

Green limos? Hemp gowns? Saying I do to eco

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When Vancouver's Tanya Morrow weds Brock Maglio on Aug. 18, she will be wearing a hemp silk dress that she designed herself.

The lavish buffet dinner, entirely organic, will feature B.C. salmon and bison, wild rice pilaf and seasonal vegetables. She has opted for organic cupcakes instead of a cake. And her bouquet of sweetpeas will also be organic.

Nellie's Laundry, a local company that makes natural laundry soda in an old-fashioned box, donated six cases for party favours. Rather than gifts, Morrow has asked that each guest make a change in lifestyle that will have a positive impact on the environment.

Morrow knows that her mother, who passed away on Christmas Day last year, would be proud. "She never liked people wasting things," she says.

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Today, as millions the world over make a commitment against climate change by participating in Live Earth, a smaller but significant number will be committing to each other for the rest of their lives.

The date of 07/07/07 is being seen as the most matrimonially auspicious in recent history. But more than the promise of good luck, it represents a dovetailing of time-honoured tradition and a robust new trend.

Call it econnubial bliss: With prime wedding season under way, you can expect to find more and more couples saying "I do" to ceremonies that are Earth-friendly.

If brides and grooms haven't already adopted a greener belief system, the new eco-consciousness is altering the marriage mindset throughout popular culture. Even *Days of Our Lives*, the NBC daytime soap, has produced "television's first green or environmentally conscious wedding."

And this fall, the Food Network's *I Do... Let's Eat* will feature Mary and Ayden from London, Ont., who plan both their ceremony and reception at an eco-park (how festive: composting toilet facilities).

Green weddings need not conform to an *idée fixe*, but the goal is to leave a smaller ecological "footprint" - the buzzword du jour that refers to our impact on the planet.

Given that almost 45,000 weddings occurred every weekend last year in the United States (according to the American Wedding Study 2006, conducted by the Condé Nast Bridal Group), with the annual total increasing by 200,000 since 2000, it's almost impossible to conceptualize the output of goods.

"People spend more money in the shortest amount of time than any other time in their lives," says Emily Elizabeth Anderson, whose book *Eco-chic Weddings* came out in January.

"So my message is if you're putting a lot of money out there and if you really want to make a difference in the world, you can actually do it without sacrificing any style or spending more money; you just have to think differently."

She underscores that the book is also about sustainable practices and the well-worn but worthwhile adage to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Morrow used *Eco-chic Weddings* as a resource and encourages her 100 guests to check into the website she created with her fiancé (<http://www.brockandtanya.com>) which details how nearly every aspect of their big day has been made conscientiously.

"This was the way I pictured my wedding," says Morrow, 26, a product developer and designer at Lululemon Athletica, who cites David Suzuki as an early influence. "I didn't want anything cookie-cutter."

Where her engaged colleagues were gathering ideas from wedding shows, Morrow says she stayed away because there were no green vendors. Toronto-based Catherine Lash, whose Wedding Co. show and corresponding website are decidedly upscale, agrees that she has yet to commit to an eco-section even though more brides are inquiring.

"I'm not convinced there's enough out there right now for me to make it as good quality as I want it to be," says Lash, who has observed brides opting for more paper these days - maps and menus in addition to invitations.

But she's still setting a good example. "I produce a trade show which produces garbage," she acknowledges, adding that she supplies blue boxes and ensures that her exhibitors compost flowers and food.

The Internet, meanwhile, continues to provide brides with a bazaar of eco-ideas and a forum for them to share and compare. TheKnot.com is the No. 1 wedding site in the U.S. with more than a million members. Two months ago, it added a green "sub channel," where the current feature story poses the

question, "Can your wedding save the world?"

Says Christa Vagnozzi, senior editor from New York, "The challenge was to do something green that [was] also fresh and modern." One of the most popular sections is "Real Green Weddings," which profiles couples in, yes, ecounnubial bliss.

As to how much information - from conflict-free diamonds to releasing doves (better than butterflies) - people choose to absorb, Vagnozzi says, "Weddings are all about personalization so it all depends on what you feel comfortable doing in terms of how eco-friendly your wedding is."

Which was why Prius limousines meant so much to Toronto's Katherine Martineau, 28, and Paul Fehr, 29, who acknowledge that forgoing the wedding would have been the most environmental decision. Fehr's mother, Reet, who takes credit for the idea, says her four children have had an effect on her. "I think my generation is becoming more aware as well." Incidentally, the whole party ended up walking from the church to the University of Toronto's Convocation Hall.

Ellen Karp, a consumer research consultant who tracks the movement toward "LOHAS" (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability), notes that informing guests about the eco-effort involved has an impact. "Without being preachy, this can be very interesting for people," she says from her Toronto office. "And people who know the couple will already know their values."

Anderson takes a slightly different approach. "I don't think [weddings] should have the stamp of being green. It's not about a label. It's deeper than that. It's about educating yourself and using your wedding as a way to establish what your values are," she says from New York. "Your registry is basically your blueprint for what your lifestyle is."

As is your venue. The Toronto Botanical Garden, with its newly renovated glass pavilion, has suddenly become a hot spot. Couples especially appreciate that the building is certified by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. Facility supervisor Kristin Campbell says dates are already disappearing for 2008 and someone recently called about 2010. Indeed, a long engagement, but as Campbell says, "If you come back in two years time, the gardens will be that much greener."

And, one hopes, weddings will be too.

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