



A venue of dreams

You don't have to leave the Bay Area to find a magical setting for your big day

by Gabriela Marks

Finding the perfect location for your wedding and reception is one of the biggest pieces to the wedding-planning puzzle. Many couples choose to stay local — whether for planning purposes or to avoid a lot of travel for guests. Fortunately, the Bay Area has plenty of timeless, romantic locales where you can tie the knot.

“If you love the vineyard atmosphere, but you don’t want to trek all the way to Wine Country, check out Byington Vineyard and Winery, set in the Santa Cruz Mountains.”

Though a museum probably isn’t your first thought when compiling your wedding-site wish list, one can be an unconventional and dramatic backdrop for your ceremony. The new Asian Art Museum of San Francisco marries modern elegance and classic Beaux Arts style. The historic and regal building, which was built in 1917 and used to house the City Library, provides a grand setting for weddings.

Italian architect Gae Aulenti, the mastermind behind Paris’ award-winning Musée D’Orsay, transformed the library into the magical museum it is today. Huge windows and archways made of Travertine, a type of Italian marble, give the museum a truly majestic feeling.

There are multiple options for your ceremony and reception, including an elegant sit-down dinner with dancing in Samsung Hall, which used to be the card catalogue room, or a more contemporary party in the North and South Courts. Whichever space you choose, guests can enjoy the world-class collection of Asian art. A nearby underground parking lot makes a large city wedding much less stressful.

B.R. Cohn Winery is a lovely choice of venue for those who just can’t get enough of Wine Country. Bay Area newlyweds Aliza and Dan Grosh tied the knot at the Sonoma Valley vineyard.

“We wanted it to be outside in a natural setting and there’s just something magical about the area,” recalls Aliza. “People said they’d never been to a wedding that had so much love. It was just charming. It’s serene, peaceful and magical.”

The 100-acre winery, just 45 minutes north of the Golden Gate Bridge, offers magnificent pastoral views. Many couples choose to exchange vows beneath the enormous oak tree with the Cabernet vineyards and Sonoma Mountains behind them.

More than a dozen 130-year-old French Picholine olive

trees and a huge, level lawn that’s perfect for receptions make up the Olive Grove. The winery also offers festive, countryside carriage rides for guests.

If you love the vineyard atmosphere, but you don’t want to trek all the way to Wine Country, check out Byington Vineyard and Winery. Set in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the stunning Estate Pinot Noir vineyards make a great location for wedding receptions. A rose-lined brick walkway leads to Wedding Hill, where vows are taken beneath a jasmine-covered gazebo. Surrounded by evergreens, oak trees and flowers, guests will enjoy an amazing panoramic view of the mountains with Monterey Bay in the distance. The facility can accommodate 150 to 250 guests, depending on the season.

If you and your fiancé have an affinity for the ocean and you’re willing to venture a bit beyond the Bay Area, then the Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa is the venue for you. Set on the water’s edge, the plaza boasts a spectacular view of Monterey Bay.

“The hotel truly epitomizes the Northern California coastal experience,” explains Doug Phillips, director of sales and marketing. “It’s perched on a marine sanctuary overlooking the coastline. It’s just magnificent.”

Two bayside terraces are a splendid choice for an elegant and romantic wedding ceremony. Most receptions are held in the ballrooms, with floor-to-ceiling windows. The hotel has recently been renovated and features Mediterranean-style furnishings and advanced audiovisual capabilities.

If you stand on the rooftop sundeck at the penthouse spa, you can see the otters at play, listen to the seals barking and see the marine birds. It literally has a 360-degree view of Monterey,” continues Phillips. “The spa has nine treatment rooms where we do facials, pedicures, manicures and more than 40 signature treatments.”

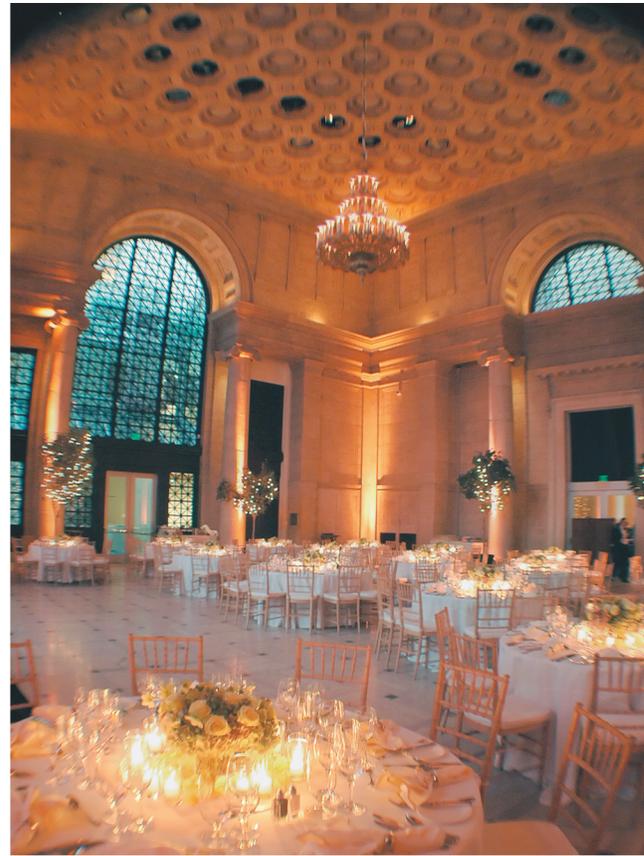
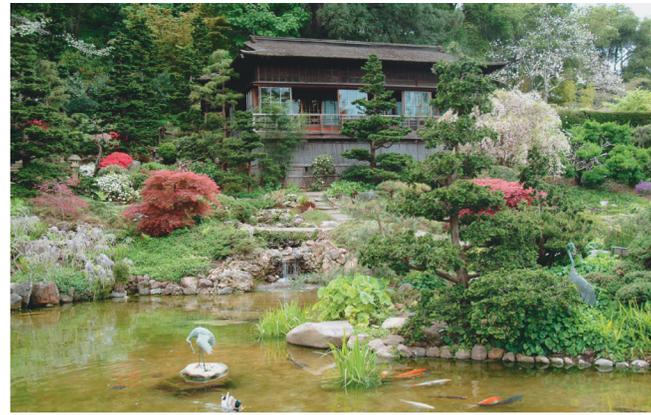


PHOTO BY CHRISTINA SHOOK, WWW.CSHOOK.COM

Asian Art Museum, formerly the site of the City Library, provides an elegant, artsy space for your nuptials.



PHOTOS COURTESY HAKONE GARDENS

Three photos above and on the preceding page: Hakone Gardens is the oldest Japanese estate garden in the Western Hemisphere, and a perfect backdrop for a Zen-like setting.

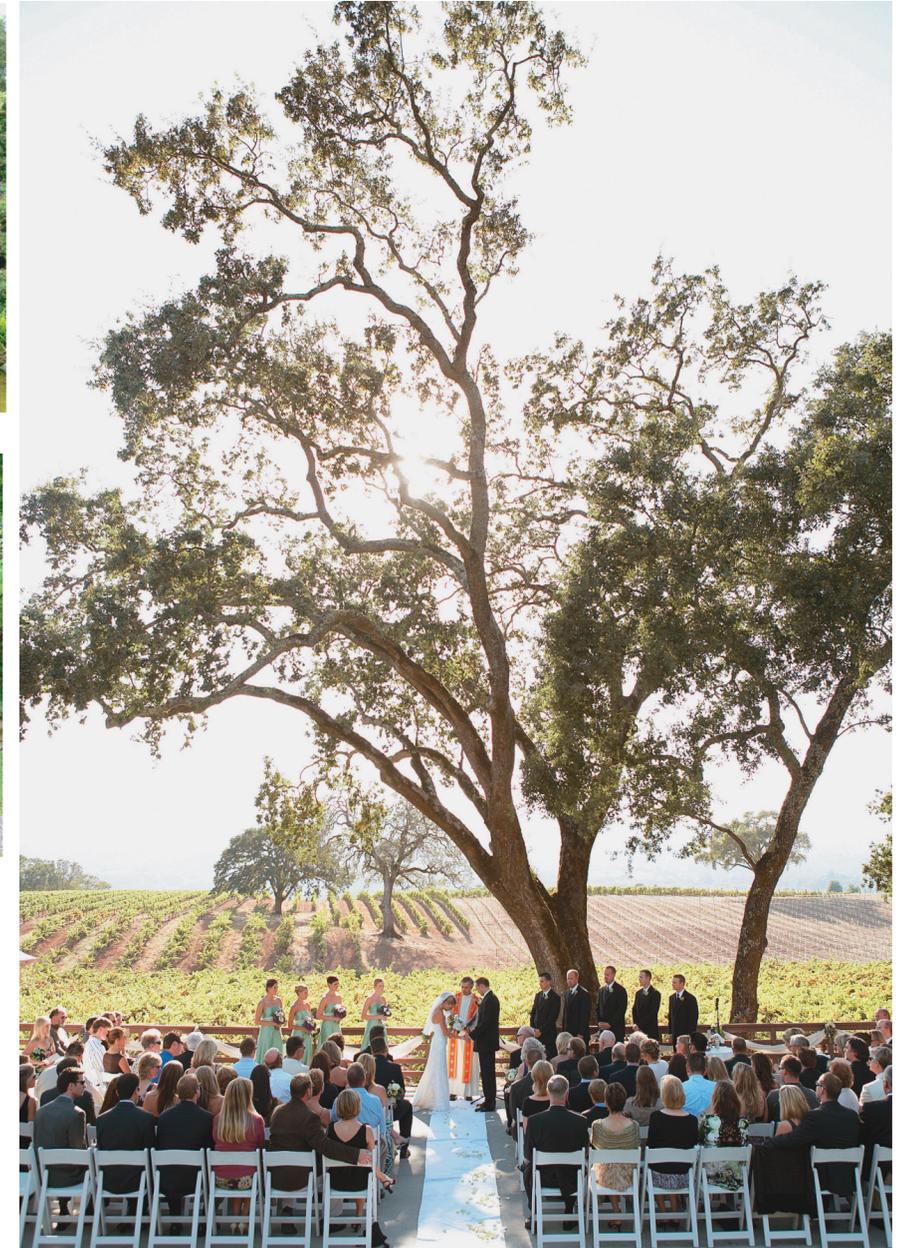


PHOTO BY MARLA AUFRMUTH

B.R. Cohn Winery’s grandiose oak tree provides a pastoral and charming spot to tie the knot.



PHOTOS COURTESY MONTEREY PLAZA HOTEL & SPA

Clockwise from left: Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa is a romantic site, perfect for coastal couples.

“Unlike many other local venues, Sunol Valley Golf Course can comfortably host 1,000 guests. There are endless possibilities at this serene setting, no matter the size of your bash.”

With a spa like that and Cannery Row and the world-renowned Monterey Bay Aquarium just minutes away, there will be plenty to entertain out-of-town guests for the whole weekend.

Hakone Gardens is the perfect Bay Area location for those who want a wedding exuding tranquility, peace and harmony. With 18 acres of beautiful nature and historic buildings, Hakone Gardens is the oldest Japanese-style estate garden in the Western Hemisphere. Hakone Gardens was founded by San Francisco art patrons Oliver and Isabel Stine and is now maintained by the nonprofit Hakone Foundation.

“It’s a hidden gem,” explains Kyongmi Ader, event manager at Hakone Gardens. “There are many Japanese artifacts throughout. Even Japanese tourists come here and they are impressed.”

Several choices are offered for morning and evening receptions – all of which evoke ancient Japanese civilization. Hakone Gardens features hillside and strolling gardens, multi-tiered waterfalls,

a bamboo forest with koi ponds, stonework, three cascading waterfalls and a moon-viewing house. The art and cultural retreat center was also featured in the 2005 hit movie “Memoirs of a Geisha.”

If you and your fiancé are golfers or if you just like the sun-drenched desert feel, then Sunol Valley Golf Club is the spot for you. Perfectly groomed golf courses, shining lakes and desert palms evoke a private, country club feel.

Unlike many other local venues, Sunol Valley Golf Club can comfortably host 1,000 guests. There are endless possibilities at this serene setting, no matter the size of your bash. The Pavilion Room, great for large receptions, boasts floor-to-ceiling windows, balconies and a gorgeous view of the greens and the palms. And of course the golf courses are available for a round or for a photo shoot against the brilliant verdancy.

With so many beautiful local venues, the hottest wedding destination is now the Bay Area.

Bay Area Wedding Reception Locations

Asian Art Museum
200 Larkin Street, San Francisco
(415)581-3777
www.asianart.org/rentthemuseum.htm

B.R. Cohn Winery
15000 Sonoma Highway, Glen Ellen
(707) 938-4064 x30
www.brcohn.com

Byington Winery
21850 Bear Creek Road, Los Gatos
(408) 354-1111 x212
www.byington.com

Monterey Plaza Hotel and Spa
400 Cannery Row, Monterey
(831) 646-1700
www.montereyplazahotel.com

Hakone Gardens
21000 Big Basin Way, Saratoga
(408) 741-4994 x103
www.hakone.us

Sunol Valley Golf Club
6900 Mission Road, Sunol
(925) 862-2408
www.sunolvalley.com