



Say Yes!

***A Guide to
Weddings
& Celebrations***
IN GEORGIA'S LAKE COUNTRY

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION OF

Lake Oconee
LIVING

Say Yes!

WEDDINGS & CELEBRATIONS GUIDE

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Ryan Phelps Marbutt is pretty in pink on her wedding day. For her story, turn to page 21.

PHOTO BY ALYSSA ALIG

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Jeff Roffman Photography

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"WELL, THERE GOES THE BARN."

Those words slipped in jest from Garry Phelps' mouth upon learning of his daughter Ryan's engagement to boyfriend, Casey Marbutt.

Phelps, long-time owner of Madison-based Phelps' Welding, had dreamed of constructing a large barn to house several old tractors and automobiles, including a recently-acquired 1941 Lincoln Zephyr he was excited to restore.

The announcement thrilled both sets of future in-laws, Lissa and Garry Phelps of Madison and Shela and Trumer Marbutt of Eatonton. Friends since middle school, the young couple started dating as seniors at Morgan County High School and were already considered family. Although no one could be happier with the prospect of Marbutt as a future son-in-law, the cost of an upcoming wedding would put Phelps' new barn aspirations on hold.

Or would it?



Newlyweds

CASEY MARBUTT AND
RYANN PHELPS SAID
THEIR VOWS AND
MAKE THEIR HOME IN A
BARN THAT WAS...

Built on Love



"The Wedding
REFLECTED WHO THEY
ARE AS PEOPLE... IT WAS
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OF SOMETHING THAT HAD
SO MUCH FAMILY."

- NANCY NOLAN-KUPERBERG



AS THE NEWLY-ENGAGED COUPLE

searched for wedding and reception venues, they had serious concerns that the Phelps' house of worship, the wonderfully historic yet quaint Madison Presbyterian sanctuary, could accommodate their guest list. Both families have a long multi-generational history in the area and were looking at having to rent a large venue for the reception as well.

That's when their thoughts turned back to the barn. Ryan admits she already considered that an apartment on the upper floor of a new barn would be the perfect place to start married life. "Whatever money my parents would put into outfitting the space, we could repay them in rent."

As the pool of possible locations to hold the wedding started to dry up like a small pond in the heat of summer, Ryan and Casey suggested to her parents that they hold the wedding in the Phelps' backyard and use the barn (still on the drawing board) for the reception. As father of the bride, Garry agreed what money he would spend for a wedding certainly could be put into building a barn. To which Ryan replied, "I can't think of anywhere else I'd rather be married."

For inspiration, Lissa and Gary rode around looking at barns in town and in the country. A schoolteacher for 23 years, Lissa had started college at Georgia Tech majoring in architecture, so it was natural for her to draw up plans. So with a wedding on and a barn needed, she turned over the sketches on grid paper to her favorite builder — brother and uncle to the bride — Wade Blackwell. With construction starting in August 2010, Blackwell reflected on the nine-month process, "It certainly wasn't



The wedding of Casey Marbutt and Ryann Phelps was full of homegrown, elegant details. The couple's family and friends built the wedding barn (now the couple's home), created the floral arrangements, and even baked miniature pies for the groom.

monotonous. Every day we were trying to figure something out."

With the men-folk raising the barn, Ryan and her mother began planning the June wedding. White peonies, the bride's favorite, served as her theme. First incorporated in drawings on the invitations, the beautiful, large fragrant blossoms were in both the bridal and bridesmaids' bouquets. Tragedy was averted when in spite of a weather-induced national peony shortage, Garry located some flowers and had them flown in from California just in time for the wedding day as a surprise for Ryan.

June eleventh dawned clear and cooler, "or at least not 99 degrees like it had been," laughed the groom. The Phelps' wooded backyard provided a lovely setting for the ceremony. The Rev. Chris Carson, former associate

pastor at Madison Presbyterian and close friend of the Phelps, came from Texas to perform the nuptials. The altar was surrounded in lovely white hydrangeas matching the bride's ivory tulle dress with Venetian lace. The groom and minister hitched a ride up to the altar sitting on the downed tailgate of Ryan's grandfather's pristine 1954 F1 Ford pickup truck just as the bride's brother, Craig Phelps, rang the family iron bell 11 times to signal the hour for the ceremony had arrived.

"Walking down the aisle and seeing Casey for the first time," Ryan remembered. "That was probably the most memorable moment of the day." While posing for photographs outside before the ceremony, great pains were taken to make sure the groom was blindfolded if there was a chance he might glimpse the bride.



Casey crafted the couple's dining room table as a wedding present to his wife. The reclaimed white pine is from an old house in White Plains. Ryan and Casey worked for months preparing homemade jellies, preserves and relish to give to wedding guests. The day of the wedding, the favors were arranged on Casey's table. A few leftover jars remain in their vintage pie safe.



AFTER THE "I-DO'S" had become "till-death-do-us-parts," it was time for a party. The doors of the new barn were thrown open and the reception began. "The bride wanted it simple but elegant and that's exactly how it was," remembered Denny Ewing, floral designer for the event. The bride gave pictures to Ewing to provide a little direction. "Her creative juices took over my bare bones suggestions," said Ryan. "It was perfect."

Guests entered the 50x60 foot barn and found a setting deeply imprinted with months of loving hard work by the Phelps and Marbutts along with many devoted friends. Three chandeliers hung

from the barn ceiling that had been covered in reclaimed rusted tin roofing from Ryan's grandfather's aging tractor barn and a friend's neighboring chicken houses.

The centerpiece of the party was a large table that had stood in the family welding shop for over 50 years. In its former life, the grand 18-foot tabletop served as a spot to mix paint. Lissa, Garry and Lissa's mother spent more than a day and half laboring to remove layer upon layer of spattered paint restoring the deep rich wood that held platters of food and the main flower arrangement.

Floral displays placed in tin buckets decorated the tables. Grapevine wreaths surrounded

each container that was filled with butterfly bush, Queen Anne's lace, Vince Dooley hydrangea, rosemary and mint.

The highlight of the bucket arrangements was the zinnias. Every year Ryan and her father grew sunflowers and zinnias. Flowers from their lovingly-tended zinnia patch had to make an appearance at the wedding. The only problem was that nature's watering system was not cooperating with last spring's drought. Lissa remembers pulling up well after sundown to see Garry out in the garden wearing a red light headlamp beaming into the dark. "Everyone would water," she laughed. "Garry watered, Casey watered and Ryan watered. We would keep a list who was to water and when."

In lieu of the traditional groom's cake, Casey, a lover of pies, wanted a groom's pie, or pies actually. Friend, Mary Loyd Moss, made more than 150 delectable miniature buttermilk, berry and chocolate pecan pies nestled in small jelly jars. A restored factory cart held the scrumptious desserts at the reception. The cart now serves as the kitchen island in the newlywed's apartment.

Each fall for a number of years, Ryan and Casey made crabapple jelly from apples off a tree on Casey's grandfather's farm. When selecting wedding favors for guests, they chose to give them homemade jelly.



As a Surprise

WEDDING PRESENT FOR HIS BRIDE, CASEY HAD TOILED AWAY IN SECRET HANDCRAFTING A DINING ROOM TABLE AT HIS FATHER'S SHOP.



The Marbutt's barn loft home is furnished with nostalgic pieces passed along from family and cleverly repurposed materials, such as the chicken feeder lamp (above) and the factory cart kitchen island (right.) Casey crafted the drafting table in the living room, and Ryan's uncle made the barn-style closet doors in the bedroom.

Starting in October before the June wedding, the couple worked nights and weekends and put up 240 jars of crabapple jelly, pear preserves (from Lissa's father's trees), corn salsa, onion relish and pepper jelly. Lissa said with a laugh, "Right at the end there, they were inside making jelly and Garry and I would be working in the dark outside on the yard."

As a surprise wedding present for his bride, Casey had toiled away in secret handcrafting a dining room table at his father's shop. "Hunting



and fishing trips" on weekends that spring explained his absence the many hours he spent creating the gift. The wood for the table came from reclaimed heart pine found in an old house in White Plains. His surprise was used to display the wedding

favours – Ryan and Casey's jars of homemade relishes, salsa and jellies – at the reception.

"Amazing" is how Lissa described the food prepared by caterer, Rae Merritt. "The food took up so much of the barn, we had to rent a tent to





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Photos by Gary Ezell with Ezell's Studios

provide space for more tables outside." Merritt was in awe of the venue. "The barn itself was the drawing card – we just went from there. It was like having a blank canvas," she remembered. Witnessing the effort of the family and friends she said, "Everything they had done had so much love back behind it." Being asked to cater the event held special meaning for Merritt. When the bride's parents where married, she had made their wedding cake. "And now here I was preparing the food for their daughter's wedding."

Departing the reception in Ryan's grandfather's 1955 Crown Victoria, the couple spent the afternoon at the Marbutt home on the lake with the wedding party. Then after a weeklong honeymoon in the Turks and Caicos, the newly-married Marbutts came home to the 1,500-square-foot apartment atop the barn. The two-bedroom, one-bath accommodations created a cozy cottage in the sky overlooking a five-acre pond.

The apartment's design was a family collaboration as well. Lissa sketched away on her trusty grid paper while Casey added his input with the help of AutoCAD (Computer-Aided Design). Like the wedding, the living space is filled with touches of family — from the galvanized plumbing that serves as a handrail made by Blackwell, to chicken coop basket lighting fixtures and stainless steel kitchen countertops crafted at Phelps' Welding.

Garry decided all the doors in the apartment should look like barn doors. "He touched everyone of the doors, along with Casey and Casey's father, Trumer," remembered Lissa. "They worked on weeknights and weekends for several months to get them finished." For the kitchen cabinets, she showed her brother photographs of ones looking like barn doors as well. Blackwell knew it would be hard to get those custom made from a cabinet shop so he built all the kitchen cabinets with barn door fronts. In the bathroom, he also created the cabinetry holding the double sinks made out of leftover flooring.

With the wedding finished after over a year of hard work, Lissa admitted with a big smile that she would do it all over again. "There were moments, of course. But we had fun," said Nancy Nolan-Kuperberg of No Regrets Events, who helped coordinate events on the wedding day. Having known the bride and her family for many years, Nolan-Kuperberg said, "The wedding reflected who they are as people. They are all thoughtful and considerate. It was wonderful being a part of something that had so much family."

"There goes the barn," Garry Phelps had said with a laugh upon hearing of his daughter's engagement. And in nine months time, a barn was raised.

A barn built – and welded – with love. ♦

Jamie Miles is a freelance writer living in Madison.




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