar.

DON'T FORGET THE DRINKS

Ask your caterer about what kind of drinks they make available. If local laws and your venue allows, you may need a separate vendor (and budget) for alcohol. Budget allowing, ask your bartenders to come up with a signature cocktail for your wedding.

TAKEOUT

Think about having to-go or takeout boxes for your guests to take desserts, cake or even whole entrees with them. This will encourage them to enjoy the party and the dance floor while they can and have a snack to enjoy when they get home or back to their hotel room.



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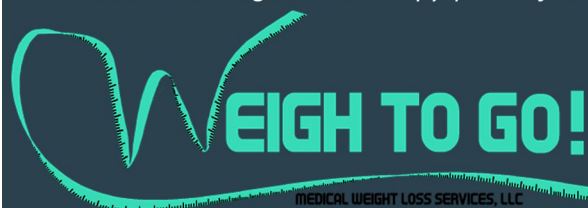
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