



MEANINGFUL

Nuptials

Incorporate tradition to make your wedding memorable and personal.

BY JENNA KASHOU

My husband works in the wedding industry, which made options limited when it came time to pick a date to get hitched. And because he had been to literally thousands of weddings in his 15 years in the industry, we wanted to take a different approach to our special day to make it feel truly personal. Our main goal: to give our wedding a unique twist by incorporating cultural traditions from our shared Middle Eastern heritage.

A December date proved the perfect solution, so that we didn't have to wait two years for an open Saturday in his schedule during peak wedding season. Plus, our chosen venue was already decorated for the holidays, our guests were already in high spirits (the open bar didn't hurt either), and we had the entire place to ourselves.

We began our reception by marching into the ballroom to launch a raucous rendition of an Arab "Dabke" circle dance, with the entire crowd joining us on the dance floor. A few of the stronger guests hoisted us up in chairs as we (nervously) surveyed the crowd joyfully celebrating us. It was an incredible high,

literally and figuratively, and the perfect way to set the tone for the rest of the night.

To cut our wedding cake, we used a family heirloom — an ornamental Arab sword. In addition to the cake, we served baklava and other gooey, nutty sweets wrapped in phyllo dough. I carried my grandmother's purse to feel her presence, even though she had long since passed. And we gulped champagne out of ornate, oversized crystal coups gifted by my sister and maid of honor at our engagement.

All of these touches made our wedding feel like ours and afforded our guests a memorable night as well. But what if you don't have your own significant family or cultural traditions?

You can still give your wedding real meaning by incorporating elements and items that represent the importance of your marriage and your uniqueness as a couple. Borrow customs that you find festive or moving and make them your own. Or ask close friends and family members to lend small, personal items you can wear or carry.

Here are a few more ideas to take or tweak for your big day.

1. Use a family heirloom — Incorporate a special object you've inherited or borrowed that makes you think of a cherished family member, friend or tradition during the celebration. Don a distinctive piece of jewelry or tuck a special hankie, flask or compact in your purse or pocket.

2. Incorporate a religious tradition into your ceremony — The Irish have traditional blessings. Mexican, Filipino and Spanish couples use a "lasso" rosary or string of flowers placed around the couple to unify them and bless their union. During a Hindu ceremony, the bride and groom stand under a "mandap" or decorated archway. Again, there





Photo by Studio 29

is no need to belong to these ethnic groups to borrow traditions like these and turn them into your own.

3. Show, or involve your guests in, a special dance — Consider coordinating a short performance to showcase a cultural tradition like a folk dance, or orchestrate a circle dance. Jewish call theirs the “Horah,” Arabs call it the “Dabke,” and Italians perform the “Tarantella.” Many cultures also lift up the bride and groom on chairs during a dance to single them out and celebrate them.

4. Serve a traditional dessert — In addition to the wedding cake, consider a sweets table with cookies or pastries that represent your families’ ethnic heritage. Be sure to provide small bags so guests can take a sampling home if they’ve already indulged in the cake.

5. Serve an aperitif or shot at the end of the receiving line — Greeks and Italians typically toast to good health with a shot of Sambuca or Limoncello at the end of the receiving line. It’s a nice way for the bride and groom to thank all of their guests for attending and a great treat for the guests if the line is

long. A little prize at the end of the line for waiting patiently!

6. Offer a simple favor to thank guests for attending and as a keepsake of your special day — In European cultures, five Jordan almonds are handed out in a small box or wrapped in tulle to represent fertility, longevity, wealth, health and happiness. Reinvent the tradition with edibles like chocolate truffles, honey or jam — a more modern and practical gift. Personalized candles, can cozies and bottle openers are also simple, inexpensive and welcome mementos for your guests.

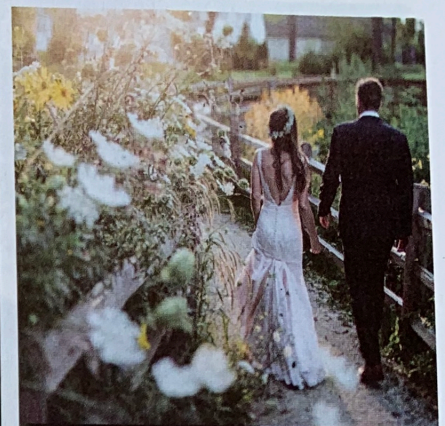
However you chose to celebrate your special day, be sure to take time to enjoy yourself as the day unfolds. The traditions, little moments and personal touches are what you will remember for a lifetime. In my own case, it was the moment one of our guests picked up the ornamental Arab sword and tried cut the cake before we had the chance. Luckily, our photographer intervened — and it became our favorite and funniest wedding story. MKE



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