

www.thejewishweek.com

- ▶ News
- ▶ Editorial & Opinion
- ▶ The Arts
- ▶ Jewish Life
- ▶ Food
- ▶ Travel
- ▶ Calendars
- ▶ Classifieds
- ▼ Special Sections
 - Education & Careers
 - Healthcare
 - South Florida Culture
 - Celebrate
 - Text Context
 - Charitable Giving
 - Israel Now
 - Jewish Life
 - Literary Guides
 - The Good Life
 - Arts Preview
 - Science & Technology
 - Directions
 - Special Holiday Issues
 - Israel Travel
 - Purim SpooF
 - westchestercounty
 - A Year In Review 2009
- ▶ Singles
- ▶ Write On For Israel
- ▶ Fresh Ink for Teens
- ▶ Directories

Home > Special Sections > Celebrate

06/17/2009

The Bride Who Looked Like Oatmeal, And Other 'Green Wedding' Myths



Green day: Miriam Brosseau, center, of the environmentally conscious band Stereo Sinai, said of her Tu b'Shvat wedding to fellow band member Alan Sufrin, "We liked the idea of getting married on a day associated with growth and renewal." The color scheme, not surprisingly, was green.

by Tamar Snyder
Staff Writer

When planning her wedding, the Jewish commitment to the concept of *ba'al tashchit*, of not wasting unnecessarily, was paramount to Miriam Brosseau. Brosseau is a songwriter for Stereo Sinai, a socially responsible and environmentally conscious band whose "Biblegum Pop" fuses traditional gospel music with Hebrew verses from the book of Judges.

She and fellow band member Alan Sufrin were married on *Tu b'Shvat*, the New Year for the trees. "We liked the idea of getting married on a day associated with growth and renewal," she says.

For the ceremony, the couple decided to serve no poultry or red meat. Instead of costly plastic favors that often end up in the trash, each guest received a place card fashioned from seed paper. "That way, they can go home and plant their names," she told The Jewish Week.

For the eco-conscious, green weddings are a "lifestyle, not a trend," says Joyce Scardina Becker, a wedding planner who is the author of "Countdown to your Perfect Wedding (St. Martins Press: 2006). "If you are a couple who cares about the environment in your everyday living and leads a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, then you'll want to have a sustainable wedding." Becker estimates that close to 30 percent of couples in America are incorporating

some green elements into their nuptials. And a recent David's Bridal survey indicated that 45 percent of respondents were making an effort to be environmentally conscious.

How green are Jewish weddings? While there is no hard data, wedding planners and industry experts say that a growing number of Jewish brides and grooms are increasingly thinking green when crafting their wedding to-do lists. And while most are going the eco-friendly route because they want the celebration to be an extension of their eco-values, many are hoping to save a little green, too.

"Brides are considering secondhand dresses and saving hundreds of dollars," says Mireya Navarro, author of "Green Wedding: Planning Your Eco-Friendly celebration," and an environmental reporter for The New York Times. "They're going local for food and flowers, which also saves money. The main thing about green weddings is to avoid waste and excess and consumption."

In her book, Navarro debunks common myths surrounding green weddings: that the wedding will take longer to plan, that the ceremony will have to break with tradition and that the bride will "look like oatmeal."

There's no one "right" way to plan a green wedding, Navarro says. "For every element of the wedding, ask yourself, 'Is there an environmentally friendly alternative? Can I avoid this expense? Can I avoid having my guests travel long distances?'"

For her May 2008 wedding to Mark Berkowitz, Judith Belasco, the director of food programs at the environmental advocacy organization Hazon, chose local flowers and opted not to have any bouquets. The local food served at the celebration included an "amazing pea soup" and "interesting fiddlehead ferns," she says. And instead of little gifts, the couple decided to "carbon offset" the wedding. (One way to do so is by visiting the Jewish National Fund's GoNeutral Calculator at <http://support.jnf.org/goneutral/carbonCalc.html> and input the approximate number of miles that your guests have traveled to get to your wedding. You can then offset the amount of carbon emitted by donating towards the planting of trees in Israel). "Honestly, a lot of the green stuff is just good sense if you don't want to spend a fortune on the wedding," she says.

It's not surprising that the green wedding trend has seeped into the Jewish world says Sara Marcus, founder of the JewishWeddingNetwork.com, which bills itself as "a Web site that takes the 'oy vey' out of planning your big day!" "If you think about it, tikkun olam relates to green values in many ways," she says.

Many synagogues are driving this trend by installing solar panels and "green-

ing” their buildings. And a handful of kosher wineries produce organic wines.

Instead of drowning the chupah in flowers, Marcus recommends that the happy couple consider constructing a chupah out of a tallit and branches. Another option is to create a quilted chupah out of fabrics that are meaningful to the bride and groom. “After the wedding, the quilt can be used a wall hanging,” she says.

And companies like Mazal Tov Glass are ensuring that the “breaking the glass” tradition under the chupah doesn’t result in more waste. The company sells easy-to-break glass cups for \$36, which come with a bag to collect the shards. Afterwards, couples have the option of having the broken glass blown into a customizable bouquet vase or round bowl. “People want to preserve it as a keepsake,” says co-founder Andrea Osnow. “I don’t know whether it’s because they’re sentimental or eco-conscious.” (Osnow advises grooms to position the glass facing forward and to wear shoes. “The glass is pretty thin so it can cut you,” she says.)

In the Orthodox community, it’s common for brides to rent a wedding gown or silk floral centerpieces from a

Even among the most fervent eco-conscious brides, other concerns may override the greenest of intentions. Though she lives in Hell’s Kitchen in Manhattan, Danielle Venokur is planning her August wedding to Timothy Greenberg in the Catskills. She’s not happy that most of her guests will have to travel to the ceremony, but wanted to hold her wedding at a place that was meaningful to her and her fiancé. Venokur, the owner of dvGreen, a sustainable event planning business in New York City, says that she often goes through such deliberations with her clients. “It’s your wedding, and it needs to be meaningful to you,” she says. She plans to buy carbon offsets and has incorporated sustainability into several other aspects of the wedding.

If the weather cooperates, she and her fiancé plan to hold their Saturday evening chupah outdoors, after sundown. “We’ll essentially be married under the stars,” she says, using tiki lamps to illuminate the area.

“The general awareness of humanity and the environment and the idea that we have to respect other people and the planet is certainly a big part of Judaism,” she says.

Gemach, a communal organization, which is a decidedly “green” option. Another option is the JewishWeddingNetwork.com, which offers a free “buy and sell” online clearinghouse for brides who want to recycle old wedding gowns, veils and favors, and those who want to buy gently used wedding regalia. “Basically I’m making a shidduch between the two,” Marcus jokes.