

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



FOR RENT - Lavish estates. Historic museums. Rolling vineyards. With private sites available for weddings and other special events, many are saying so long to the humble hall.

By MARILYN McMAHON, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER



Kelly Oshiro, local wedding and event planner, describes Villa de la Guerra as a "miniature version of the Getty Villa" in Santa Monica. The one-story, 4,000-square-foot home has an H-shaped layout joined by a gallery.

STEVE MALONE/NEWS-PRESS



Villa de la Guerra, at left, on the upper Eastside near the Santa Barbara Mission is among the privately owned estates and other locations that are available for weddings and other special events in Santa Barbara County. At right, in the spacious gallery, Mary Hanson and her two grandchildren, Gwen Tormey, 5, and Liam Tormey, 7, admire the view of the front courtyard.





Romantic weddings are the rule at Rose Story Farm in Carpinteria, where 20,000 fragrant rose bushes are in bloom most of the year.

ROSE STORY FARM

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When Shannon Jones began planning her special day, she knew exactly what she wanted -- "a backyard wedding with a homey feeling, the same as if I was going to my mother's house for dinner on a Sunday evening."

Ms. Jones found exactly the setting she wanted in Montecito, a private estate with a classic Hamptons look with spacious lawns to accommodate 200 guests. One lawn has a small garden with a fountain, roses and clipped hedges. Another is sunken with large oak trees growing on each side, creating a grove.

"It's perfect for a themed 'down-home' wedding because, while it is an elegant estate, the scale of the property still feels very intimate," said the bride-to-be by phone from her office in Santa Monica. "The little nooks and crannies, like the garden and sunken lawn, are immediately adjacent to the main lawn, so when guests explore these areas they are never far from the main action."

The estate is a mile away from All Saints-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church on Eucalyptus Lane in Montecito, where the 4 p.m. ceremony will take place July 25.

Even though Ms. Jones, 26, and her fiance, Michael Malik, 31, live in Santa Monica, they had no problem finding the perfect venue for their big day with the help of Kelly Oshiro, who does design and planning for

weddings and other special occasions.

She and other event planners in the Santa Barbara area have lengthy lists of privately owned sites that are available to individuals who prefer not to have their weddings and other special events in hotel ballrooms, church fellowship halls or similar places.

The venues range from posh estates in Montecito and beachfront spreads on Padaro Lane in Carpinteria to vineyards and ranches in Santa Ynez Valley. There's even a huge catamaran, the Channel Cat, in the harbor that can be rented.

Among the rentals are historic landmarks like the recently named Villa de la Guerra, a new rental on the upper Eastside, around the corner from the Santa Barbara Mission. The original owner was Francisca de la Guerra Dibblee, whose grandfather was Don Jose de la Guerra, Santa Barbara's founding father.

The one-story, 4,000-square-foot home has an H-shaped layout with two wings joined by a sun-filled gallery. The formal entrance features an interior, open-air courtyard with a circular fountain surrounded by olive trees and plantings of star jasmine, agapanthus and lavender.

"We fell in love with the property and its history," said Mary Hanson. She and her husband, Rowland, purchased the estate and meticulously refurbished almost every exterior detail while adding modern conveniences and styles inside and outside.

When they bought the property in December 2003, the Hansons were living in Seattle, where Mr. Hanson was vice president of corporate communications for Microsoft.

"Our original plan was to use this house for a vacation home. We thought it would take six months to do some cosmetic touches. It took us two and a half years to complete the permitting process and get final approval from historic and architectural groups," said the youthful-looking grandmother of two during an interview at the home, a spectacular setting for any special occasion, especially a wedding.

As work on the home progressed under the watchful eye of Kent Mixon, local architect, more and more hurdles were encountered. The foundation had to be seismically updated. The roof needed replacing. The structure was taken back to the studs.

"Once a month, then every other week, I came down from Seattle to check on the project. So many times I wanted to cry," laughed Mrs. Hanson.

The renovation of the home and all new drought-tolerant landscaping was completed several months ago, just in time for the Pearl Chase Historic Homes tour on May 17.

She moved in May 5, the day the Jesusita Fire broke out, evacuated on May 6, came back on May 9, and the tour was a week later, Mrs. Hanson said.

Although the project took 5 1/2 years, the Hansons are so thrilled with the final result and with the Santa Barbara lifestyle that they have decided to sell their house in Seattle and make Villa de la Guerra their home.

"This estate transcends any particular time period. It is a blending of styles inspired by Old World Mediterranean and the natural beauty of Santa Barbara," said Mrs. Hanson, an interior designer and co-owner of Liberty 123, a home furnishings retail store in Kirkland, Wash.

Because of its designation as a historic landmark, the couple feel it's important to share it with others by opening the villa for private events and film or photography shoots.

"We're stewards of this home, not owners," said Mrs. Hanson.

To Ms. Oshiro, Villa de la Guerra "feels like a miniature version of the Getty Villa in Santa Monica, and its proximity to the Mission can't be beat."

She likes planning events at private venues because "the locations are prettier and more private than a huge hotel ballroom, and you don't have to find ways to hide unattractive elements.

"Rose Story Farm in Carpinteria is a good example," said Ms. Oshiro. "How can you argue with 20,000 rose bushes?"

But she warns that having a wedding or other special event at a private site can be complicated.

"Everything has to be brought in -- tables, chairs, linens, kitchens and electrical power, which at historic sites can be iffy. Don't forget porta-potties, which rent for \$250 each for basic ones. The nicer ones in trailers cost \$1,200 and up," said Ms. Oshiro. "Parking is another problem. You have to have valet parking or shuttles."

Just to rent an estate for the party can cost \$10,000 to \$25,000.

There are more affordable places like Arroyo Hondo Preserve in Gaviota, which charges \$3,000, and Rancho La Patera and Stow House in Goleta, which charges \$1,500 to \$2,000, according to their Web sites.

Shannon Jones agreed with Ms. Oshiro about the complexities of renting a private site.

"An estate or other private location is not a good idea if you need structure. Hotels are a safer route," said Ms. Jones. "We had a clear vision of what we wanted, so everything has worked out great."

Ms. Jones said all the credit for the smooth operation goes to her mother, Debra Hanrahan of Brentwood.

"She's incredible. My mom and I did everything from scratch. Once we found the site, everything fell into place," she said.

In keeping with the feeling of a "big summer backyard dinner," guests at the reception will be seated at long tables, covered in burlap, and platters of food will be passed family-style.

Miniature hamburgers and bacon-wrapped shrimp will be among the appetizers, and the main course will include hanger steak, grilled chicken, corn and arugula salad and roasted potatoes.

Instead of a wedding cake, the dessert will be two cobblers -- peach and mixed berry -- served with vanilla ice cream.

"The Kitchen for Exploring Foods in Pasadena will cater because my mom has used them before for entertaining, and they specialize in home cooking," Ms. Jones said. "Centerpieces on the tables will be big cabbage roses in small containers, along with bowls of lemons and herbs."

The bride and her mother made all the arrangements for rentals -- tables, chairs, linens, restrooms in trailers, and whatever else will be needed.

"We'll have a dance floor but no tent," she said. "Because there is little parking at the estate, we are shuttling guests from the ceremony to the reception by bus."

Despite the lack of lavish touches for her dream wedding, Ms. Jones said it has turned out to be more expensive than having it at a hotel.

Asked why the couple, who will honeymoon in Bali, chose to be married in Santa Barbara, she said that they were engaged at the Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara, and "we wanted to get out of the Los Angeles area. I came to Santa Barbara frequently as a child."

As her wedding day approaches, Ms. Jones confided that her feelings are bittersweet.

"It has been exciting to plan it with my mother, who is so creative, and I'm excited to be married, but it will be sad to see the day come and go," she said.

e-mail: mmcmahon@newspress.com

LOCAL EVENT SITES

Finding an unusual local site for your wedding or other special event? You can scratch that off your to-do list.

Lynette La Mere, proprietor of Pure Joy Catering, 111 E. Haley St., has done thousands of events over the 26 years she has been in business.

A free listing of dozens of unique locations in Santa Barbara County is on her Web site, www.purejoycatering.com. There are also sites in Ventura County and Camarillo.

A sample of the locations follows:

ESTATES

Sea Gate, Summerland

Orzi de Montecito, Montecito

Deacon Hill, Montecito

Villa Camino Cielo, Goleta

A Fernald Point Estate, Montecito

Villa Verona, Goleta

Sycamores Estate, Montecito

OUTDOOR LOCATIONS

Casa de la Guerra

Santa Barbara Historical Museum

Chase Palm Park Carousel

The Oaks/Orella Ranch, Refugio Canyon area

Alice Keck Park Memorial Gardens

Camarillo Ranch, Camarillo

Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

A.C. Postel Rose Garden

OTHER VENUES

Santa Barbara Maritime Museum

Twin Peaks, Ojai

Santa Barbara Carriage and Western Arts Museum

Ty Warner Sea Center on Stearns Wharf

Meditation Mount, Ojai

Santa Barbara Woman's Club-Rockwood

Channel Cat, a catamaran in the Santa Barbara Harbor

WINE COUNTRY

Figueroa Mountain Farmhouse, Santa Ynez Valley

Long Meadow Estate, Santa Ynez Valley

Gainey Winery, Solvang

Rideau Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley

LinCourt Vineyards and Winery, Santa Ynez Valley

Koehler Winery, Santa Ynez Valley

Foley Vineyards and Winery, Santa Ynez Valley

For the complete list of locations and more details, go to www.purejoycatering.com.