

Wedding day take-over

If the idea of a ceremony far, far away seems just that, try staying local and staying completely private

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For some couples, the best alternative to a pricy, exclusive destination wedding may actually sound even more extravagant. By completely booking every room at a chic boutique hotel or bed-and-breakfast, a couple and their guests can be the sole lodgers at the hotel, the only strangers being the hotel staff.

"It's very appealing [for couples] to have their own secluded place [for their wedding], a place that feels like theirs and reflects their personality," said Christine Baumgartner, owner of The Perfect Day wedding planning business in Fullerton, Calif.

If you're a wine-lover, consider an opportunity to host your reception in a wine cave at Calistoga Ranch. With a vine-covered, trellised entrance, the three-year-old resort in Northern California's wine country has a private vineyard surrounded by oaks. Hold the wedding here or drink in the ambiance by booking all 46 rooms, which are stand-alone "guest lodges" bigger than typical studio apartments in New York City, and start at \$725 in the summer months. That

means the couple-to-be would owe at least \$33,000 for a Saturday evening, not counting the food or rental fees accommodating up to 110 people.

"About five percent of our weddings take over the hotel," said Shannon Pulling, catering sales coordinator at Calistoga Ranch. "We attract people from San Francisco all the way to the East Coast."

Since opening nearly two years ago, the Shade Hotel in Manhattan Beach, Calif., has held about 10 "Ultimate Shade Weddings," turning over its 38-room facility to couples who spent at least \$60,000 for the sleek rooms and wedding reception serving up to 170 people for a sit-down celebration. Geared for the Southern California urbanite who might appreciate the hotel's minimalist look, zinc exterior and waterfall courtyard and amenities (think rooftop Skydeck for mojitos and a pillow library for that perfect head rest), the hotel is open to new ideas, including handing out hamburger sliders as the wedding favor after a night of dancing and drinking.

"We don't have a lot of rules," said Jen Peterson, Shade's sales and event manager. Couples opting to wed in this non-traditional way should typically book their hotel six months to one year in advance. They can pay for the rooms upfront or ask their guests to pay for their own lodging. And, the prices aren't always sky-high. Lovebirds who appreciate skiing can check out the Sunlight Mountain Inn in Glenwood Springs, Colo., a homey 20-room bed and breakfast situated between Vail and Aspen, where prices start at \$1,200 to rent the site and \$5,000 to book the rooms. Catering is extra and can serve up to 60 people.

"These weddings tend to be smaller so you're often spending the same amount of money, just in another environment," said West Los Angeles-based wedding planner Paula Gild, who owns Gilded Events. "It's a trade-off to spend an extended period of time with the people you love."