



Photo: Mike Shoup



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A destination wedding close to home

By HEATHER MCLEAN WEIDERHOEFT

A midnight blue sky filled with the brightest stars, fields blanketed with bluebonnets as far as the eye can see, and hillsides and valleys that are home to historic properties, Texas livestock, bubbling creeks and rivers, and some of the most welcoming people you'll ever meet. This lovely image isn't imaginary-

it's Washington County, Texas, an ideal location for an unbelievably romantic wedding.

Washington County is about an hour northwest of Houston and includes the towns of Brenham, Chappell Hill, Independence, Washington and Burton. It is the perfect setting for the bride and groom who have their hearts set on holding a wedding and reception that's not quite in Houston, but close enough to make pre-wedding visits and planning feasible, as well as a place that has a truly romantic ambience for the wedding, while also offering guests an array of activities before and after the ceremony. Steeped in Texas History, Washington County is the birthplace of the Republic of Texas and its first capital, Washington-on-the-Brazos. Though no longer the state capital, this idyllic location is in the family history book for many couples who began their lifelong journey together in Washington County.

Another advantage of Washington County is that a couple has numerous choices for the wedding, reception and rehearsal. If you've dreamed of feeling like a true Southern Belle for a day, consider Lillian Farms Bed & Breakfast. This charming B&B is set on a 230-acre cattle ranch with a Victorian homestead that may look like it's from another era but was recently constructed. And the house, like all the amenities on the property, has many modern conveniences and can host weddings with as few as five guests to as many as 300. "Lillian Farms is the ultimate destination wedding," explains owner Barbara Segal. "Many of our couples and their families spend several days with us before the wedding so they can truly enjoy one another." Most weddings at Lillian Farms are outdoors while some brides choose to have an intimate ceremony on the wrap-around porch. Receptions can be held

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under a Texas sky or a beautiful tent. In 2007, construction will be completed on an amazing ballroom that will be on the second story of the stables which will include cathedral ceilings and picture windows overlooking the entire property. Lillian Farms' brides also have the option of having their wedding reception catered by The Chef's Table of Houston.

The true spirit of Texas comes alive for the bride and groom who say their "I Do's" on the land where the founding fathers of



Texas declared independence on March 2, 1836. Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site sits on 290 acres along the Brazos River and has recently undergone \$6 million in enhancements and renovations to the property. Couples selecting this destination could have their wedding in the Washington-on-the-Brazos amphitheater, which can seat up to 2,000, and have their reception in the recently renovated conference center that can seat 250 guests for a banquet-style reception.

Another truly historic, stately location for a wedding is the Ciddings-Stone Mansion that dates from 1869 and is located high atop a hillside. Fully restored in the 1970s, the Mansion has been cited as one of the 10

best examples of 19th century residential architecture and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Today, it serves as an elegant setting for weddings and receptions. Picture yourself arriving in a horse-drawn carriage as your guests wait on the front portico, its original beveled-glass grand entrance sparkling in the background. Inside, original hardwood flooring and fireplaces, as well as lace panels on the large windows, provide a dramatic setting.

Seated on more than 1,800 acres in Lonesome Pines and surrounded by scenic rolling hills is Texas Ranch Life. This acreage has been a popular locale since 1823 when it was originally settled by one of Stephen F.

Austin's "old 300." Your guests will certainly enjoy the amazing Texas wildlife that includes quarter horses, American bison and one of the country's largest registered Texas Longhorn herds. At Texas Ranch Life, you have several choices for your historic wedding. A chapel, which was originally built as a country church in 1920 with wood floors and beaded walls and ceilings, is a perfect choice for an intimate wedding with fewer than 80 guests. If you

prefer an outdoor wedding that can accommodate a larger ceremony, consider an outdoor wedding in The Ranch's oak grove that sits atop a hill with a truly breathtaking view. The Ranch also has accommodations for up to 50 overnight guests who can enjoy original artwork, German stenciling, antiques and primitive Texas pieces.

Another excellent choice for a bride who wants a true Texas feel to her wedding is the Mariposa Ranch Bed & Breakfast. This 100-acre ranch has hosted weddings from as small as two guests to a larger gathering of 400. "We have an on-site antique chapel and recently completed a 2,600-square-foot pavilion adjacent to the chapel that features two outdoor fireplaces," explains

Mariposa's Johnna Chamberlain. From our gazebo, the bridal couple will enjoy breathtaking views of the hills of Washington County. To help with the planning, we have a wedding coordinator/event planner on staff who can help with every detail of the day. We also have eleven accommodations on site that will house up to 40 guests."

A bride who desires a taste of European elegance can find her heart's desire at Washington County's Inn at Dos Brisas. From the Inn's two wine cellars that have a selection that will complement any cuisine to the beautifully appointed guest-quarters and dining room, the Inn at Dos Brisas has a uniquely serene atmosphere that lends itself to sophisticated weddings. Meals are classically French, yet are imaginative as each dish is enhanced with herbs and produce from the Inn's own organic farm. Get away from it all as you take an early-morning horseback ride with your beloved or have specialty spa services in the privacy of your own casita.

For the gardening enthusiast whose day would be perfect among a bevy of flora, the Antique Rose Emporium's amazing garden featuring roses, perennials and native plants may be an outstanding choice. The grounds

There are plenty of bed & breakfasts that can host your guests.

feature a Chapel, Pavilion, Champneys' Green (reception house) and a gazebo. The chapel includes an English stained-glass transom that is more than 100 years old while the interior includes vaulted ceilings and gothic windows. Champneys' Green is an elegant choice for intimate weddings, receptions and rehearsal dinners. The property's Pavilion has an etched and stained concrete floor that can accommodate approximately 180 guests for a seated dinner—slightly less if a dance floor is included under the covered area. And what bride and groom wouldn't enjoy having their guests throw fragrant rose petals from the Antique Rose Emporium on them as they dash away for their honeymoon?

DREAM A LITTLE DREAM

No matter what fantastic locale you select for your Washington County wedding, there are plenty of bed & breakfasts that could host as many of your guests who want to extend their time in this lovely region. Far View: A Bed and Breakfast Estate is a Texas

Recorded Historic Landmark that sits on two acres. It features stately trees and manicured grounds, while each of your guests would enjoy the comforts of this B&B's elegant rooms.

Built in 1923, the beautifully restored Ingleside Bed & Breakfast is housed on Brenham's Main Street, just a few steps from Historic Downtown Brenham. Ingleside focuses on providing each guest with true Southern hospitality in a serene environment that includes a gourmet breakfast every day.

Another option is the Ant Street Inn Bed & Breakfast – a truly first-class boutique hotel featuring 14 guest rooms with both modern amenities and Southern ambience.

FINE DINING CHOICES

While many locales do offer on-site catering services, Washington County brides have many other choices for their receptions and rehearsal dinners. One of the region's most renowned caterers is Design II fine catered cuisine. Not only will your reception or rehearsal dinner guests enjoy a superbly prepared meal but Design II also offers brides exquisite floral arrangements, rentals, including tables, tents and linens, as



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well as trained service staff.

For a unique rehearsal dinner, consider the Brazos Belle—a true Country-French Restaurant located in a building that has been a part of Washington County since 1875 when it originally was known as the Steiner-Dallmeyer General Store. The proprietor and chef, Andre Delacroix, has created specialty recipes that include elements of traditional French cooking, such as fresh Salmon, grilled beef and lamb and crusty breads, as well as unique tastes that every Texan is sure to enjoy.

ENJOYING WASHINGTON
COUNTY

Your guests who travel to Washington County may want to arrive a few days before your nuptials or extend their stay after you've departed for your honeymoon to enjoy the sites of Washington County. In

addition to the rugged beauty of the Texas landscape that is evident as soon as one enters the County, there are many activities to explore.

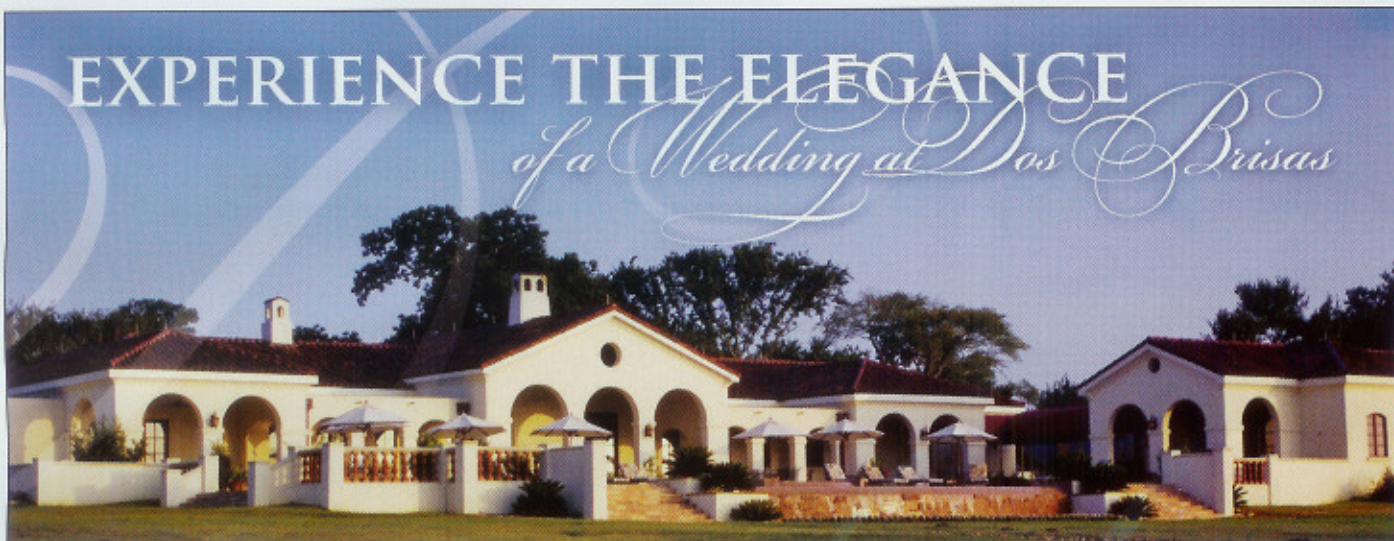
Not only do the famous cows think Brenham is heaven, but after a tour of the Blue Bell Creamery, your guests will too, as they enjoy a scoop of Buttered Pecan in the Blue Bell Country Store and Ice Cream Parlor.

For the young, or young at heart, consider a trip to the Monastery of St. Clare where the Franciscan Poor Clare nuns support this monastery by raising miniature horses and selling arts and crafts in their Art Barn.

Learn the history of the most unique state in the Union with a visit to Washington-on-

the-Brazos or at the Brenham Heritage Museum. The Chappell Hill Historic District includes a one-of-a-kind visitor's center in the restored Provident Baptist Church Parsonage. It also has a museum featuring Swearingen folk art and local historical exhibits as well as century-old churches and the Masonic Cemetery. And for the shopper in the crowd, Washington County has a plethora of antique stores, unique gift shops, galleries, and a delightful farmers' market.

Washington County's picture-perfect landscape, exquisite choices of wedding and reception locales and the just-right mix of modern-day and traditional amenities is certain to create a wedding that no one will soon forget. When two lives become one deep in the heart of Texas in Washington County, it's sure to be the beginning of a true happily ever after.



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Upholding the tradition and European traditions of grand estates and ranches, the Inn at Dos Brisas offers 330 acres of horse-filled pasture views, Heirloom Rose Gardens, garden terraces, luxury casitas, an intimate 8,000 bottle wine cellar and a five-star restaurant. For unforgettable weddings, receptions, rehearsal dinners and more.

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