



LIVING GREEN

AS GREEN WEDDINGS GROW TINY TREE HOUSE FINDS A NICHE



photo by Jennifer Esperanza

Neither pure white nor shimmering gold are the most popular colors for weddings this spring. These perennial favorites have been surpassed by an unlikely choice: green. The demand for ecologically-conscious weddings is a growing trend across the country—evidenced by a burgeoning industry of "green wedding" providers. The development has caught some off guard, and many businesses that provide wedding services are scrambling to react.

Not so for Tree House Pastry Shop & Café, a cozy all-organic restaurant and bakery located on the grounds of Plants of the Southwest nursery in Santa Fe. There, among the first shoots of spring, tiny Tree House has always been "green."

"For us, ecological consciousness is not a reaction to any particular trend," says owner Maria Elena Bustamante-Bernal, "it's one of the core ideals on which our business is built." Those "core ideals" of which Bustamante-Bernal speaks include a commitment to supporting community, local agriculture, and a reduced impact upon the earth—all while making fresh, organic food that's good to eat and good for those eating it.

Strolling up the garden path that approaches the café, this commitment is readily apparent. Made primarily of adobe bricks created from the earth on which it stands, Tree House is built, quite literally, with sustainability at its heart. Large painted drums harvest the rainwater that falls on the building's tin roof; solar panels behind the kitchen provide electricity; and the café recycles or composts most of the waste it produces. Yet it's not the café's adobe bricks that recently won Tree House a place among Gourmet Magazine's "100 Best Farm to Table Restaurants". Once inside the restaurant, Tree House is all about the food.

As the enticing aroma of tinga Mexicana—a recent Tree House offering—fills the air, Bustamante-Bernal explains that in the summer and fall, 98% of the produce served at Tree House comes from local farms. Tree House is proud of the fact that, since opening, it has worked to develop mutually-beneficial relationships with many local farmers. Even in the winter months, much of Tree House's produce is obtained locally.

And what of those cakes so much a part of any wedding ceremony? Bustamante-Bernal explains that all of the flours and nuts used in the Tree House kitchen are New Mexico grown.

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"There's no trade off for obtaining our ingredients locally," says Bustamante-Bernal. "It may take a little more effort on our part—but we've found that using local ingredients, we can produce a better looking and better-tasting product. That doing so is better for the environment and our community—that's icing on the cake."

The quality of what is produced at Tree House has made the café a favorite among local wedding professionals. Indeed, when Rock Resorts—a collection of luxury hotels with a long-standing tradition of emphasizing the natural settings of its locations and the parent company of La Posada de Santa Fe—launched a "Green Weddings" initiative in February 2008, event planners on staff approached Tree House Pastry Shop & Café about providing organic cakes for the green weddings held at the Santa Fe resort. Having already delivered many cakes to La Posada, Tree House was thrilled to participate.

"Tree House is one of our favorite bakeries to work with," says David Stone, Director of Catering and Conference Services at La Posada. "Besides the fact that they're all-organic, Tree House cakes are beautiful and taste great, too. It was natural that we went to Tree House when we initiated the Green Weddings program."

Green weddings are very much a part of what's happening in the country today, but is this trend likely to continue? With awareness of and interest in sustainability and all things green on the rise, it looks like Tree House may be on to something. Back in the kitchen, the longevity of the "green wedding" movement doesn't seem to be a concern.

"People choose a cake for lots of different reasons," says Bustamante-Bernal. "We try to work with each and every couple in order to produce something that is unique, memorable, and fits the occasion. Some people choose us because we're organic; others for different reasons. What we hope for in every cake is that it is truly enjoyed and that—for its part—the cake we deliver helps to make someone's day as special as it can be."

Regardless of the mood of the country, Tree House's commitment to sustainability provides some interesting food for thought: at Santa Fe's Tree House Pastry Shop & Café, those planning a New Mexico "green wedding" really can have their organic, locally-made cake—and eat it, too.

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