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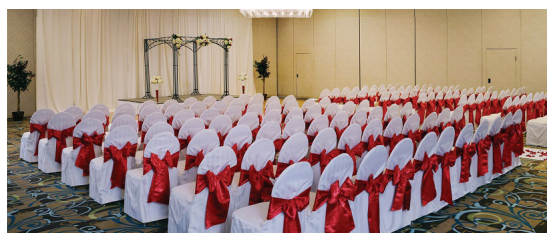
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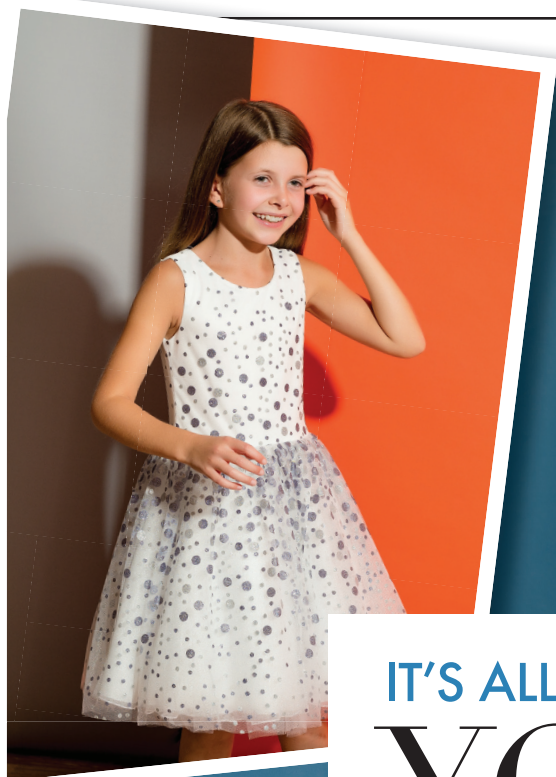
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THE CHANGING FACE OF



MICHAEL HUBER
AND TYLER SYLK

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Engagements

HILARY DANAILOVA | JE FEATURE



WHEN MICHAEL HUBER, a 31-year-old attorney, popped the question to Tyler Sylk at the Jersey Shore last July, the moment was intimate. But they were hardly alone. Waiting to celebrate the moment were a professional photographer and, back at Sylk's family's beach house in Longport, both sets of parents.

As Sylk, 28, recalls, it was a surprise engagement party — but not really.

"I had dropped these hints along the way, like, 'Maybe you should make sure to take nice pictures of the moment,'" recalled the bride-to-be, a clinical trial coordinator at Penn Medicine's Abramson Cancer Center. "And I was hoping if he were to propose, he'd do it there down the shore."

Welcome to the new engagements.

They're shorter in duration — averaging under a year, according to Gina Sole of Philadelphia-based The Wedding Planner — but increasingly emphasize elaborate proposals that feature surprise engagement parties, staged by the groom-to-be and captured by a professional photographer.

The calculus of where to splurge and where to scrimp has clearly shifted for today's Jewish couples. Sylk said a lot of her friends reset family diamonds into engagement rings, a potential four-figure savings that many would rather put toward a photo shoot.

With grandma's solitaire, "nobody can really accuse you of cutting costs, because of the sentiment," Sylk observed.

Meanwhile, engagement photo shoots have gone from optional to part of the standard full-service wedding package. Even booked a la carte, "they're definitely more popular in the last eight to 10 years," said Carina Romano, a co-owner of Love Me Do Photography in Philadelphia.

See ENGAGEMENTS, **page 10**

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Engagements

Continued from Page 8

Most couples spend \$500 to \$700 for a shoot lasting between one and two hours, Romano said. A counterpoint to nuptial formality, engagement pictures capture a couple's dynamic through everyday activities — "drinking coffee, taking a walk, at home with their pets," Romano said.

To save money, some brides will schedule their hair and makeup trial on the same day as the shoot, Romano noted.

"That way they can get the professional hair and makeup without having to spend twice," she explained. Romano has also seen more brides renting gowns from websites like Rent the Runway.

But even couples on a budget don't skimp on photos. "They'll use it for save the dates, on the wedding website," Sole pointed out. "Girls will pay top dollar for photo and video, because after the wedding, that's all they have left."

The informality of an engagement shoot is also an ideal way for couples to "bond" with their photographer and get comfortable posing, said Christiane Lehman of Truly You Events in Philadelphia. "That way you don't have a stranger in the room on your wedding day while you're getting dressed," she said.

As proposals have gotten more elaborate, Lehman said she has begun receiving emails from grooms seeking her services. "There are full Instagram feeds and blogs dedicated to this topic — 'How He Asked' — and it's the first thing your girlfriends ask: 'How did he do it?'" she said. "There's all this pressure to have a great story."

But most grooms take the DIY approach, Lehman said, especially after hearing a planner's fee. She charges \$100 per hour,



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and calculates an average of five to 10 hours to arrange proposal decor and setup, secure a photographer, and corral family and friends for a “spontaneous” engagement fete.

One who planned it alone was Michael Pasadak, a 30-year-old Center City attorney, who had a crowd of 30 well-wishers waiting at City Tap House last July when he asked Samantha Wertheimer to marry him. Both sets of parents, along with friends from as far away as Los Angeles, joined the happy couple for a private reception, Wertheimer recalled.



“It’s really overwhelming, planning a wedding. My friends who haven’t hired a planner wish they had. They say, ‘I wish I’d just gotten fewer flowers.’”

Engagement parties “are more about having champagne and celebrating with friends and family,” said Lehman, who said that in her experience, Jewish families are particularly likely to involve both sets of parents in pre-wedding events.

Families of all persuasions, however, are less likely to turn to a professional for the engagement party, which has grown smaller and less formal over time. With shorter engagements, Sole explained that couples are loath to spend — or make their parents spend — a large sum for a second event within a year.

An engagement party “is the one area where people feel they can save a bit, and they can manage it,” observed Sole, who has owned The Wedding Planner since 2001. Her couples typically invite no more than 100 people, even for a large wedding; the event might take place at a parent’s home or country club, but it’s just as likely to be at a favorite BYOB where the family has enjoyed many a dinner.

Next up: save-the-date cards. Like a lot of modern brides, Wertheimer, a 29-year-old graduate student, decided to cut costs by ordering save-the-dates from Minted.com, a website that was cheaper than her wedding stationer.

“The reality is, it goes on somebody’s fridge, and then it goes in the trash,” said Wertheimer, who describes herself as practical. “We decided not to spend as much on save-the-dates, and spend a little more on the actual invites.”

It may be cheaper cardstock, but paper still rules over email.

“I thought the transition would happen quicker, but my brides and grooms are sticking with tradition,” Sole said. “People like the idea that something is coming into each guest’s home that they can hold onto for the whole year.”

Sylk, who is planning a July wedding at the Barnes Foundation, said that of all the costs that arise during an engagement, hiring a planner — in her case, Lehman of Truly You — may be the most worthwhile.

“It’s really overwhelming, planning a wedding,” Sylk said with a laugh. “My friends who haven’t hired a planner wish they had. They say, ‘I wish I’d just gotten fewer flowers.’” ❤️

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Laurie Segal, Chuckie and Larry Copeland at a Bar Mitzvah rehearsal

Photos by debbie zak cohen photography

AYAD SKIMMING OVER the black letters of the Torah during a Bar Mitzvah or a family gathered under the chuppah at a wedding are images you probably want to always treasure.

Once-in-a-lifetime events, like B'nai Mitzvahs, weddings or special birthdays, should have photos that reflect their significance.

With professional event photography easily costing hundreds — if not thousands — of dollars, you want to make sure you end up with photos you love. According to several local photographers, you should make sure the person you hire is someone you feel comfortable with, available to take your phone calls and is good with people. And, of course, that their style reflects your personal taste in photography.

WHAT TO EXPECT



FROM AN EVENT

Photographer

SELAH MAYA ZIGHELBOIM | JE STAFF

"I love providing a family with photographs that they can love and cherish forever," said Debbie Zak Cohen of debbie zak cohen photography, who said she particularly enjoys photographing B'nai Mitzvahs. "It makes me very happy."

A quick Google search of local photographers will turn up countless choices, so Cohen recommended starting your search by asking friends who they've used for event photographers and pursuing the people they recommend.

Cohen said that a client should make sure the photographer has the highest-quality equipment to capture the best photos and that the client feels comfortable with the photographer.

"It's a very intimate thing, to be photographed, to put your trust in someone who can capture and provide you with what your heart thinks you're going to get," she said.

People have different tastes in how they want their photos to look, so just because a friend recommends a certain photographer doesn't mean that you will also like that photographer.



Nadel Berke Moskowitz wedding

Gal Abahel, owner of Galara Photography, suggests someone looking to hire a photographer should first ask to see samples of the photographer's work. She noted that people have different tastes in how they want their photos to look, so just because a friend recommends a certain photographer doesn't mean that you will also like that photographer or his or her style.

"As a photographer, I do not like to use over-the-top editing," Abahel said. "I create my shots. What happens is I use extra lighting if needed. I manage the location, where I work, so I manage my lighting and my set. ... At an event, I don't use Photoshop."

Abahel then recommends talking about the price. She suggests asking for a starting price and then seeing if there is any wiggle room for paying less. A client, she said, should stick within the price range he or she feels comfortable paying.

Sasha Aleiner, a freelance photographer who shoots events at the Chevra as well as weddings, said clients should find out about a potential photographer's background working with people, how easily the photographer takes directions and how creative they are.

"The photographer should have a good sense of when it's appropriate to interact, and when they really shouldn't be intervening," he said. "A photographer can come in and greet the participants and ask if they care to have their picture taken. Generally, that's the best way to interact."

Abahel has photographed weddings and Bar Mitzvahs, in addition to corporate events, portraits and marketing events, for eight years. Before the event, she likes to schedule a meeting with the client where she can get a sense of the client's vibe and even

See PHOTOGRAPHER, page 14

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Photographer

Continued from Page 13

do a test shoot. At that first meeting, Abahel also prefers to write up a contract.

At that meeting, she gets to know her clients. She uses the information she gathers in her photography.

"Let's say I have clients that are very touchy," Abahel said. "They like to touch each other. They're warm, kissing each other, things like that. I know they will be open to trying different photos. I will do their photos very intimate, very sexy. I will let them touch each other and smile to each other, and I know that in most of the photos they will be very close. If I know my clients are silly, like they love to do faces, I will just let them run around and take them to a playground."

Cohen and Aleiner both like to meet with clients beforehand to get a feel for their clients. They said they want to get a clearer understanding of what exactly the client wants and to work out the logistics.

"What I get when I ask, that varies from 'Get a little bit of everything' to mainly this, this and that, and everything in between," Aleiner said. "Most of the time, I'm basically left to my own judgment to make that decision. What I like to do is get the most clarification to make sure I know that I'm doing what they want most."

Abahel values availability in photographers.

"I would really recommend for the client, if it's a wedding or Bar Mitzvah or any personal event, to make sure you and the photographer [are] on the same page," she said. "If you're not sure about a question, ask again. Call as many times as



“The photographer should have a good sense of when it’s appropriate to interact, and when they really shouldn’t be intervening.”

you need. Make sure the photographer will be able to take those phone calls and provide you with patience, understanding and any answer needed.”

On the day of the event, Abahel makes sure to arrive early. Many clients are nervous at big milestones like weddings, so photographers should be relaxed and try to help out the client, though the client should not expect a photographer to fulfill event planner duties.

Cohen said one of the most important qualities in a photographer comes after the event, in the editing process. She tries to pick out photographs that she herself would feel she looks good in.

For clients, seeing the photos of their events often allows them to relive the experience through another set of eyes.

“I do not like having my photo taken,” Cohen said. “I do not like photographs of myself, so I’m very sensitive to how people will feel when they see their own photograph. For me, I feel as if people are paying me for photos, they’re going to look good. ... I want them to feel good when they see it.” ♥

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Many Motivations for Adult B'NAI MITZVAHS

SELAH MAYA ZIGHELBOIM | JE STAFF



Senior Rabbi Jill Maderer (far left) poses with Congregation Rodeph Shalom's most recent B'nai Mitzvah class. PHOTOS PROVIDED

JUDAISM JUST FELT RIGHT to Julia Engel, who grew up Catholic but converted to Judaism more than two decades ago.

She studied the religion and attended services. She married a Jewish man and had a Jewish family. But there was one element of the Jewish tradition she had never experienced, so when her 10-year-old daughter received the date for her Bat Mitzvah four years ago, Engel started to think that she wanted to have one, too.

"This will bring my journey, maybe, full circle, from where I started 20-some years ago when I was 26 years old, when I wanted to become Jewish as a choice, a Jew by choice," Engel said. "I thought, 'This is it then. I've done everything I'm supposed to do. I've attended; I've studied; I've worshipped; I've lived. Now, I'm going to actually complete it by doing this.'"

For the women and men — though mostly women — who have B'nai Mitzvahs as adults, their reasons for doing so vary. Some, like Engel, converted as adults. Others grew up in families that didn't have a strong connection to their Jewish communities or couldn't afford Hebrew classes. And then, of course, there's that common story of the woman who has a Bat Mitzvah as an adult because the community she belonged to as a child only performed Bar Mitzvahs for boys.

Unlike B'nai Mitzvahs for 12- and 13-year-olds, these adult B'nai Mitzvahs tend to be done as a group, the celebrations tend to be more low-key and the B'nai Mitzvahs themselves bring added perspective to the experience.



Barbara Marx (standing, second from left) with retired Adath Israel Cantor Bernard Lowe (far left), Rabbi Eric Yanoff (far right) and her B'nai Mitzvah class

Congregation Rodeph Shalom has an adult B'nai Mitzvah class whenever there are enough people who have expressed interest in participating, said Rabbi Eli Freedman, which generally happens every few years. Their last class, a group of eight women, had their B'not Mitzvah in March 2017.

Freedman said adult B'nai Mitzvah classes used to be dominated by older women who hadn't had a Bat Mitzvah when they were younger because their communities didn't practice them. Now, that's no longer the case.

"We're seeing less of that," Freedman said. "There's just not as many of those women around. ... What we're seeing more of now is more conversion students."

Converts are now the most common reason for adult B'nai Mitzvahs at Rodeph Shalom, he said, but most of their adult B'nai Mitzvahs are still women because most of the conversions they do are of women.

Despite the changing motivations to have adult B'nai Mitzvahs, women still dominate this custom at other synagogues as well. All 10 people in Barbara Marx's adult B'nai Mitzvah class at Adath Israel in 2014, for example, were women.

Marx never had a Bat Mitzvah as a child because her parents could only afford either piano lessons or Hebrew school, and she was doing well with piano. But as a child, she had conversations with her grandfather about having a Bat Mitzvah one day, and as the years went by, she became more observant.

"When Adath Israel offered the adult Bat Mitzvah classes, it seemed like the opportunity was right," she said. "It was too good to pass up actually."

Studying for her Bat Mitzvah took about eight months. Like most adult B'nai Mitzvahs, the class had their ceremony together. At the end, they were blessed beneath a chuppah held by their adult children. Afterward, they had a kiddush luncheon, where Marx held up a thimble of vodka to her grandfather, who died when she was 11 years old.

"He was the smartest person in the world, or at least in my world," Marx said. "His good opinion of me meant an awful lot."

More recently in January, Melissa Ufberg had what she called a "surprise Bat Mitzvah." After eight months of learning to read Hebrew and trope with Susan Novack, she went to Congregation Adath Jeshurun to read Torah for the first time and found out that her husband had invited her friends and family for an event he had made into her Bat Mitzvah.

As a child, Ufberg didn't have a Bat Mitzvah because her family didn't belong to a synagogue, and she had little Jewish education. Her husband, though, had a strong Jewish upbringing, so they decided they wanted Judaism to be a major part of their home.

Their children attend Perelman Jewish Day School, and seeing them learn Hebrew inspired Ufberg to learn to read Torah. A trip she took to Israel with the Jewish Women's Renaissance Project motivated her as well.

"That really also lit the spark for me to seek out learning and to seek out something that I always felt was missing, and to take the time — because everybody's lives are so busy and everything — but to take the time to do something that I had wanted to do for a long time," Ufberg said.

At the ceremony, Ufberg's friends gifted her with a tallit from Israel that they chipped in to buy.


"I had tears in my eyes when they gave it to me," she said. "It was such a meaningful moment in receiving a tallit of my own. I had needlepointed one for my sons that they'll receive on their Bar Mitzvahs, but I had never imagined that I would have one of my own, that I would have the opportunity to be wearing that."

That evening, her husband gave her a pocket watch that once belonged to his great-great-grandfather. Ufberg said it is a custom in their family to re-gift this same watch to each person in their family who has a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

Having one when she did, Ufberg said, gave the ceremony deeper meaning for her than it might have when she was just 13.

"Being older, you have the perspective of the specialness of the moment and just kind of thinking, Jews all over the world, not everyone has this," she said. "Not everyone is able to openly read Torah and worship as they want. Through the ages, our people haven't, so that really struck me also, that I'm part of this history, this heritage. As a 13-year-old, I might not have appreciated that as much as I would as an adult." ♥

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HILARY DANAILOVA | JE FEATURE

“Bar and Bat Mitzvahs are generally very theme-oriented,” observed Valori Zaslow, a party planning veteran.

When it comes to milestone parties, there are themes — cars, ballet, candy. And then there are *themes*.

Ryan Orlov’s neon baseball reception at Citizens Bank Park surely falls in the latter category. Following his December 2016 Bar Mitzvah at Main Line Reform Temple, the Bala Cynwyd teen was feted with neon cocktails served in neon glasses, and lemonade that flowed out of a neon ice sculpture shaped like Ryan’s name.

Men in neon green neckties sat at tables lit by glow-in-the-dark neon baseballs, as neon mazel tovs blazed on the Jumbotron.

“Bar and Bat Mitzvahs are generally very theme-oriented,” observed Valori Zaslow, a party planning veteran whose Bala Cynwyd-based firm, ReEvent, handled the Orlov reception. While the neon was novel, Zaslow said sports-oriented receptions are a perennial favorite.

This year, unsurprisingly, event planners expect a surge in Eagles parties — not only B’nai Mitzvahs, but also weddings and milestone birthdays.

“We’ve definitely seen a few Eagles cakes already,” said Stephanie Fitzpatrick of Philadelphia-based EBE Events & Entertainment.

See DREAMS, **page 20**



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Dreams

Continued from Page 19

Riding a wave of Philly pride, Philadelphia's mummers are also expected to be ubiquitous, said Fitzpatrick. She credits Eagles center Jason Kelce's memorable Super Bowl parade speech, in full mummers regalia, for jump-starting the vogue.

"Mummers groups are boning up on the *Rocky* and Eagles fight songs," noted Fitzpatrick, who coordinates entertainers as EBE's talent director. "They're being asked for that so much right now."

Philadelphia itself — a city that inspires outsized pride and passion — is a more popular theme than ever, especially following a spate of high-profile events (the Pope's visit, the Democratic National Convention, the Eagles win). "Anytime anyone gets married in Philly, it's nice to do something that's inherent to the city," Zaslow said.

Party favors and out-of-town guest bags have long included



Rose gold, sequins, tall flowers and wooden lanterns highlight a wedding. Photo provided



Wooden "LOVE" sign with floral arch Photo provided

local flavors like Tastykakes and Goldenberg's Peanut Chews. Recently, Zaslow had a copy of the city's iconic "LOVE" sign made for a wedding at the Radnor Valley Country Club, where it was tacked to a tree for the outdoor ceremony.

That wedding, recalled Zaslow, fit into another big trend planners are seeing: organic-tinged nuptials, inspired by farmers markets and all things natural and artisanal. "We're even doing green and woodsy for a Bar Mitzvah cocktail hour," Zaslow said. "It's carrying through to a lot of events."

The dress code may still be formal, but today's reception decor is likely to feature burlap, branches, succulents and river rocks, said Stacey Kesselman, the president and owner of Conshohocken-based Exceptional Events. Especially at weddings, guests in silk and pearls are routinely following hand-carved wooden signs to rough-hewn tables and chairs.

Green, it seems, is everywhere — in the floral arrangements, as a color scheme, and even as a concept. One popular twist is for couples to recycle their wedding bouquets and floral arrangements by donating them to local hospitals. Fitzpatrick arranges to have the blooms picked up overnight so patients wake up to them.

In keeping with the social consciousness, couples are also making charitable donations in lieu of traditional par-

ty favors to cut down on waste. “I’m also seeing a lot more potted plants as opposed to cut flowers, even just for the aisle,” Fitzpatrick observed.

For the younger set, Bar and Bat Mitzvah parties tend to celebrate the individual. Kesselman sees a lot of receptions in the colors of a favorite summer camp, with tables named for “dance, drama, the dome — whatever’s specific to the camp,” she said.

Technology is behind some of the newest themes. In the era of Instagram poses and YouTube contouring videos, fashion is having a moment — with Gucci logos in the photo booth, “paparazzi” chasing the Bat Mitzvah girl, and red carpets leading into the reception.

Video game schemes are more of a hit with boys, planners said. Zaslow has designed tables with app screen centerpieces and table cards shaped like iPhones (with personalized “text messages” indicating where to sit).

“Something I’m seeing more and more for Bar and Bat Mitzvahs is a theme that’s a play on the kid’s name or initial — a pun that ties the night together and is unique to their child,” Fitzpatrick said.

That’s how Ava Schrier of Blue Bell ended up celebrating her February Bat Mitzvah with “One ExtrAVAgant Night,” incorporating her first name as a theme designed by Fitzpatrick.



Examples of theme decor
Photos provided

What does One extrAVAgant Night look like? At the Bluestone Country Club, it meant a room bathed in Caribbean blue, with what Ava’s mother Kim Schrier called “jaw-dropping centerpieces,” glittering jewels and sparkly blue stones everywhere. “Afterward, everyone said it truly was an extravagant night,” she recalled.

Names are popular because they make natural logos, and B’nai Mitzvah logos are suddenly *de rigeur*. It may sound weird to anyone over 35, but teens today cap off their rite of passage with a custom-designed stamp, imprinted on everything from water bottles and cocktail napkins to kippot and tote bags.

“You have to think about how your logo will fit on a sweatshirt, how many colors it should be,” recalled Kim Schrier of the hours she and Ava spent combing Pinterest for inspiration. “Every color is a cost, and if you do a girlier logo, what do you put on the boys’ shirts?”

Against a backdrop of social media “likes,” such pressure to be unique can be overwhelming, Zaslow said. And not everyone plays an instrument, is crazy about shopping or cheers for a sports team. For those clients, Zaslow gently steers the conversation toward favorite colors or initials.

“Trying to define what you’re going to be for the rest of your life — that’s a lot of pressure for a 13-year-old, and even for a bride,” the planner noted. “It’s fine just to make it simple, understated and beautiful.” ♥



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'Inseparable' Since the Start

What Started as the Intention for a Small Wedding Led to More Than 150 Guests

RACHEL KURLAND | JE STAFF

WEDDING PLANNING can be a daunting task, but Jada Littman Eldrich relatively knew what she wanted from the start.

Namely, Samuel Eldrich.

But finding each other first was a tangled web of Jewish geography.

Jada's close friend Stephanie Ice reached out to her cousin hoping to find a nice Jewish boy for her to date — as much as she enjoyed her friend as a third wheel, she wanted to go on double dates with her. Ice's cousin worked at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, who reached out to her coworker. That coworker was Sam's cousin.

Sam was still finishing medical school at Tulane University. During his last couple of months there, they chatted for hours and hours over the phone, texted and FaceTimed each other.

Sam (originally from Connecticut) subsequently moved to Philadelphia to start his residency, and the pair finally met face-to-face for the first time in June 2015. It was *besht*.

Fast-forward to January 2017: When Jada was out to brunch with her girlfriends one morning, she returned back to the home she shared with Sam to discover a surprise.

"He left me a note in our foyer area asking me to meet him where the two of us first told each other that we loved each other," she recalled, which was at Three Bears Park in Society Hill.

Sam placed rose petals around the Three Bears statue and handed Jada a box with her name on it.

"I opened it up and it was a View-Master," she said. "Each slide had a different picture of us with a caption leading up to 'Will you marry me?' at the end. I turned around and he was on one knee."



Jada laid out the ins and outs of the anatomy of her wedding day, of which the ceremony and reception were held at the National Museum of American Jewish History on Nov. 4, 2017, officiated by Rabbi Elyssa Cherney.

They chose the NMAJH as their venue because they wanted to stay in the city, which would also allow their guests to learn more about Philly — right on Independence Mall — and also showcases why the couple love it so much. Although it rained that evening, Jada said she was glad to bring more Jewish awareness to the city through the venue.

"NMAJH was a blank canvas. You can do anything with the space that they give you," she said.

As they were initially touring the venue, Jada got a notification that Beyoncé announced she was pregnant with twins (Feb. 1, 2017) — that was all the divine inspiration she needed to lock down her wedding space, she laughed.

"I thought that was *besht* right there."

The museum offers several options for catering (they chose Sage Catered Events out of Berwyn). It's also BYO, which helped with liquor costs.

Although a bit unorthodox, Jada was especially excited that the event floor had 10 bathrooms, for both men and women. For a guest list of 150 people, that is an important factor, considering their elderly relatives.

"I just didn't want people cutting out their time of eating, dancing, drinking," she said. One of the first major deci-



sions the couple planned was the color scheme: They settled on green (Jada's favorite color), blue (Sam's favorite color), and purple (Jada's late grandmother's favorite color).

"We didn't want the typical fall [colors] — maroon, champagne."

They kept it simple, excluding any other theme — "we had our Bar and Bat Mitzvahs; we had our themes there," she laughed. "We just wanted it to be fun."

Picking a DJ was easy, too, because Jada was set on one company before Sam even proposed.

Wired Up Entertainment, based in Wilmington, Del., where Jada grew up, is owned by her close friend; they went to JCC day care and grew up together.

Their cake was from Bredenbeck's Bakery in Chestnut Hill: a simple French dot and quilt design. After hors d'oeuvres, guests chose from either filet mignon, chicken, salmon or butternut squash ravioli.

Ryan Young Studio provided photography and videography.

Jada surprised herself while dress shopping. She wanted a fit and flare, mermaid silhouette style — "to show off the wedding diet body" — but ultimately chose a princess-style ball gown from Sabrina Ann Couture in West Chester to flatter her 5'2" frame.

It paired well with her late maternal grandmother's original

wedding veil, worn on July 3, 1949, as well as her choice of shoe, a pair of Badgley Mischka gardenia pumps (her late maternal grandmother's favorite flower).

She changed into a shorter dress at the reception to dance in, a sequin dress from Bernsteins Fashions in Edison, N.J., while Sam wore a dapper tuxedo from Boyds Philadelphia.

"I was never the type of girl who dreamt of a big wedding or wedding day," she admitted, and neither did Sam. But he's an only child, and three of their grandparents are in their 90s, so they decided to go all out.

Her favorite moment of the evening was seeing Sam's reaction when he saw her in her dress for the first time. And after the father-daughter dance, she surprised her grandfather with one, too, to Bette Midler's "Wind Beneath My Wings."

Since they returned back to their Washington Square home after a honeymoon in the Galapagos Islands, they said married life has been a breeze.

"We've been inseparable since the day we met," she said. ❤️

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PHOTOS: RYAN YOUNG STUDIOS

EVENT PLANNING DONE EASY — FROM YOUR SMARTPHONE



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RACHEL KURLAND | JE STAFF

PARTY PLANNING is *exhausting* — and when you're drowning in invitations, reservations and rental fees, it's hard to imagine an end in sight.

Many have opted for the DIY approach in the digital age, which is clearly beneficial if you're trying to save time and money. There are endless instructions, ideas, tips or blogs on the subject of organization, plus doing it yourself allows your creativity to flow — while your budget doesn't.

Although the DIY approach promotes planning with ease, we could all still use a little structure. Look no further than these event planning and management apps to juggle all the tools that entail scheduling your celebratory events, from weddings to Bar Mitzvahs and everything in between.

START WITH INSPIRATION

OK, this may not seem like a *planning* app, per se, but for any party, wedding, Bar Mitzvah or the like, Pinterest should be your first stop.

With the unfathomable accessibility to options in this digital library at your fingertips, you can't go wrong in gathering creative inspiration for ideas, tips, recipes and how-tos for your own soiree.

Elaborate hairstyle? Pin it. DIY crafts and snacks for kids? Pin it. Cute puppy picture? Irrelevant, but pin it anyway.

To keep things under wraps, you can make some boards — for those who aren't frequent pinners, boards can be labeled whatever you like, and you pin pictures and links to a "board" of similar interests to keep them organized — private, so no one else can see your party plans.

Pinterest: Free. Available on web, iOS and Android.

GET ORGANIZED IN ONE PLACE

It's difficult to narrow down just one planning accessory when there are so many excellent products out there. These apps provide the foundation for your party, scheduling everything you need to do from start to finish.

Planning Pod stores all your notes, documents, spreadsheets and related emails in one place for simple and organized accessibility. It's equipped with productivity tools to help you manage budgets, schedules, checklists and calendars.

It's great for wedding planning: You can add multiple people to your Planning Pod event, so parents and future in-laws living elsewhere states can stay up-to-date on floor plans, guest lists and websites.

Similar to Planning Pod, as well as aspects of Google Drive or Dropbox, is Evernote, which is another great app to store all of your notes, as well as research you've done for venues or travel itineraries, and it can easily be shared with others and synced to different devices.

Asana is a good option to outline your daily or monthly tasks, highlighting how high a priority each are.

Super Planner is a must-have planning tool for the more business-oriented events. It calculates for you how much of one item you need based on your crowd size. That includes understanding pricing, arranging tables and sizes based on room capacity, or catering based on the number of attendees.

Planning Pod: Free 30-day trial; monthly packages range from \$19 to \$99, depending on how many events you'd like to manage at one time. Available on web, iOS and Android.

Evernote: Free; premium plans available for \$34.99/year or \$69.99/year. Available on web, iOS and Android.

Asana: Basic version is free; premium plan \$9.99/month. Available on web, iOS and Android.

Super Planner: \$9.99. Available on iOS and Android.

TURN THE TABLES

One of the most irritating party planning particulars is seating arrangements. Aunt Suzy can't be seen next to Cousin Cathy; the Steins are in a feud with the Sterns; Rebecca is suddenly gluten-free and can't be around anything that remotely smells edible. But with Social Tables, you can visualize and track arrangements in 3-D models. You create a seating chart in digital layouts and schematics of the venue, with customizable table colors and chair sizes. You can also assign menu preferences. Top Table Planner also helps you visualize seating arrangements on the planner's end.

Social Tables: Free. Available on web, iOS and Android.

Top Table Planner: Free trial; \$20 to \$80 yearlong packages. Available on web, iOS and Android.

COLLECT THE MEMORIES

Candid photos are often the best ones from a celebration. Your friends and family have the ability to comfortably be right up in the action. But tracking down photos later on different social networking sites can be a hassle. If attendees download Capsule, they can upload all of the photos from the evening into a shared, public "capsule" online for easy reviewing and tagging later.

Capsule: Basic package is free; professional package has a 30-day free trial, then \$12/month per user. Available on iOS and Android.

CHECKLIST AFICIONADO

If you're anxiety-prone to to-do lists — or checking off boxes gives you a fulfilled high — Trello makes the interface simple and satisfying. You create a board, prioritizing your daily tasks. Tasks can be dragged to different sections when done or held for later. It's the most visual way to collect all of your party plan-

ning responsibilities in one place. You can also dive deeper into your workflow, adding notes, contacts, comments and attachments to a single Trello card.

24me is also great for organization: During all the chaos that goes into planning an event — whether it lasts a month or a year — everyday things can fall through the cracks. 24me is a daily schedule manager to remind you to pay bills or simply wish your special someone a happy birthday.

Trello: Free. Available on web, iOS and Android.

24me: Free. Available on web, iOS and Android.

DO YOU HEAR THE PEOPLE SING?

To save some money, DIYers have opted for being their own DJs at events. Apps like Spotify and Pandora make it simple to create your own playlists to plug in at the party. As an added bonus, you can be the one who decides how many times to play “YMCA” (hint: zero).

And when your elderly relatives inevitably approach the DJ kvetching that the music is too loud, you can be the judge of that. Decibel Ultra measures volume and determines the noise level compared to an average benchmark, so you can clapback with some facts.

Spotify: Free; subscription \$9.99/month. Available on web, iOS and Android.

Pandora: Free; subscription options for \$4.99/month or \$9.99/month. Available on web, iOS and Android.

Decibel Ultra: Free. Available on iOS.

DRIPPIN’ IN FINANCE

As taboo as it is, let’s talk finances. A lot goes into big parties, from renting big elements like the venue to small ones like silverware. Fudget, a budget planner tracker app, is a simple way to manage those complex charges. It adds and subtracts your monthly bills, and you can add in other factors based on the income you have left.

And to keep all your receipts in one place, ScannerPro or CamScanner eliminate the paper clutter. Simply take a picture in the app, and it converts the receipt into a PDF that can be emailed and saved.

Fudget: Free. Available on iOS and Android.

ScannerPro: \$3.99. Available on iOS.

CamScanner: Basic account is free; premium and business accounts are \$4.99 and \$6.99, respectively. Available on iOS and Android.

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You see her crossing the dance floor. She looks familiar; you know she’s a distant cousin who you only see every few years. But what’s her name? Namerick uses repetition and mnemonics to keep track of names of people you meet at parties, so you’ll never forget. Ninety-nine cents well spent.

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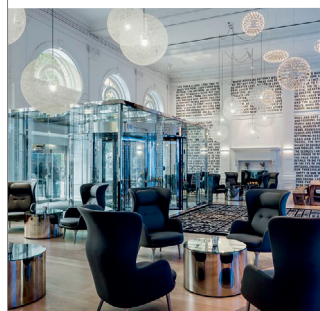
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YOUR PALMS are sweaty.
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No, you're not Eminem; you're a probably-a-little-bit-nervous 13-year-old about to give your speech at your Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

Going in front of an audience and giving a speech can be daunting. But with the right guidance, you can deliver a *d'var Torah* that is thought-provoking and personalized.

When it came time for the October 2017 Bar Mitzvah of her son, Josh Krain Sasson, Abbey Krain helped him write his speech, as she had for her two other children. For her, it was important that it not only included nuggets of wisdom he gleaned from his Torah portion that he could impart on his audience, but also included bits of himself.

His Bar Mitzvah fell during Sukkot, the holiday that focuses on the harvest and agriculture — a fitting holiday for Josh, as he is an avid gardener. In his speech, he tied in his Torah portion with not only his mitzvah project — in which he worked with the Jewish Farm School and Philly Farm Crew — but also an ancient Jewish fable in which two brothers secretly deposited bits of their harvests to the other's bounty to ensure they were well-fed until they discovered it was his brother adding to the pile.

Josh, however, changed the story in his speech to a brother and sister to allow the story to apply to more than just two men. And he has a sister, so it made it more personal, his mother added.

"He spent really the bulk of it making it personal and talking about the agricultural tie-in of Sukkot and his hobby of gardening," said Krain, executive director of Temple Shalom in Broomall, "and how important it is in this day and age to realize there are actually people in our own backyard that don't have enough food."

His two older siblings also incorporated stories in their speeches, which Krain said was a cool way to integrate ancient Jewish storytelling into today's world.

For Krain, who does Bar and Bat Mitzvah tutoring, the importance of the speech lies in the skills and lessons it teaches.

"One is the opportunity for the child to have a chance to both practice and to do public speaking," she said. "At that age, it helps with maturity level and it gives the child — whatever level they're at — a little confidence their peers who don't have a Bar Mitzvah don't get the opportunity to have because there are very little chances for public speaking like that when you're a 13-year-old."

Another is the chance to connect more deeply with the text. While each Torah portion is "chock full" of information, the student has a chance to take the bits they connect to and build on it in his or her speech.

"Something else that's important about the speech is actually the learning opportunity," she said. "Sitting down with mom and dad or your teacher or your rabbi, whoever it may be, and actually looking at the part and reading it and understanding it."

It's also a chance for the student to see what they can understand from the ancient viewpoint and if they can bring it into today's world, she said.

There are many lessons to be learned from the process of writing the speech — namely, that once you write it, it isn't quite done. They learn the editing process and how to tweak their ideas into the finished product.

And of course, the biggest hurdle of all: delivering the speech.

Josh worked with his rabbi at Tiferet Bet Israel to learn delivery techniques and bring animation into his speech. At home, he would practice these tools — often pontificating on their Ping-Pong table, Krain said.

But in the end, it teaches the students "when you put your mind to something, you can do it."

For Senior Rabbi Lance J. Sussman of Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel, there are five elements to a good *d'var Torah*.

"The speech demonstrates to the student, their family and the congregation they've invited that they understand what they're reading, that they're able to explain it and interpret it, that it means something to them," he said. "I find that people do listen. It's one of the only parts of a service where the student is reading that's not in the book, so to speak, so people pay attention."

And he coaches the students to be "loud, slow and clear" so they don't speed through it at "200 miles per hour."

The synagogue clergy divvies up duties when working with students for their Bar or Bat Mitzvahs. Sussman helps them write their speeches, of which he has helped write more than 1,000. But for him, it's fun because "every kid is different and every family is different."

He broke down *d'var Torah* elements:

1. Citation.

He helps the student explore where their section of the parsha is found in the Torah, which book it appears in, what's special about that week's parsha, and questions like that.

2. Summary.

The student summarizes the material they're reading and the context in which it appears in the parsha. Is it during Exodus? Is it during Abraham's journey in the Land of Canaan? Sussman likened this part to a "mini book review" in which the student gives an overall idea of the content.

3. Theme.

"I ask the kids, 'What do you think the Torah is teaching you?' And this is interpretive; there's no right or wrong," Sussman explained. "There's interesting and very interesting. And this is where they might do a little research into commentaries and Midrash and things like that."

4. Application.

Sussman asks the students to think about, "What does it mean to me?"

"I then ask them to think of situations in their own young lives or in their family or something they're deeply aware of and to make an application of the Torah's teaching to their own life and why that's important."

5. A report on the mitzvah project. (This a bit self-explanatory.)

The *d'var Torah* is one of three speeches the students give at KI, where they lead the whole service for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. The first is a welcome statement, another is a statement of thanks given during the section in which prayers of thanks are recited. The third is the *d'var Torah*.

(And even though they aren't leading the service, parents aren't off the hook. They give a short speech, too.)

For the students, the *d'var Torah* is an obstacle to overcome — and they want to do it well.

"At the end of the day, they are putting themselves on display before their entire world," Sussman said, "and even if it takes a little work to get to it, at the end of the day, all the kids want to do a good job on *d'var Torah*, and that helps them connect to the tradition, so it's a win." ♥

SPEECHES Present Learning Opportunity for Bar and Bat Mitzvahs

MARISSA STERN | JE STAFF



Josh Krain Sasson volunteers at an orchard with Teens 4 Good.

Photo provided

Dana Winiarz
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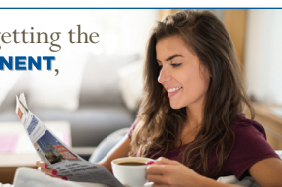
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