

Simple Extravagance

Keren Lifrak is the owner, event planner and designer behind Keren Lifrak Weddings and Special Events. Keren has produced numerous special events in New York, Sarasota and Tel-Aviv, at celebrated venues such as Madame Tussauds wax museum, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and the Dakota and Pratt Mansions. **COMPILED BY SARAH WALCH**

With the Sarasota Film Festival right around the corner, I was sitting at the drafting table with my partner in crime Kim Miele, figuring out how to make this year's festival events glamorous and exciting. More importantly, how were we going to create more with less? It's no secret that the economy is not what it used to be and it's always a Catch-22. On one hand, the clients and board members want to see us be responsible with the modest funds we are given by making each dollar count. I also want to not appear too flashy when so many people are living paycheck to paycheck. On the other hand, many patrons arrive at these events hoping to see the stars, experience the red carpet and everything "Hollywood" that goes along with it.

So, the goal in mind: simple extravagance. Contradiction in terms? Perhaps. Or perhaps a new term for new times. First things first: prioritize. This applies to weddings and private parties just as much as it does to large-scale festivals. While it seems like an obvious first step, strangely enough this stage is often overlooked due to big dreams and too many hands stirring the pot. When dealing with brides, in order to avoid confusion and disagreements down the road, here's what I always suggest: As a bride, take an hour for yourself (not with the mothers and the girlfriends drizzling their own vision onto your special day) and create your dream wish list. And dream big. Then, list the three to five things that are most important. No one bride is alike. For one person it's the venue, for another it's the food. Ideally, we want it all but reality and budgets often dictate otherwise. The sooner you are able to mesh your dream with reality, the sooner you will be able to come up with the right plan for you and you will feel a sense of relief and accomplishment.

Find a beautiful venue. And when I say beautiful, I mean the kind of venue that already has so much going for it in the setting alone that it won't require much embellishment on your end. Something like the Sarasota Yacht Club, with its clean, contemporary lines and white sails or the Ringling Museum with its striking, classic architecture that might require less decoration. Another option is turning 180 degrees in the other direction and finding a location that is inexpensive, or even free—be it a warehouse or parking lot—and celebrating its uniqueness with the latest trend, contemporary meets nature. Mix a selection of white contemporary table lamps with some herb or cactus boxes as centerpieces, add a dash of industrial touches in a raw space and you've created a unique statement.



This leads me to the next point: decorations. I'm in do-it-yourself mode these days. You would be amazed at your own ability to come up with new creative ideas when you absolutely must be resourceful. It's like when you feel like stopping for ice cream and realize you have no cash on you, but suddenly remember that you saw some change lying under the seat of your car. The principle is the same—allow yourself to be creative and unique and I promise you that solutions will mysteriously appear. It's also always good to ask the advice of family and friends. You may be surprised to find where brilliant ideas will come from. As I'm a big fan of recycling, I immediately think of what I can reuse, redress and repaint. Unique centerpieces can be a great draw of attention (and a great icebreaker if you've been seated next to a boring guest). Here are a few ideas for commonly found objects:

ONE Take a simple white ceramic vase with flowers and dress it up with colorful rubber bands—yes, the kind you use in your office. You can pick one or two colors, or mix them all up. Stretch them in linear patterns or cross them at fun angles and you have a simple vase turned into a striking little piece of art.

TWO If you have a theme in mind, find an object that stands on its own base, like a globe or a large chalice, and then glue gun other objects to it that represent the theme. For example, in 2010 I used the Sarasota Film Festival's two-dimensional "golden face" logo as an anchor and glued film related objects onto a wig mannequin and voila—a fun centerpiece for the kids' event.

THREE People underestimate the power of paper. Take plain white (or colorful) paper, crush it into a ball (you can do this in varying sizes), thread a string through it and hang dozens of them from the ceiling in different heights to create a giant mobile effect. You would be astonished at the whimsical and pretty outcome.

FOUR Lastly—candles, candles, candles. It's an item you can find anywhere and they are sure to change the mood with very little cost. Whether they are spread, stacked, tall, short, white or colorful, they're always a bright addition to an event.

FIVE One last point: add a dash of special entertainment to your event, even if it's only for 20 minutes, but something extraordinary that people haven't seen before.

As the sayings go, sometimes less is more and one man's trash is another man's treasure. Now more than ever is the time to embrace it. You will be amazed at what creativity you have hidden inside you when it's essential that you seek it. ■