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Places to wed for those (damned) secular humanists

BY ADRIENNE VAN DER VALK

Clichés abound in the world of weddings: white dress, bouquet, church, clueless flower girl, drunken best man. But for many couples, celebrating their union in a decidedly spiritual environment does not fit the relationship. Marriage between people of different religions is increasingly common, and of course there are couples who do not formally practice a particular faith, or at least not to the extent that they want to be married in a place of worship. These couples have an abundance of choices in addition to the minutia that accompanies any wedding ceremony: indoor or outdoor? Formal or informal? Judge, minister or friend ordained on the Internet? Fortunately, the Eugene area has a wide variety of solutions for lovebirds who choose a more secular celebration.

Outdoor nuptials scheduled during Oregon's more hospitable seasons are very popular — so popular that choosing a date may mean waiting up to two years. The Country Inn on Country Farm Road is one such choice, an all-inclusive event facility that dazzles guests with its breathtaking garden landscapes. Weddings at the Country Inn are catered by Cravings, and all involved are treated to a polished, professional experience, one that is much sought-after — at least, according to the length of their waiting list. The Beacon House outside Junction City provides a similar, if less decadent, garden-ceremony option. The Beacon House itself is a Normandy-style structure also available for smaller, indoor unions.

For a rose-strewn experience on a budget, the city-owned Owen Rose Garden provides a ceremonial space for under \$200. While receptions cannot be held at the site, couples can be married under the trees by the river or walk through the trailing rosebushes and stand under a gazebo to say their vows for a nominal fee with chairs provided. An Owen Rose Garden wedding requires more DIY effort than a private facility where the set-up and orchestration are included in the package, and, of course, you may see joggers flying by as you exchange rings. But for a more community based and modestly priced option, it stylishly fits the bill.

The natural wonders of the Willamette Valley provide stunning backdrops perfect for weddings. Several local businesses that make their living off the land have capitalized on the scenery surrounding their liveli-

hood and made the spaces available for concerts, parties and marriage ceremonies and receptions. Northern Lights Christmas Tree Farm in Pleasant Hill is one such venue with a river view and packages to suit weddings of almost any size. Vineyards such as Secret House, Chateau Lorane, King Estate and the newly opened Iris Hill all provide site rental and varying degrees of wedding accommodation. Some provide service packages similar to those of Northern Lights, while others provide only the space and take a laissez-faire approach to the actual implementation of the happy occasion. Each vineyard also has a distinct personality, providing choices along a spectrum from rustic to more elegant, formal environments.

Key questions to ask when investigating marriage at a winery or scenic farm: Does the space use a specific caterer, or can the food be chosen by the couple? Is the space available for both the ceremony and the reception? Are there limits on the volume at which a DJ or band can perform? Does the vineyard provide chairs, stemware, dishes, kitchen facilities? How far in advance does the space book? Is it required that the wine served only be provided by the facility; can any other type of alcohol be served? For wedding planners with financial resources, the cost of sanity should also be factored against the expense of having certain amenities provided.

Many marriage-minded folks either do not have the means to go around renting vineyards or have financial priorities that call for planning a more modest event. Finding a friend with a green thumb and asking to use his or her yard is one way the non-religious can have a romantic and personalized experience. National and state park sites have hosted numerous weddings over the years. And, of course, there is also the option of marching down to the Public Service building at 8th and Pearl (get your permit first!) and paying \$25 to tie the knot. Think of all the dough that could be funneled toward post-wedding fun when the union itself costs less than a decent bottle of wine! Regardless of the venue, the most important element of any wedding is a reflection of the couple's own values and personalities, whether that means hay bale seating and home brew or lace gloves and Moët & Chandon. If you can imagine it, Eugene or one of our neighbors can probably provide it. ■

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