

FROM I DO TO ADIEU

14 HOUSTON CEREMONY + RECEPTION VENUES

From historical buildings and downtown vistas to serene gardens and enchanting ballrooms, these 14 Houston-area venues offer dream-worthy backdrops from the moment you say your vows until your spectacular newlywed sendoff.

THE CORINTHIAN

Couples seeking the ultimate in grandeur frequently seek out The Corinthian, a historical landmark featuring 22,000 square feet of space capable of accommodating 800 for a seated dinner and up to 1,100 for a cocktail reception.

This century-old structure was the grand hall and working mezzanine level of one of the first banks in Houston, its original architecture renovated and revitalized to create an idyllic setting for some of the most beautiful weddings in Houston. Just about everything you will find in The Corinthian is grand, from its 90-foot-long aisle, flanked with regal 35-foot-tall Corinthian columns, to its grand hall, featuring more than 10,000 square feet of soaring ceilings.

General manager Boyd Bryan says The Corinthian's standout features

WRITER MAURI ELBEL | PHOTO J. COGLIANDRO PHOTOGRAPHY



LOCATION: THE CORINTHIAN

include its namesake Corinthian columns, upper-mezzanine views of downtown Houston, and the unparalleled expertise of catering firm Jackson and Company, which owns the venue and provides its famed food.

Special touches such as the Champagne lounge in the ladies' powder room, a groom's lounge featuring a much-admired whiskey bar, and the fact that the venue only hosts one event per day, all prove that at The Corinthian, wedding dreams really do come true.

CHATEAU COCOMAR

Tucked away in the lush forest just north of Houston sits a fairytale castle, where gleaming marble floors give way to soaring gilded mirrors, intricate moldings and towering windows looking out upon manicured grounds. This destination for regal weddings with a distinctly European

ambiance is Chateau Cocomar, and it's one of the region's top spots for wedding ritual and revelry all in one place.

Controller Sherry Alvarez says that's because couples love the upstairs-downstairs ease of Chateau Cocomar, which gives guests access to every bit of its romantic opulence. "The upstairs ballroom is a favorite for ceremonies," she notes. "It's just so white and beautiful, with very detailed crown moldings, and a soft tone that's perfect for saying, 'I do.'"

For post-ceremony mingling, guests need only venture out onto the upstairs terrace, where views of the venue's dewy lawns and surrounding forest make for a spectacular backdrop for signature cocktails and hors d'oeuvre.

When it's time for dinner and dancing, the crowd makes its way downstairs, where the chateau's main ballroom, with

room for 375, features "gold filigree, antique fixtures, large windows, and a very dramatic long staircase where the couple can make their grand entrance as newlyweds."

THE HOUSTONIAN HOTEL, CLUB & SPA

A favorite of society families, politicians, scions of business, and many a happy couple seeking an iconic Houston experience for their beloved wedding guests, The Houstonian Hotel, Club & Spa is as versatile as it is welcoming.

Director of catering Lisa Hopkins notes that to-be-weds "love to put their overnight guests here—if you're coming from out of town, it really feels like you're arriving at a destination resort." She cites the Houstonian's extensive on-property activities and indulgences, including outdoor pools, the family-fare Arbor Grill, tennis,



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yoga, and, of course, sumptuous relaxation at the Houstonian's 17,000-square-foot, Mediterranean-style spa.

That resort feel extends to the Houstonian's picturesque front lawn—a favorite spot for wedding ceremonies in front of the property's huge and magnificent live oak tree. For receptions, the hotel's Grande Ballroom can accommodate up to 500 guests, making it not just one of Houston's most elegant wedding spaces, but also one of its largest.

For a more intimate party space, with unique indoor-outdoor charm, Hopkins recommends the Juniper Room, where couples can host guests for pre-dinner cocktails on the patio, and, after dining and dancing inside (gazing out through floor-to-ceiling windows all the while), return to the patio for Scotch and cigars with a sophisticated al fresco lounge feel.

THE ASTORIAN

The Astorian's modern-meets-industrial-chic aesthetic, inspired by New York's Grand Central Station, is a throwback to 1920s glamour and Art Deco design. The landmark historical building, once a paint factory, boasts stunning panoramic views of downtown Houston that form a dazzling backdrop for celebration.

With its 14-foot-high ceilings, The Astorian's 14,000-square-foot Grand Ballroom, boasting space for 500-plus guests, is a popular choice for both ceremonies and receptions. The open-floor-plan space "is configurable to accommodate almost any layout that the bride and groom can imagine," says partner Joe Pachioli.

Couples who want to change up the setting after saying their vows can head to The Astorian's oyster-bar-inspired cocktail

lounge where standout details include a 40-foot-long hand-laid mosaic, domed granite ceiling and marble bar top.

No matter which space you select, The Astorian goes above and beyond to make your wedding dreams come true. "The attention to detail, not only in the design, but also by the staff, sets us apart from other venues in Houston," Pachioli says.

BUTLER'S COURTYARD

Historic elegance infuses every corner of Butler's Courtyard, a unique private venue comprised of five separate buildings that span an entire city block. The venue's main building, built in 1909 by George Washington Butler, has housed everything from a bank to a doctor's office over the years. But in 2002, the abandoned structure underwent a complete renovation, becoming one of Houston's premier wedding facilities.

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Today, the century-old brick structure captivates couples with charming details like an old bank vault with its original steel door and brick interior walls, both of which serve as spectacular backgrounds for bridal and wedding photos.

Butler's Courtyard offers a handful of ceremony and reception options and can accommodate parties of up to 300. For ceremonies, couples often gravitate to the property's gazebo—surrounded by lush gardens, a serene waterfall and gently flowing stream—before migrating to the Main Hall for the reception, illuminated by a dozen chandeliers and ample candlelight.

Couples seeking to feel special on their wedding day will appreciate the fact that Butler's Courtyard only hosts one event per day, and was one of the first venues in town to give the bride and groom their own individual dress-

ing houses. "The bride will have a team behind her at every point in the wedding," says owner Janice Gunnin Wilson. "We treat each bride with white gloves and take care of her every need."

CITADEL ON KIRBY

Inspired by Scotland's regal castles, while reflecting the Lone Star State's bold spirit, The Citadel On Kirby is a new full-service event venue, standing proudly on six sprawling acres. Built to resemble a grand 17th-century castle, and set among lush grounds featuring landscaped gardens, fountains and gazebos, The Citadel On Kirby boasts noteworthy architectural details including 26-foot-high ceilings, 25 grand chandeliers, and 32 oversized castle doors on its 20,000 square feet of event space.

"The Citadel is the perfect wedding venue," says Rachel Bloom, lead sales

manager. "Imagine having your dream wedding in a brand-new castle." The Empress wedding chapel, overlooking an outdoor courtyard on one side and a 30-foot-high indoor water wall on the other, is the most popular choice for ceremonies. The Kingsley banquet room, with its large mezzanine area, elegant wrought-iron double staircase, and a marble floor that beckons dancers, is the venue's most popular spot for receptions.

From the intricate stonework on the main towers of the castle, to the lovely arched platforms, The Citadel serves as a worthy space for some of the most distinguished weddings in Houston—and, with its 1,500-guest capacity, some of the largest. "The sheer size of this beautiful structure under the blue Texas sky will amaze you," says Bloom. "You will feel like you are in another world."

From a ceremony in the garden Atrium lobby to a lavish reception in the luxurious Donatello or Raphael Ballroom, for 20-1000 guests, your event will be *memorable.*



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ASHTON GARDENS

With its new West Houston location, Ashton Gardens has made its chapel-plus-ballroom elegance and ease even more accessible to Houston to-be-weds. Ashton Gardens West Houston, located in Katy, and Ashton Gardens North Houston, situated just south of Spring, each features a custom-constructed chapel, with floor-to-ceiling windows framing a vista of lush trees beyond. "We have created a wedding space where couples can bring the outdoors in," says marketing manager Ashley Love. "After all, every bride can see herself having an outdoor wedding—but we never know what weather Texas is going to give us. This way, the couple can have an outdoor feel for the ceremony, without compromising comfort."

Along with expansive picture windows, each Ashton Gardens chapel features wood ceiling beams and charming pews, for a rustic-elegant feel—along with a state-of-the-art sound system and exceptional acoustics that make ceremony music soar.

When it's time to celebrate, guests simply make their way to the window-surrounded ballroom, where crystal chandeliers, a grand staircase and a built-in dance floor welcome revelers to party the night away. As for customization, Love notes that couples can take advantage of the many extras included in Ashton Gardens wedding packages—rentals, decor and lighting, to name just a few—or can opt to bring in their own vendors.

"We really pride ourselves on having everything centrally located," Love notes. Whether you select Ashton Gardens West Houston, with room for 400, or Ashton Gardens North Houston, with space for 300, you'll receive the expert assistance of an on-site coordinator, and your guests will take pleasure in Ashton Gardens' "amazing catering service," she adds.

Another Ashton Gardens advantage? "Privacy," Love says. "We are really moving forward with exclusivity. While we may

have a morning and an evening event scheduled, there is no overlap. During your wedding, you will always be the only bride here."

HEATHER'S GLEN

Sitting just 20 miles north of Houston, Heather's Glen offers a destination-wedding feel at a destination very close to home. From the moment you arrive at this intimate all-in-one venue, you'll encounter enchanting gardens bursting with vibrant seasonal blooms, and the lull of bubbling water features.

Heather's Glen can accommodate up to 200 guests, and specializes in all-inclusive packages for couples wanting to tie the knot and celebrate in a truly timeless setting. Host your ceremony in its elegant chapel, complete with twinkling chandeliers and expansive windows that look out onto manicured gardens kept green and welcoming year-round. From there, it's a short stroll to your spectacular celebration.

"The most popular reception space is our Garden Room, which houses a huge fountain, garden chairs, dance floor and more chandeliers," says owner Heather George, who always advises brides and grooms to walk around each venue they are considering, to see if they can imagine their family and friends having a great time there.

LAS VELAS

Las Velas has been hosting unforgettable weddings for a quarter century—a level of experience that gives wedding couples an incomparable sense of security. "Because Las Velas has been around for 25 years, we truly understand a bride and her needs," says venue director Elmira Frias. "And although there are constant changes in the industry, brides have always looked and will always look to this day as one of the biggest and most important days of their lives."

With its convenient Galleria location,

Las Velas can accommodate everything from an intimate event to a large gathering of 250 on its unique grounds dotted with dewy gardens, babbling fountains and decorative hand-carved stonework.

Las Velas was one of the first venues to present Houston wedding couples with an alternative to traditional hotel ballrooms and country clubs, and its iconic Palm Court remains one of its most popular settings for weddings. "Our couples love it because of the high ceilings, natural lighting and outdoor ambiance," says Frias. Las Velas typically "flips" the ceremony area for the subsequent reception. "During this time guests go to an additional room for a cocktail hour, and when they return, the Palm Court has been completely transformed," she explains.

PETROLEUM CLUB OF HOUSTON

Cosmopolitan wedding sites don't get much more dazzling than the Petroleum Club of Houston, defined by its incredible views, fine dining and expert staff. Founded in 1946, this acclaimed venue enjoys a stellar reputation for providing unsurpassed elegance and style. From its 35th-floor location, the Petroleum Club of Houston provides classic sophistication and unparalleled vistas of the downtown skyline. Featuring traditional architecture, expansive floor-to-ceiling windows and sparkling chandeliers, the club's stylish, romantic ambiance can be adapted to a cozy crowd of 50, or a grand affair for 280.

Weddings that include on-site ceremonies only take place on Sundays, with ceremonies set in the Noble Energy Grill, which features a stunning cityscape backdrop. Couples usually opt to hold their receptions in the Petroleum Room, the venue's largest space. "The neutral color palette complements many color combinations and three of the walls are completely covered with windows, allowing natural daylight, or, at night, the glow of city lights, creating a spectacular

atmosphere,” says Stacey Perez, catering coordinator. “And the built-in oversized hardwood dance floor welcomes guests to join in the celebration.”

STATION 3

Sparks inevitably fly when your big day takes place at one of Houston’s original horse-drawn-steamer fire stations. Couples who choose to wed at Station 3 enjoy exclusive use of all three spaces throughout their special day, allowing them to provide their guests with a variety of settings as the ceremony progresses into the reception.

Built in 1905, Station 3 is a historic landmark, featuring original brick walls, wood floors, concrete beams and intricate hand-carved exterior stonework, all of which evoke another era. The main structure is a 5,800-square-foot, split-level building with a 1,500-square-foot courtyard that can accommodate groups of up to 200. The industrial-style brick-and-mortar building caters to a wide variety of wedding styles, allowing couples to create celebrations that are as unique as they, themselves, are.

“The building features exposed brick, custom iron-and-glass doors, and an iron staircase, and the original fire pole is still intact, allowing for a bride-and-groom entrance that guests are not soon to forget,” says Kerri Childress, venue director.

She adds that one of the most popular spots for wedding ceremonies is downstairs, where ivory chiffon curtains contrast beautifully with brick walls. Receptions typically take place in three separate spaces, with cocktail hour commencing in the ivy-covered courtyard before guests are ushered upstairs for dinner, and then invited downstairs for dancing. Be sure to look out for the old fire station’s motto, “Trust in Us,” still etched into the building’s stonework—a modern-day affirmation for couples tying the knot there.

THE BELL TOWER ON 34TH

With floor-to-ceiling glass windows and

doors, The Bell Tower on 34th’s Campanile Chapel is its most popular space for ceremonies. And it’s easy to see why.

“This special space offers a view of the 30-foot water wall and patio area outside,” notes venue CEO Roger Igo. “The chapel space also features a beautiful dome ceiling and authentic wedding bells which can be heard throughout the room. Many nights the candles are lit, making the space even more gorgeous.”

To surround couples in comfort, and give them space to primp before the wedding, and, if they choose, between the ceremony and reception, the chapel also offers a groom’s suite and two different bridal suites—“one with a beautiful garden featuring a quaint fountain, and the other with a fantastic second-story view of the famous Bell Tower water wall.”

For post-ceremony festivities, couples covet the Carillon/Chandelier Ballroom combination, with its magnificent cascading staircase—perfect for a memorable grand entrance as newlyweds. This room also boasts “columns, arches, multiple chandeliers, authentic wood-burning fireplaces, and giant antique wood doors,” Igo adds, “and opens up to reveal a giant recessed dance floor, plus built-in bar areas, and stately mirrors.”

SANS SOUCI BALLROOM

Sans Souci means “carefree” or “without worry” in French, and describes the kind of experience couples can expect from the moment they say their marriage vows until the time when they depart their once-in-a-lifetime celebration.

At Sans Souci, wedding dreams become reality, says owner Abdee Sharifan. Everything about this all-inclusive venue is magnificent, from its 1,000-guest capacity to the 16-foot-wide-by-22-foot-tall crystal chandelier in the foyer—the largest in Texas. With more than 30 chandeliers that change colors via LED lighting, and state-of-the-art sound and

intelligent-lighting systems, the ballroom’s club-quality dance floor will have all of your guests busting moves.

“The grandeur you experience when you first step into the foyer and see the huge chandelier, and then the ballroom, with the sparkle of its 30-plus chandeliers, will transport you back to the magic of childhood—with all the sophistication you desire in adulthood,” says Sharifan.

THE LYCEUM

The site of one of the oldest German Lutheran churches in Texas, The Lyceum, as it is now known, has survived numerous natural disasters (including the great storm of 1900), to become one of Galveston’s most coveted sites for wedding ceremonies and receptions.

Original stained-glass windows frame the main Lyceum space, evoking a feel of tradition and grandeur, while expansive hardwood floors, dark-wood beams and a charming courtyard allow couples to design weddings with “that vintage, rustic look they love,” notes venue director Cynthia McEldowney.

Situate a ceremony photographer or videographer in the venue’s original choir loft, for fantastic photos and film of your Lyceum “I do’s.” While you’re waiting for catering staff to turn the ceremony space for your reception—the Lyceum is one large room that can be divided with old-fashioned roll-down doors—enjoy an al fresco cocktail with your guests on the lawn. And about those cocktails—since the site doesn’t have its own liquor license, you’re free to bring any bar you choose (with proper security and trained staff, natch).

Close out your festivities with a sparkler sendoff down the regal venue’s front steps, and you’ve just had yourself the Galveston Island wedding of a lifetime.