

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING ... GREEN?

Celebrating the planet on and after the big day

BY NICOLE FANCHER

For betrothed, planning the big day — and the big night — can be a costly undertaking. Couples aren't just paying a high price for the catering, the flowers, the dress, the rings, the venue, the music, the cake and so forth. Weddings cost the environment a pretty penny, too: They generate trash, waste food and spew tons of carbon into the atmosphere from related travel. But four Eugene couples shrank their ecological footprints and still celebrated in special ways. Read on to learn about these eco-couples' green weddings, honeymoons and ever afters.

Rebecca Silver and Jacob Sackin

In preparation for their wedding last September, Silver and Sackin created gift registries for the usual blenders, pots and glassware. But they soon reconsidered. "What would we do with three fondue pots?" Silver said. Dedicated environmentalists — Silver is an environmental studies master's student, Sackin teaches at Eugene's OutDoor School — the couple decided to give back to the Earth instead of getting stuff they wouldn't use. So they deleted their registries.

Instead of requesting tangible gifts, the couple asked their guests to help them achieve a carbon-neutral wedding. Inspired by Silver's environmental studies colleague Josh Skov, who also had a carbon-neutral wedding, the couple estimated the carbon emissions of all wedding-related travel: 34.5 tons. They translated this into a dollar amount for guest donations through The Climate Trust, a Portland nonprofit that provides greenhouse gas offsets to industry, businesses and individuals. These offsets go towards sustainability projects that help reduce CO₂ emissions. Silver said that while offsets won't solve global climate change, she hopes the idea got people "to consider the invisible

impacts" of non-renewable energy.

The couple also went green instead of gold for their rings because of the metal's negative social, economic and environmental impacts. They found a wooden ringmaker in British Columbia who harvests fallen trees from his property and had him custom-make a pair of blue spruce and juniper rings.



The Wheelers were lovin' the planet and each other at Machu Picchu

Josh Skov and Kathy Lynn

Skov — Silver's friend — and Lynn celebrated their carbon-neutral wedding on Sept. 5, 2004. Skov created a spreadsheet to calculate guests' travel mileage and converted the miles to dollars. They wanted to buy clean energy.

Lynn's mother footed the bill, after confirming her daughter and son-in-law weren't off their rocker. "Are you sure? You want windpower?" Skov recalled his mother-in-law asking. But when they explained their feelings about reducing CO₂ emissions, she bought \$1200 worth of green tags through Renewable Choice

Energy. Green tag purchases go directly to renewable energy production.

This eco-couple lives for the environment. Skov and Lynn are research directors at Good Company and Resource Innovations, respectively, two organizations that consult businesses on implementing sustainable practices.

They ensured that most products used in their wedding came from organic, renewable and local sources. They ate wild Alaskan salmon, drank Willamette Valley wine, ate off 90 percent post-consumer paper plates from Living Tree and used catering from Café Soriah, whose fruits and veggies came from local, regional and organic sources.

The party favors? Local organic blueberries, handpicked by the bride and groom at Green Hill Aire, hauled by bike and dried with wind power from EWEB, of course.

Katherine and Robert "Wake" Wheeler

As shaman practitioners, the Wheelers travel around the world to study energy arts. So it was only natural that the Wheelers chose to marry last June atop Machu Picchu, the Inca ruins in Peru, a site steeped in spiritual and cultural significance.

"It was just me, my husband and the hummingbirds," Katherine said of their

simple, intimate ceremony, adding that in the shaman religion, hummingbirds represent ancestral spirits.

What followed was a year-long series of eco-honeymoons to spiritual retreats. In the Yucatan, the Wheelers visited Azulik, a small, rustic, clothing-optional resort for couples. Each of the 15 cabañas is built from local hardwoods and has wood-carved bathtubs, a private beach and no electricity.

On another Yucatan trip, the Wheelers visited Genesis Retreat, which is adjacent to Ek Balam, an archaeological site uncovered in the '90s. The eco-resort's services include a natural, bio-filtered pool, six open-air cabañas, bikes to explore the natural wonders and opportunities to meet Mayan villagers. The spiritual solitude of these natural, rustic locales, Katherine said, will surely keep the Wheelers going back.

Tom and Victoria Schnieder

Thirty-three years ago, the Schnieders fell in love in northern British Columbia, loaded up their canoe and paddled off into the arctic sunset to a remote island. After marrying on the mainland, they returned to the Queen Charlotte islands and built a log cabin, where they lived for three years and their children were born. "We lived as hunter-gatherers," Tom said.

The land is now a national park or the Schnieders would seriously consider moving back, they say. Not surprisingly, their love of wild adventure and raw nature persists: For their anniversaries, the Schnieders travel for a month into the heart of the tropics. For their 28th, they rented a bamboo hut in the Osa Peninsula rainforest of southwestern Costa Rica. Entirely off the grid, the hut and facilities, including a well water pump, were solar powered. Windowless except for some half-wall shutters, the open-air hut allowed forest creatures to fly, crawl, scamper or slither inside. In the mornings, they awoke to the thunderous roar of small howler monkeys. In the afternoons, they swam, fished, gazed at scarlet macaws and iridescent blue butterflies and got acquainted with the nearby village. The Schnieders won't stop exploring. "We still really love the unknown, the adventure," Victoria said. ■

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