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Jeffrey McKee and Katherine Bakker pose under an oak tree dripping with moss. He sports a suit by Grady Ervin; she is wearing a Carol Hannah gown and veil. Opposite: The elegant centerpieces overflow with pastel peonies, ranunculus, roses, and filaree; vintage brass birds found on etsy.com hold table numbers.

sweet *Carolina*

The recipe for an unforgettable outdoor fête:
two lovebirds, a thousand lush acres, and a dash of Southern charm.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY Jessica Antola TEXT BY Riann Smith





the sun-dappled ceremony

Clockwise from top left: Guests were driven around the gated property in golf carts. The bride, on the arm of her proud father, makes her entrance at the outdoor ceremony. Katy's mom wears a custom hat for the occasion. The couple offered three signature drinks: kir royales, classic mint juleps, and strawberry soda made with vodka and muddled locally grown fruit.

Most grooms do not have "Shoot an 11-foot alligator" on their pre-wedding to-do list, but when your bride is Katherine Bakker, whose family owns a plantation in South Carolina, hunting for gators is apropos. "It was my first time, but I got one, and we served the meat as an hors d'oeuvre at cocktail hour," says Jeffrey McKee, a Florida native.

A lucky shot, perhaps, or the result of a good old-fashioned adrenaline rush. Jeff, a professional wakeboarder, is known for completing a "900," a perilous two-and-a-half aerial spin. The first time he took Katy, his college girlfriend, out on the water, she quickly won his heart by doing a "360" (a full single spin). And after five years of dating, he proposed in her hometown of Charleston. Katy's parents were in the process of closing on their new home, a 1,000-acre plantation on the Combahee River that's a haven for bald eagles, ospreys, deer, and horses. The couple jumped at the opportunity to hold their April 16, 2011, nuptials on the sprawling grounds.

With a year and a half to plan their celebration, the pair looked to the property for inspiration. "It was once filled with rice fields, so there are birds everywhere. And since I've always loved feathers, it seemed fitting to go with an avian theme," says Katy, an art consultant.

On the big day, the couple exchanged vows before a semicircle of six grand oak trees. Afterward, their 200 guests enjoyed a first course of vegetables and lettuces from the garden, followed by local organic triggerfish and venison. Even the reception tunes had a homegrown twist: "I play drums in a band, and the group we hired invited my bandmates to jam with them to 'September,' by Earth, Wind & Fire," says Jeff. "It was definitely a highlight." Katy's favorite moment occurred minutes before, when guests flooded the dance floor. "I just stood back and watched," she says. "After working out all the little details, I had a picture in my mind of what this day would look like, but I was still blown away."



Clockwise from top left: A quail feather embellishes each save-the-date, and the envelope liners feature bird drawings from an Audubon book. Guests were given rice to toss at the newlyweds—a fitting touch for a celebration on a former rice plantation. Simple, sophisticated invitations hint at the pastel palette. The wedding planners surprised the couple with monogrammed thank-you notes. Reception cards were letterpressed onto silk-backed wood veneer.



the soft touches

Clockwise from top left: The mother-of-the-bride's horse, J. B. (for Jim Beam), gets his photo op. Katy and Jeff's wedding cake (center) features tiers of lemon-raspberry and pistachio, while a smaller cake (left) presents chocolate and orange, and a third offering (right) is fruitcake—a traditional English dessert—made by Katy's British grandmother. Bridesmaids wear feather fascinators with their sherbet-colored gowns. Guests were welcomed with exceptional Southern hospitality: boxes filled with venison sausage and honey from the plantation, Charleston Breakfast tea, and a bottle of wine from the family's Bakker Estates in Mendoza, Argentina.



Katy had the plans sketched for her custom gown a year in advance of the wedding, but she didn't see the finished dress until just six weeks before the big day. Its delicate bodice matches the mood of her bouquet of sweetpeas, roses, peonies, and white feathers.

the romantic reception

Clockwise from top: The tent's dramatic fabric ceiling was inspired by the draping on Katy's dress; "it took a lot of work to construct, but it softened the entire room," she says. *Audubon's Birds of America*: The *Audubon Society Baby Elephant Folio* doubles as a guest book. Quail feathers add whimsy to the boutonnieres.



SOURCES

EVENT PLANNING & DESIGN Kristin Newman Designs (kristinnnewman.com)

CATERING Chef Sean Brock of McCrady's (mccradysrestaurant.com)

FLOWERS, LIGHTING, FURNITURE & DÉCOR Gathering Floral and Event Design (gatheringevents.com)

STATIONERY Sideshow Press (sideshowpress.com)

WEDDING CAKE Wedding Cakes by Jim Smeal (weddingcakesbyjim.com)

TENT & RENTALS Snyder Event Rentals (snydereventrentals.com)

TENT FABRIC INSTALLATION Blossoms Events (blossomsevents.com)

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY Elisabeth Millay Photography (elisabethmillay.com)

GOWN, VEIL & BRIDESMAIDS' DRESSES Carol Hannah (carol-hannah.com)

MENSWEAR & ACCESSORIES Grady Ervin (gradyervin.com)

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The couple set off into wedded bliss—and an epic honeymoon adventure. "Elephants are Katy's favorite animal, but she'd never seen them in the wild. So I surprised her with a 10-day safari in Kenya," says Jeff. "I'll never forget the look on her face."

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