Plan Your Dream Day
Real weddings, ideas, and love stories from below the Mason-Dixon Line
It was love at first sight.

I caught a glimpse of her last summer in the bookstore, oozing Southern charm with her sweet, radiant smile and cowboy boots peeking out beneath her dress. I walked over to get a closer look. Whoa. Gorgeous, and kinda heavy! No, not her. I mean the 300-page magazine Southern Weddings. Its pretty cowgirl cover bride and bridesmaids hooked the sappy romantic guy in me from across the checkout aisle, then seduced me from cover to cover. I was smitten.

It may make anyone with an ounce of dude in them wince, but it’s true: I cry at weddings. Not openly, mind you, but in a soft, sniffly, oh-it’s-just-an-allergy sort of way. For as long as I’ve been an editor, I’ve worked with gaggles of creative young newlyweds—last year alone we had no fewer than seven brides-to-be on the SL staff, swooning for months over hundreds of nuptial details. That’s when I decided it was time to get hitched, and reached out to Southern Weddings Editor-in-Chief Lara Casey to fill many a Southerner’s notebook with inspiring details. This is just the first of many collaborations we’re planning in book, online, and on newsstands; at right, see all the ways to get, share, and spread the love.

Oh my stars! It is with great joy and gratitude that we have joined together with the Southern Living family. Generations of women in our families have been shaped by the pages of SL... you might say Southern Living was our childhood sweetheart! Making buttermilk biscuits from SL in the kitchen as a young girl with my mama is one of my favorite memories. Each recipe and garden how-to has been woven into the fiber of who we are today, inspiring all of our life celebrations, including the most important: a meaningful beginning to married life. We’re so happy to meet y’all!

P.S. Be sure to look for our editors’ tips and comments, marked with their monograms.
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WE LOVE THIS! “From a family Bible where guests mark favorite verses for the bride and groom [below right] to a hymnal from the bride’s childhood church [below, far left], treasured books can play a meaningful role in your day and are unique twists on family heirlooms.” —Lara

INSTEAD OF A HANKIE, PASS DOWN A MONOGRAMMED TABLE RUNNER. WE LOVE THE IDEA OF IT GRACING GENERATIONS OF WEDDINGS.
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EDITOR’S ADVICE: “Plan time in your day to tell loved ones how much they mean to you. Taking a moment to look in their eyes and express your gratitude is the greatest gift you can give.” —Lara

WE LOVE THIS! “Not all rentals are created equal. Incorporating vintage furniture, like this wooden trestle table, in key areas gives a homespun feel.” —Emily

HAY Y’ALL! THIS HAY BALE TABLE WITH A QUILTED RUNNER, MINI CENTERPIECES, AND TINY MASON JARS IS SURE TO PLEASE PINT-SIZE PARTYGOERS.
WHO SAYS YOU CAN HAVE ONLY ONE WEDDING CAKE? WE LOVE THIS MIX OF SOUTHERN FAVORITES: COCONUT, HUMMINGBIRD, CARAMEL, POUND CAKE, AND RED VELVET.

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SOUTHERN WEDDING TRADITIONS

We take tradition very seriously here in the South—almost as seriously as we take college football. It runs deep in the roots of our family trees, and, almost without notice, impacts everything from what we eat for dinner to what we call dinner at our family table. While some traditions may seem as confusing as a cow in a parking lot at first glance, each has a history and a deep meaning to the folks that introduce it to a new generation. Of course, nowhere will you find as many traditions in one room as at a Southern wedding, where “the way things have always been done” is often not questioned. We’re all for heritage and legacy, but we’re not afraid to shake things up either. Our advice: Pick and choose the traditions that are right for you and your groom, and leave the rest for someone else. Our favorite traditions? Ones that ooze graciousness and honor the people most dear to you. After all, the ultimate Southern wedding tradition is hospitality; with it as a common thread throughout your festivities, you can’t go wrong.

A FATHER’S FIRST LOOK

A conundrum in the heart of almost every Southern gal: whether or not you should see your groom before walking down the aisle. Called a “first look,” many couples opt to make it a private moment. We’ve seen many variations of the first look, including a blindfolded groom and a sweet hand-hold around a door or corner, but our very favorite has to be when dad steps in one final time. The moment when a father first sees his daughter in her wedding gown can be a very emotional and memorable one for everyone involved, particularly because most Southern women are unashamed to identify as “Daddy’s girls.” Though a wedding day is focused on the bride and groom, we love when a bride sets aside a few minutes to spend with just her father. While a first look with dad may not have the lengthy history our other traditions have acquired, we can’t wait to see this sweet one grow.

BURRING THE BOURBON

Southern folklore says that if you bury a bottle of bourbon at the site where the bride and groom are to be married it won’t rain on their wedding day. According to many believers, this must be done exactly one month before the wedding, the bottle must be completely full, and it must be buried upside down to ensure maximum weather persuasion. We’ve also heard a variation that stipulates the burying should be done on a day with weather you’d be happy to have on your wedding day. Rain or shine, the bottle should be dug up post-ceremony and enjoyed with the bridal party, making this a win-win tradition no matter the skies!

CAKE PULL

Though their popularity has spread throughout and beyond the South, cake pulls are most often associated with New Orleans, where they’re as traditional and beloved as red beans and rice on Monday nights. The cake pull gets its name from an old Victorian tradition of “ribbon pulling.” In those days, charms of luck and good fortune were set into the wedding cake by the bride to predict the future of her single friends. These days, pulls are more often placed in a small cake at the bridesmaid luncheon or wedding shower instead of the wedding cake (or bride’s cake) at the reception. Bridesmaids and close female friends are given the opportunity to pull a charm from the cake just before the cake is cut. A few of our favorite charms and their meanings: a hot-air balloon (adventure and travel), the fleur de lis (love and prosperity), and the four-leaf clover (good luck).
HOUSE PARTY

Along with our hair, our bridal parties tend to be a bit bigger here in the South. But what to do when the bridal party grows and grows? We owe a thank you to fellow Southern gal (and SL Editor-at-Large) Jenna Bush Hager for introducing the world to an old Southern solution when she opted for a “house party” of 14 in addition to her one maid of honor—her sister, Barbara. As Jenna demonstrated, a house party is a great way to include loved ones without having an enormous bridal party.

Similar to the standard “attendant” title, members of a house party are often assigned wedding day tasks like manning the guest book or handing out programs. They can also help plan the bachelorette party and bridal shower. Some house party members aren’t assigned any duties at all but are simply included because the bride wants to honor her relationships. The only thing a house party traditionally does not do is stand at the altar with the bride—that spot is reserved for bridesmaids. HP gals can be seated in the first or second row, just behind family, and can be included in the wedding program.

As for the attire, you have several options. Some brides ask their house party to wear a different dress in the same color—one that corresponds with the bridesmaid dresses. Mixing and matching dresses in a single color always looks beautiful! Other brides ask their house parties to wear little black dresses, as most women already have an LBD in their closet. We also like the idea of giving your house party the whole color scheme of your wedding and asking them to wear something that coordinates. Finally, if you don’t give your gals a dress code, we’d recommend giving them an accessory to acknowledge their role, like a corsage, matching necklace, or gardenia bloom for their hair.

GROOM’S CAKE

Groom’s cakes can be traced back to England’s Victorian era, when there were three cakes at a wedding—the wedding cake, which was served to the guests; the groom’s cake, which was served to the groomsmen; and the bride’s cake, which was served to the bridesmaids. While we’ve narrowed it down to just two cakes in recent years, we’re happy this sweet tradition is still going strong.

The earliest groom’s cakes were actually fruitcakes! Thankfully, fruitcake no longer rules as the flavor of choice, but groom’s cakes are still usually made of dark chocolate with fruit or liqueur, perhaps to contrast with the white or light-colored traditional wedding cake. These days, almost anything goes for the groom’s cake, from intricate designs customized to the gent of honor’s favorite hobbies, to the red velvet armadillo made famous by Steel Magnolias. Some groom’s cakes aren’t even cakes at all but towers of Oreos and glasses of cold milk, hot doughnuts passed on trays, or a spread of favorite childhood treats baked by mama.

Groomsmen everywhere would no doubt be terrified to learn that the male half of the bridal party used to be responsible for whipping up the groom’s cake on the morning of the wedding, but it’s true! Legend also holds that if an unmarried woman sleeps with a slice of groom’s cake under her pillow, she’ll dream of her future husband. We can’t support singling out your single friends, but we think to-go boxes filled with cake would make any wedding guest quite pleased at the end of the night. Whatever sweet you decide to serve, and whenever or however you choose to serve it, make sure the groom’s cake is an obvious nod to your handsome beau. This one’s all about him!

SECOND LINE

With the city having the motto Laissez les bons temps rouler (“Let the good times roll!”), it’s no surprise that the “second line” tradition belongs to New Orleans, a town rich with celebration. The line stems from African-American jazz funerals, where a brass band played and paraded to honor the life of the deceased while loved ones followed the band, dancing to add to the spirit and celebration of the procession. Weddings with a NOLA connection have flipped this tradition on its head, using a second line parade to signify the beginning of new life for the bride and groom. A second line usually takes place between the ceremony and reception, with the newly married couple leading the way and holding decorated parasols to honor the life of the deceased while loved ones followed the band, dancing to add to the spirit and celebration of the procession. Weddings with a NOLA connection have flipped this tradition on its head, using a second line parade to signify the beginning of new life for the bride and groom. A second line usually takes place between the ceremony and reception, with the newly married couple leading the way and holding decorated parasols while the band and wedding party follow right behind. In a genius display of double-duty programs, we’ve seen couples print their order of service on white handkerchiefs, then encourage guests to twirl them in the air once the second line sets off. Though second lines begin with just invited guests, they often attract passersby to join the fun—perfect for a wedding in the South, where there’s always enough joy to go around.

Traditions are as much a part of Southern life as Mason jars and monograms. When it comes to the traditions surrounding our weddings—well, we’ve just scratched the surface! Find more to include on your big day at SOUTHERNLIVING.COM/WEDDINGS.
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WE LOVE THIS! “There’s been a resurgence of sleeves on wedding gowns in recent years. It’s such an elegant and timeless look.” —Emily

HOW THEY MET: Whitney and Clarke met as undergrads at the University of Virginia, in the basement of Clarke’s fraternity house. Clarke was dressed in a David Beckham costume, and the two danced all night. The Proposal: Whitney had plans to visit Clarke, who was working in D.C. for the summer, for the weekend. He asked her to pick up an important package from his Charlottesville apartment before getting on the road. But when she arrived, no package was waiting. She was on the phone with him explaining the situation when he walked around the corner, led her to a garden near UVA’s Rotunda, and proposed. THE ’I DO’S’: Charlottesville, the backdrop to where they met and fell in love, was a natural location for Whitney and Clarke’s wedding. Whitney was also the first employee of Pippin Hill, a Virginia winery, so that was the ideal reception spot. NUMBER OF GUESTS: 275

GRACE PERSONIFIED: Whitney’s dress, the “Catherine” from Monique Lhuillier, was modeled after the Duchess of Cambridge’s famous gown, but she admits she felt like another princess in it: Grace Kelly. She chose to have the sleeves cut to three-quarter length to reflect the summer season.

SOMETHING BORROWED: Whitney’s grandmother’s handkerchief was tucked inside her bouquet of ivory patience garden roses, peonies, white hydrangeas, and Sahara roses.

FOR HIM: Instead of a traditional wedding ring, the couple engraved a signet ring Clarke’s grandfather had given him, embossed with their family crest. He now wears that ring on his left hand, just like his father and grandfather.

EDITOR’S ADVICE: “Ask your florist to tag each boutonniere with the gent’s name. They’ll appreciate the personal touch, even if they won’t admit it.” —Lara
“My heart will always be in Charlottesville, close to my alma mater. It’s perfect for a wedding set against one of our country’s most idyllic and romantic landscapes.” —Lindsay

AN ELEGANT FLOWER, SUCH AS A DAHLIA (SHOWN), ROSE, OR GARDENIA, AT EACH GUEST’S PLACE SETTING IS A BEAUTIFUL WAY TO ENGAGE THE SENSES.
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HOW THEY MET: Paige and Adam met at a party at The University of Texas and bonded over their summers abroad. They soon became dedicated study partners.

THE PROPOSAL: Adam popped the question at Becker Vineyards in Texas. His best friend and his older brother wandered around the property wearing disguises of safari hats, vests, and aviators to photograph the whole thing.

THE "I DO’S": Paige and Adam said their vows at Kali-Kate Equestrian Center in Texas.

NUMBER OF GUESTS: 222.

MAKING VOWS: The bride and groom recited vows to each of their parents and presented them with a hand-embroidered hanky before reciting vows to each other.

FULL MOON: Paige and Adam’s wedding date happened to fall on the day of the super “perigee moon,” the largest full moon that appears once every 18 years.

FAVORITE DESIGN ELEMENT: Paige loved the bunches of white asters that lined the aisle and framed the altar.

FIRST DANCE: The couple’s official first dance to Johnny Cash’s “Ring of Fire” was preceded by a candid and unchoreographed dance to Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believin’.”

GOOD EATS: Guests made the rounds on the chip-and-dip bar, complete with guacamole, salsa, queso, and pico de gallo.

THE GETAWAY: The newlyweds made their exit in a pristine and classic Bentley.

KEEPING THE PARTY GOING: Paige and Adam were dedicated to giving their guests an enjoyable time and bussed some of them downtown to keep the party going after the reception.

EDITOR’S ADVICE: “Show your love for your bridesmaids by letting them pick a favorite dress style of their own choosing. We love this modern and vintage mix!” — Lara
WE LOVE THIS! "Nothing beats the drama of a long veil! I love the juxtaposition of Paige’s bridal look with her country locale." —Emily
THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING
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