



the wedding

When **Ashley Marriott** called home to Potomac last summer, she had two big announcements: She was getting married *and* she wanted to have the wedding in four months.

That's when her mother, Julie, swung into action

By Ann Cochran / Photos by Jonathan Canlas



planner

New bride Ashley Marriott Samuelian and her mother, Julie Marriott, wedding planner extraordinaire.



Mr. and Mrs. Samuelian in front of the Washington D.C. Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sacred to church members who enter for official blessings and ceremonies. Prior to its dedication 750,000 visitors toured the completed temple, which serves more than 175,000 LDS members in the eastern United States.

When Spencer Samuelian was preparing to return to Brigham Young University from his two-year mission in Peru for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), his brother Gary, also a BYU student, wrote to tell him he wanted to introduce him to a girl he'd met at school. It wasn't just any girl. It was Ashley Marriott of Potomac, the beautiful granddaughter of J.W. Marriott Jr., chairman and CEO of Marriott International.

But Spencer wasn't interested. "No thanks," he recalls telling Gary. "I don't

want to date some high-maintenance Marriott chick."

Gary, however, knew a perfect pair when he saw one, and didn't give up. In August 2005 Ashley and friends were invited to the Samuelian's houseboat on Lake Powell one weekend and a romance began.

Ashley and Spencer dated for almost a year before he proposed last July on the houseboat. Ashley told her mother, Julie, they wanted to get married soon, at the latest in November, just four months away. "Obviously, when you're LDS and

you get to this point," says Ashley, "you don't want to wait—you just want to be together, married."

With their belief in premarital purity, Latter-day Saints are used to short engagements, so Julie was not shocked to find herself with less than four months to plan a wedding. In this case, it would be for more than 400 guests.

"It didn't bother me that I didn't have a year to plan the wedding," says Julie, "but I was worried about finding a special reception site that was large enough and available. When we started calling



Ashley and Spencer and most of their family members gather outside the temple after the ceremony.

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around, the common reaction was ‘Are you talking about *this* fall, 2006, really?’

“We tried the Corcoran, and they would be undergoing a renovation. The Museum of Women in the Arts was too small. Finally, we heard about the Mellon. Ashley loved it and it was available.”

Preparations

As a Marriott, Julie could have hired a top wedding planner and told them they had carte blanche. Instead, she picked up the phone, jumped in the car and got busy.

Ashley and Julie agreed that the wed-

ding reception should be lovely, of course, but with a relaxed party atmosphere. A reception line was out (“Boring,” says Julie) and a buffet dinner was in.

With only four months to plan the wedding, it helped that Julie is unflappable. “Julie is so-not-drama,” says Cyril Keating of E. Fitz event planners in Falls Church, who were hired a few weeks prior to the wedding.

Julie consulted with friends who had recently hosted weddings, the groom’s parents and professionals—and quickly chose a caterer, florist, photographer and

others. She took Ashley to meet with each of the vendors—and then let them do their jobs. “She had faith in the experts and their decisions, which makes for a dream client,” says Erin Miller, the wife of Cyril and the co-owner of E. Fitz.

“We only had three conversations about thousands of flowers, 20 cases of pears, 48 table arrangements and a dozen bouquets,” says florist Rick Davis of Amaryllis Inc. in D.C. “Some of my customers e-mail me a few times a day for weeks on end.”

Adds Ellen Cutler of Occasions Cater-



Above: Ashley and Spencer cut the cake.



Left: Ashley and her bridesmaids, Ashley Foulger (left of the bride), Courtney Pratt and Ashleigh McDougal

ers in D.C. The process was “beyond easy. We didn’t even do a tasting.”

For a photographer, Julie called Jonathan Canlas of Utah, who had photographed her daughter Jennifer’s wedding two years earlier. Canlas told Julie that he was going to be on vacation with his family in Hawaii the week of Ashley’s wedding—but he said, for Julie, he would interrupt his vacation and fly to Washington and then back to Hawaii.

Julie saw invitations she loved that ran \$50 each and decided she could do some-

thing similar for a lot less. And she did, by having invitations printed, and then sliding around each one a brown satin ribbon with a petite sparkly buckle that she found at a notions shop in New York. At Creative Parties Ltd. in Bethesda, Julie found a partner in Tracy Bloom Schwartz, who helped choose the invitation design, worked with a printer and got the envelopes addressed. Later, in one week, Julie did most of the ribbon and buckle work herself: for 700 invitations.

It would have been easy to pay some-

one else to fill 500 boxes with chocolates for wedding favors. Instead, friends got together for a few chatty evenings in Julie’s dining room and put together the box tops and bottoms and then placed six exquisite Xocolate candies, which were shipped from Salt Lake City, inside.

Ashley felt totally comfortable with her mother in control of the planning, although they made decisions together. Was any choice tough? “When any decision gets hard, you always go to the one who knows best, who knows everything: Mom,” says Ashley.

The Dress

Strapless has hold on bridal wear. Approximately 90 percent of all bridal gowns are strapless. But even young Mormons place a high premium on modesty, so Ashley needed to find something that covered her shoulders and was generally not revealing. She does, however, love clothes, so it had to be stylish and flattering as well. Ashley wanted an all-lace dress, and found her two-piece creamy white lace Monique Lhuillier confection that fit, flattered and covered at the Bridal Atelier by Mark Ingram in New York.

Donna said she was proud of many things about Ashley, who had been elected president of her class at Walt Whitman High School.

Ashley hadn't even had a chance to think about what she wanted for her six bridesmaids' dresses. But shopping last summer at Tysons Galleria, Ashley and Julie looked in Betsey Johnson's shop, and saw a plaid taffeta dress with a full skirt that fell to just below the knee. It had all the right colors: champagne, mocha and sage green.

Salespeople called around the country to find six of them in sizes 2 and 4. Ashley's sister, Jennifer, went online and found brown cashmere shrugs for the strapless dresses. A second set of five bridesmaids, close friends who Ashley wanted to include as honored participants, wore stylish chocolate brown dresses from J. Crew.

The Shower

The invitation to the bridal shower set the tone for the wedding by having no registry information. Instead, there was a request for a contribution of \$15 for a group shower gift. At a brunch at the Potomac home of Ashley's aunt, Angie Marriott, about 100 friends and family members "roasted" the 20-year-old Ashley in skits and speeches.

Family friend Lynne McDougal of Bethesda instructed Ashley on what every young bride needs to know when their husband calls and says he is bringing a business associate home for dinner—in two hours.

"You keep a box of takeout menus handy, and order an assortment of delicious items you can put in your own casseroles and serving dishes. Clean the bathroom, and then walk through your own front door, surveying and cleaning in what will be the guest's line of sight. Before you run out to pick up the food, you whip up cake from a mix and start baking to produce an irresistible aroma of the home cooking your husband bragged about."

Friends kidded Ashley about the trail of broken hearts she left between Potomac and Provo. Grandmother Donna Marriott said that eternal marriage was perfect for Ashley because she has no concept of time.

Later, at a post-wedding brunch, guests described how Ashley has one pace: slow and steady, and that she can fall asleep anywhere, instantly.

Donna said she was proud of many things about Ashley, who had been elected president of her class at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda. She racked up a tremendous amount of community service hours, in and out of school. She sacrificed her very long blond hair to Locks of Love, which makes wigs for cancer patients.

"Beyond all that, you set a good example for your younger cousins with the stylish but modest clothes you wear," Donna said. "Above all, I appreciated how close you are to your father." Her voice cracked a little as she ended with, "He's going to miss you."

Ashley's father, Steve Marriott, a vice president at Marriott International, suffers from a rare mitochondrial disorder that affects sight, digestion and hearing—the body's every cell and system. At the wedding, it didn't stop him from enjoying the guests, dining well, chatting with his son, and dancing with his wife and daughters. A new digital hearing aid allowed him to appreciate the band.

The Ceremony

Before a Latter-day Saint can get married in a temple, they have to be deemed "worthy." Worthiness is determined by church leaders who ask a series of questions about the individual's morality and faithfulness to LDS standards. That leads to a temple ceremony called "taking out your

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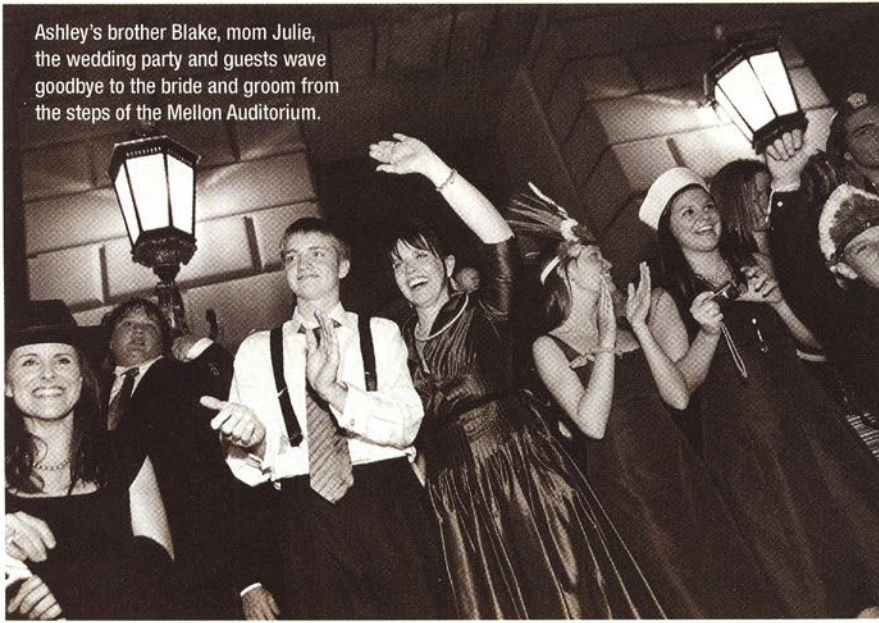


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Ashley's brother Blake, mom Julie, the wedding party and guests wave goodbye to the bride and groom from the steps of the Mellon Auditorium.



in California, at the San Diego Temple near Spencer's family home. It was a matter of convenience, because she had to go during the fall while she was in school in Utah, but it also served as a warm bond with her future in-laws.

Church members do not share many details about temple ceremonies with nonmembers. "My mom says what happens in the temple is sacred, not secret," Ashley says, "but I can tell you I never felt so at peace."

The wedding was held at the Washington D.C. Temple in Kensington, a familiar site to anyone who has ever driven on the Beltway. Temples are ceremonial only, for sacred ordinances and members only. Latter-day Saints' Sunday services are held at unadorned church buildings like the one the Marriotts attend on Falls Road in Potomac. Anyone is welcome to worship or visit on Sundays.

For the ceremony, Ashley wore her maternal grandmother's plain white temple dress. The bride's paternal grandfather, J.W. "Bill" Marriott, a prominent church leader,

endowment" done only once in a member's life, usually before they go on a mission or get married. It is not a celebration attended by many; usually only one family member or close friend goes along.

During the ceremony, which can be

loosely compared to a Catholic sacrament, the member feels a communion with God. They experience a spiritual cleansing and make a covenant to live a life that will eventually bring them back to God. Ashley took out her endowment

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performed the wedding. Temple weddings are spiritual, solemn (no photos, no rice throwing), and small; the room holds only about 60 guests. They also have a very high success rate: Mormons who marry in the temple believe they are sealed for time and all eternity. To illustrate that point, the officiant asks the couple to look into mirrors on opposite sides of the altar. The new husband and wife see their images repeating into infinity.

The Reception

You would think it would be safe to assume that a Marriott would have her wedding reception at a Marriott hotel, or a Ritz-Carlton hotel, which are owned by Marriott International. But Ashley had something else in mind “I’ve spent all my life in Marriotts,” she says, “so they are too familiar. I wanted something different for my wedding, and my parents and grandparents wanted whatever made me happy.”

The gilded and grand four-story reception room at the Mellon Auditorium in Washington made her happy. A Classical Revival building with a Doric temple front facing Constitution Avenue, the Mellon Auditorium was completed in 1934. Its history includes the signing of the NATO treaty and the filming of “The West Wing” TV show inaugural ball.

Marriott hotels weren’t cut out altogether. The groom’s family and friends—about 200 Californians—stayed at the J.W. Marriott in Washington, while an Arizona contingent stayed at the Bethesda Marriott Suites near corporate headquarters, for easy access to family headquarters: Julie and Steve’s Potomac home.

The reception was formal in appearance and free-flowing in spirit. There was open seating except for immediate family and the bridal party. Even the caterer commented that it was “a really good looking group,” and well-dressed, but it was not black tie and only the bride wore a long gown.

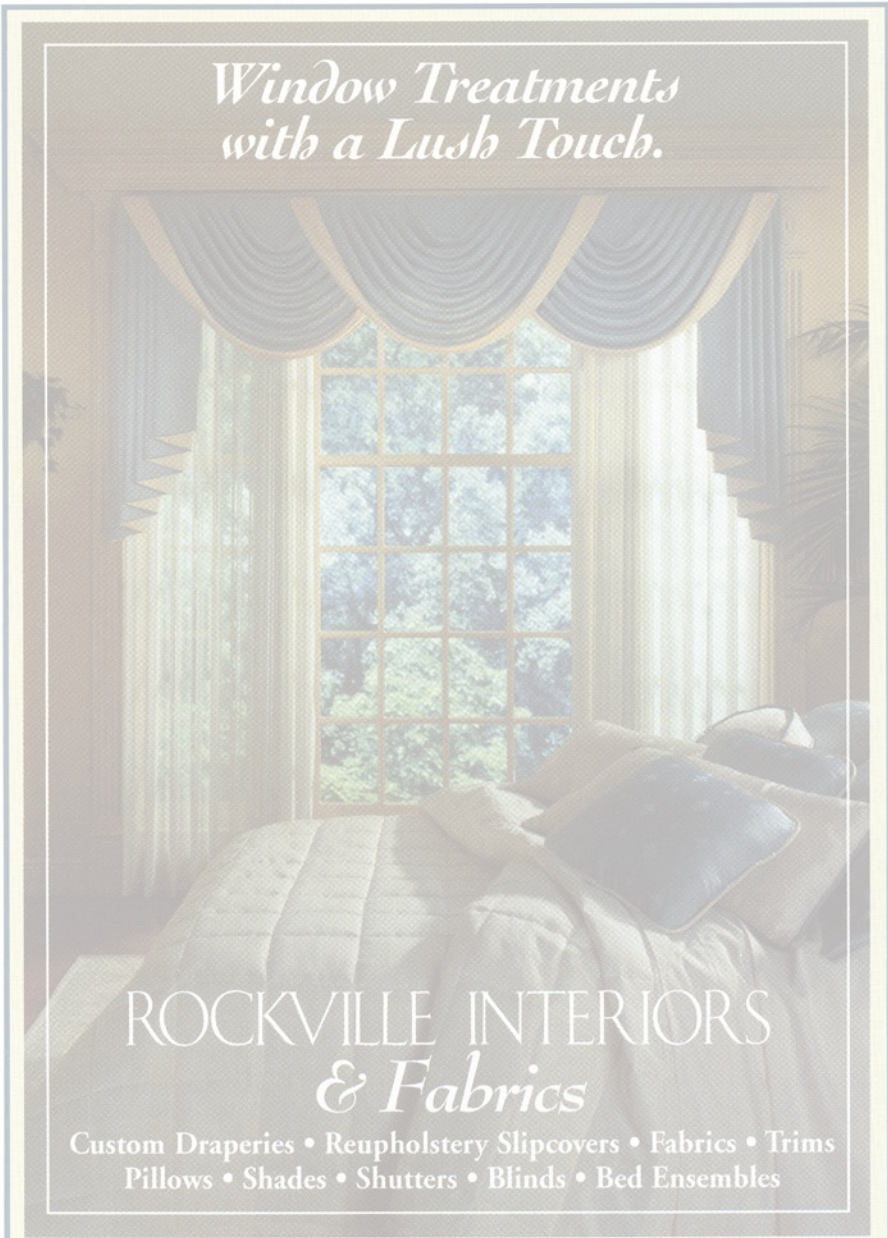
If buffets are good enough for the Marriotts, we all might want to rethink formally served dinners that take forever and limit choice. Perhaps because the passed hors d’oeuvres, including goat cheese beignets and coconut shrimp, were

so plentiful and delicious, the buffet lines were never crowded. Especially for her new California family and their guests, Ashley had a sushi station, and it was visited early and often.

At the pasta station, pancetta cracklings were a hit, as was roasted tomato sauce. Medallions of Black Angus beef with red cabbage and morel sauce stood out. The corn soufflé was irresistible with crab cakes or rosemary mustard chicken,

and the prize for best salad would go to the mesclun with honey-pear vinaigrette and grapes, apples, Stilton cheese and almonds. The dessert buffet was almost too much of a good thing, with lemon, coconut and brownie confections next to tiny pumpkin pies and meringue acorns made with chocolate and nuts.

The wedding cake, made by Fancy Cakes by Leslie in Gaithersburg, was a five-tier chocolate fudge cake with brown,



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sage green and ivory icing. The groom's cake was a lemon cake fashioned to look like the Samuelian's houseboat.

Wayne Foster Entertainment provided the music with a 21-piece orchestra that flew in from California for the occasion. "The band was my biggest worry—I'd never even heard them before!" says Julie, who knew music was the most important element to Ashley, who had said she didn't care if hot dogs were served at the reception, as long as the music was great.

The band never took a break, going from "Fly Me to the Moon" to "Crazy," to an opera aria to "It's a Wonderful World." This was no ordinary wedding band; they came with references from Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg. Although Julie could have booked a pop star, she placed a higher value on pleasing all her guests. Small children and grandparents hit the dance floor alongside the exuberant 20-somethings.

There was also a surprise soloist. For a dollar bill and a Barbie, Julie booked Al-

lison Jones, Ashley's 4-year-old cousin from Atlanta, who fearlessly sang "It Had To Be You." Twice.

Later in the evening, Julie let Ashley and Spencer know their horse-drawn carriage had arrived. "You can leave anytime. Just run!" she advised, warning that if they stopped to talk to anyone, they'd be talking to everyone. Run they did, attendants, too: a beauty with long, red hair flowing behind her, young men striding alongside. Guests followed, bursting through the doors out into the cold air.

The photographer captured the night's final image: the horses clip-clopping to the nearby Willard Hotel, where Ashley and Spencer would spend one night before leaving, but not to an exotic beach locale—they were headed back to BYU. The honeymoon—a surprise to be revealed by the groom—would have to wait until Christmas break. **B**

Ann Cochran is a Cabin John-based freelance writer.

Comic Relief

Every mother of the bride has to deal with the stress of planning a wedding. For Julie Marriott, there was one rare burst of anxiety that grew over a small detail: What earrings would Ashley wear for her bridal portrait? It was about to be taken in Provo, Utah, where she attends BYU. After a frenetic shopping trip all over D.C., Julie came up empty and decided to FedEx Ashley a pair of her own.

The next day, a FedEx truck pulled up to her Potomac home. The driver handed her the exact package she'd sent the day before.

She almost cried. "No, you made a mistake!"

"Look at the address, lady," the driver said. "It's this address."

Julie remarked later with a laugh, "Yep, I paid \$40 to mail myself a pair of my own earrings!"

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