

The Party After the Party

Is there anything worse than being all revved up with no place to go? I don't think so. That's why I'm all for the party *after the party*! Let's be real- you've spent hours upon hours preparing for your big wedding *day*. Then, seemingly, in the blink of an eye the celebration comes to an end and is over much too soon; leaving you, your beloved and probably your closest cronies in disbelief that the plug was pulled just when you all started to rock. Parties should never end abruptly and that is why I am a huge supporter of the wedding *after-party*.

Depending on your own personal style, your after-party can range from hitting the town to something more intimate such as a house party; or it can be as simple and spontaneous as taking over the hotel lounge and enjoying the amenities that drew you to that spot in the first place. One of the nicest features of the after party (aside from the obvious of keeping the party going) is that it presents the opportunity to bring in some of the things that you would have liked to have done, but perhaps couldn't due to expense or other logistical reasons. Here are a few sensory-filled descriptions of the most popular types of ***After-Parties*** to help clarify your vision, so work further through these descriptions and circle anything that calls out to you...

Taking Over the Hotel Lounge

If the reception will take place in a hotel ballroom, lead your guests out to the hotel lounge, which is already buzzing with other revelers (perhaps from other weddings or conferences in the hotel). The atmosphere is celebratory, the décor welcoming, the bartenders smiling at the sights of you (and prospect of a nice, big tip). Your guests order martinis in a range of neon colors, or old-school dirty martinis with three olives. Your mothers clink glasses of chardonnay. The bridesmaids are checking out the new 'shipment' of single men, since your reception was light on available single men (and vice versa for your groomsmen). The simple act of changing locations changes the mood, and the quick, spontaneous gathering means no stress, no pre-planning, and no details to manage. It's already arranged that the groom's parents (or you) will pick up the tab. So out come the trays of drinks, the platters of finger food, or the dishes for your trip to the free buffet. Who knew the lounge had a free shrimp cocktail and oyster bar? As the pianist plays in the lobby nearby, and the big game is on the television behind the bar, all of your guests gather into groups at their own tables and enjoy the next few hours of celebration.

Room Service

Everyone comes back to your honeymoon suite, or to the parents' presidential suite, where you enjoy the platters of hors d'oeuvres and extra wine and champagne bottles that you've arranged to have transported from your cocktail hour and reception up to your room for your full enjoyment. Hey, you've paid for it! So bring on the cheese platters and the chicken satay, the mini shrimp rolls and empanadas. Room service has provided champagne flutes and wine glasses, buffet dishes and silverware, and perhaps the remaining portion of your wedding cake for a second round of dessert. You'll play music, perhaps look at everyone's images on their digital cameras, step out onto the terrace for a breath of night air, and continue the evening with toasts and well wishes from all. Some

presidential suites feature lush couches and chairs, mahogany gathering tables, fireplaces, and other attractive options for the perfect post-party party.

Hitting the Town

You'll use those limousines, or take the subway or cabs, to a nearby nightclub for dancing – either in your wedding wardrobes or after a quick change into club wear. Let everyone from the manager to the bartenders know that this is your wedding night, and you'll surely get a big dose of attention, perhaps free drinks, perhaps a song played for you, and you'll dance until the morning hours when a diner run is definitely in order. Especially if it's been years since your club-hopping days, this After-Party may bring back great memories within your circle of friends. And imagine the excitement of having your parents along with you, immersing them in an environment they may have never seen. Bring on the beautiful party drinks and fusion cuisine on square plates, and gourmet desserts. A side option: going to an 80s-theme club (*especially for you 40 somethings*), a jazz club or other specialty-music nightspot for a themed dancing night.

Taking It Home

After such a long and thrilling day, you may want only to get out of your gown and tux, put on some comfy clothes and gather together with your closest friends and family at home; on your couch, cozy as can be. You may arrange to have someone bring your leftover food platters back home with you, or serve up fresh buffet items like fruit platters or mini sandwiches. Some choose to cater this at-home party with hot foods, and some enjoy the opportunity to serve their own homemade dishes (made before the wedding day). Bottles of wine, cases of microbrew beer, a champagne punch, or Irish coffees and espresso may be on your menu, and you might wish to use some of those terrific shower gifts (blenders, Panini machines, quesadilla makers) in your first 'housewarming' party as a married couple. Your parents might wish to host this party as well, loving the opportunity to further indulge their loved ones. You feel no need for entertainment, just relaxing time to talk and catch up on all the little goings-on at the wedding that you missed while mingling or dancing. Again, you might be treated to guests' digital camera shots right away, no waiting to see what the photographer captured. A big trend in home After-Parties is to have it at a place (yours, your parents', a friends') where there is a backyard terrace, pool or hot tub. Everyone changes into bathing suits and takes a dip, or drinks may be served at the host's outdoor bar. Add in a fire pit, for those who are thrilled to unveil their newly completed outdoor entertaining area, and it's time for S'Mores.

Sunrise on the Beach

As mentioned earlier, a big trend – especially for destination weddings – is to close down the official reception and then take your *Inner Circle* to the beach. At many exotic resorts, you don't have to worry about the no-drinking-in-public policies that you'll find at many mainland beaches...in fact, some resorts encourage these late-night beach parties and thus stand multiple palapas where bartenders await your drink orders. You might grab a

stretch of beach with cozy beach chairs or hammocks, or lay out blankets with extras for snuggling. Check out those stars above. Watch the sky turn from black to a dark purple to a deeper blue to the lavender and pink of the sunrise. Vow to stay up all night and see that big, beautiful sun rise on your first day as a married couple. (We'd advise keeping everyone out of the ocean for safety reasons – there's enough fun on the sand, especially if you've all been drinking throughout the evening.) You may hear late-night steel drum music in the distance, and you can arrange through the resort to bring in your own entertainers, like a guitarist or island singer, for a surprise to your guests. Food platters can be prepared for your guests (aren't resorts terrific?!) and this is an unforgettable night that many of your guests can truly call a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

These are merely the most popular options, determined by your location, the season, and your personal energy levels. Will you have the stamina after your wedding day to keep up with your bridal party for the all-nighter you have planned for them? (*If not the after party may have to wait until brunch for those couples who prefer the a.m. to the p.m.*). Do you have the energy to plan a catered, detailed party – or are you the spontaneous type who doesn't need to have every second booked? Sometimes, spontaneous outings are the best ones.

Here, you'll answer a few guiding questions to help you determine your After-Party style, and here's some more good news: if you're torn between two different styles, you can always choose the second place party style for your just-home-from-the-honeymoon get-together later!

Think of after-parties you've been to at other weddings. Were they planned or spontaneous?

Think of non-wedding parties you've attended: Housewarming parties, cocktail parties, get-togethers with your couple friends for pizza and board games. What did you love about them?

Is that style something you'd like to emulate for this party, or is it a party style you'd like to have in the future for a regular weekend plan?

Think of an After-Party that was an utter disappointment. Do you have the experience of a terrific wedding followed up by a yawn-filled gathering at the couple's home – the couch luring everyone into an early slumber state? Was that party too relaxing for its own good?

Think not of after-parties but of your favorite nights out on the town.

- ∞ *Where did you go?*
- ∞ *What did you eat, drink, enjoy?*
- ∞ *Did you dance?*

∞ *Do you have a favorite club where you are known by the bartenders and waiters, where you know you will be treated like royalty? Is this club a part of your dating history?*

Can you incorporate the place where you got engaged into your After-Party plan? If you got engaged on the beach or at your favorite restaurant, would that be a wonderful full-circle moment to bring your wedding guests back to that same exact place now that you're married?

Are there other locations in your love story that would work for your After-Party?

If it sounds like planning the After-Party is a bit like planning the wedding, you're absolutely right! The makings of a great celebration are the same: choosing a location that suits your guest list, designing a menu, planning for entertainment or music, planning a drink menu, creating invitations, and so on. So go back and revisit the planning style chapters that pertain to your choice of party style. Perhaps the menu chapter guided you to your reception entrée theme, but you were looking at those questions through a lens of planning an elegant, formal wedding. The same questions posed to you now with an informal party at home in mind can lead you in an entirely new direction. Whatever you decide let your after-party be a reflection of all those aspects of your personal party style, as well as those of your partners, that speak to who you are as a couple as you celebrate and launch your new life together.

Sharon Naylor's newest book is *What's Your Bridal Style*, co-written with Casey Cooper of Botanicals Inc. in Chicago. This book outlines the NEW first step in wedding planning, helping you to define your style before you talk to any of your wedding vendors. Look for it at www.sharonnaylor.net and www.botanicalschicago.com.