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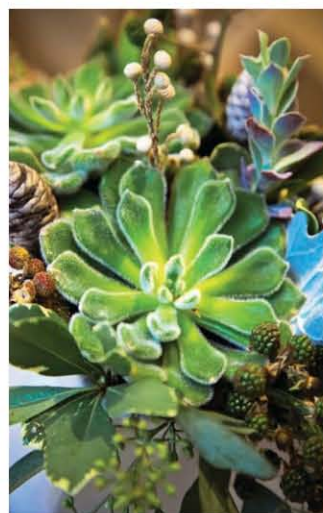
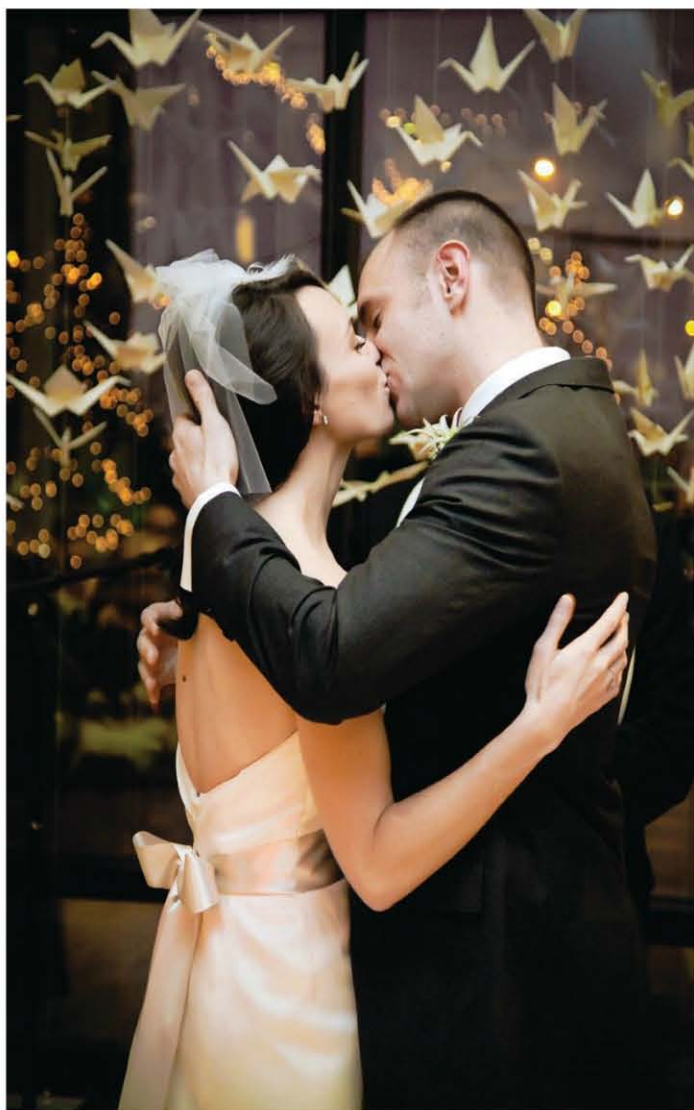
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Beautiful Being Green

Once considered crunchy and hippie, green-friendly weddings are becoming more chic, thanks to the savvy team of vendors behind Chicago Green Wedding Alliance.

| By Lauren Viera |

For the decade or so that the word “green” has stood in for “ecologically responsible,” many of us have absently dismissed its connotations as more hippie than hip. Sure, we all want to be kinder to the environment, but recycling is something we take care of at the office after shredding memos, or at home after sorting soda cans and discarded pizza boxes—which is about as unglamorous as it gets. Utter the phrase “green wedding,” and most brides’ minds wander to visions of bland, taupe-colored paper napkins and unsightly recycling containers flanking the bar.

Which, of course, is not an accurate representation of how gorgeous green can get. In addition to its mission to encourage and promote greener weddings, commitment ceremonies and social events, **Chicago Green Wedding Alliance** (greenweddingalliance.com) hopes to educate

brides-to-be that environmentally responsible fêtes can be just as chic and beautiful as those that are less responsible with resources.

“The biggest thing we’re working on is to bring awareness and make people think of ‘green’ as not a granola, crunchy thing,” says Amanda Eich, who with husband Tony Vassallo runs the ecologically responsible stationery firm **Spilled Ink Press** (spilledinkpress.com). Together with a handful of like-minded vendors, the husband-and-wife team co-founded the Chicago Green Wedding Alliance in 2010 after rendezvousing at the first-ever Indie Wed event. “We had just started focusing our invitations and business model on green practices, and we wanted to surround ourselves with people who had the same sense. We found **Pollen** (pollenfloraldesign.com), one of the few eco-friendly

ECO-LOVEABLE
Clockwise from left: Lauren and Joe Andresky wed with the help of Chicago Green Wedding Alliance at Greenhouse Loft in December. Fig Catering, Pollen and Amy Beck Cake Design were among the couple’s smart vendor selections.

ANDRESKY WEDDING PHOTOS BY GREENHOUSE LOFT PHOTOGRAPHY

...CONTINUED florists in the city, and from there we just started talking about it. We realized that this was a need that needed to be filled.”

Over the course of the following year, Eich and Vassallo, Pollen’s Lynn Fosbender and a handful of others workshopped memberships and application requirements for the budding Chicago Green Wedding Alliance, with the goal of incorporating as a business league nonprofit (structured similarly to a chamber of commerce) in time for the following year’s Indie Wed. “It was like our coming-out party,” says Vassallo of the group’s January 2010 debut.

Back then, the alliance was a dozen members strong. Now, it’s more than 30, ranging from event planners to DJs and musicians—even eco-friendly fashion and accessories designers. **Green Diva Jewelry** (greendivajewelry.com), for instance, is made using fair trade, recycled, reclaimed and renewable materials, but it aesthetically fits right in at an upscale boutique. “Green can be classy and chic—and affordable,” says Vassallo, pointing out that his own Spilled Ink Press invitations, for example, aren’t necessarily any more expensive than anyone else’s. “Going green doesn’t mean that you have to completely blow the budget.”

In most instances among the members of the Chicago Green Wedding Alliance, it’s basic business practices that earn a given vendor its green status as opposed to laborious extra measures that increase costs for the client. It’s simple stuff, Vassallo says of the alliance’s application, from whether a given office utilizes recycled paper to print invoices, to shutting down computers each night after work. “A lot of new members say these are things they weren’t necessarily conscious of, or were already doing it and didn’t think of it,” he says.

From the wedding party’s point of view, little appears to be different at a wedding gone green other than the peace of mind that it’s a less wasteful event. Consider the meal: By offering family-style service, alliance member **Pure Kitchen Catering** (purekitchencatering.com) only dishes out as much as a given table can eat, avoiding the potential waste of overloaded individual plates. And Pure Kitchen has been known to take leftovers to homeless shelters, instead of tossing untouched food into the garbage.



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“It’s always been within the Pure Kitchen mission to be community focused, ecologically friendly and use sustainable, local sources,” says Pure Kitchen managing member Joshua Yates, who acts as the company’s director of sales and marketing. When Pure Kitchen joined the alliance last year, Yates explains that it didn’t alter the way they do business, but instead greased the wheels for relationships with new vendors. Among them were a new composter to help offset Pure Kitchen’s zero-waste policy, a photographer who utilizes eco-friendly processing and techniques, and the gorgeous **Greenhouse Loft** (greenhouseloft.com)—the No. 1 green venue in the U.S., located inside Chicago’s Green Exchange, which is the nation’s largest sustainable business community.

Elsewhere, little details go a long way toward cutting down on wedding waste, which averages 400 pounds of garbage per event. Pure Kitchen, for example, opts out of emptying hundreds of plastic bottles of water by using a triple-water-purification system, and serving guests via urns and classic carafes. Need sparkling? There’s a soda gun for that. And when Pure Kitchen is called upon for so-called hyper-local events, Yates says he can produce a wedding with up to 95 percent locally sourced ingredients.

Of course, not everything can be reused. “More than likely, you’re going to buy a brand-new dress and wear it once,” says Eich, “and one of the biggest things is the carbon footprint: people traveling. Some things like that are kind of unavoidable. But that’s why it makes a lot of sense to try to do everything else you can responsibly.” ■



WASTE NOT, WANT NOT
Clockwise from top: Chioggia beets with bell pepper coulis, raw almond, cilantro and balsamic syrup by Pure Kitchen Catering. Greenhouse Loft in Logan Square is the country’s premier sustainable event venue. An invitation suite using 100 percent post-consumer waste paper from Spilled Ink Press

SPILLED INK PRESS INVITE SUITE PHOTO BY VIRAI; PURE KITCHEN CATERING FOOD PHOTO BY MAYPOLE STUDIOS PHOTOGRAPHY; GREENHOUSE LOFT PHOTO BY GREENHOUSE LOFT PHOTOGRAPHY