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LIGHTS



■ When Winfrey Hill proposed to Kesha Harris, she already knew exactly where she wanted to get married – under the pergola in Duke Gardens, the same place her parents stood when they were married.



PHOTO BY JERRY DILLARD | www.dillardstudios.net

Say ‘I do’ in Durham

Brides and wedding planners on why our city is the best place to tie the knot

By Eleanor-Scott Davis

When **Winfrey Hill** proposed to his then-girlfriend, **Kesha Harris**, she said yes – but with one stipulation.

The condition that Durham-born-and-raised Kesha placed on Winfrey was that if they were going to be married, they had to do it standing in the same place her parents stood when they were married: under the pergola in **Duke Gardens**. Winfrey agreed, and on a sunny day in June, the two were married with a reception following at the **Millennium Hotel**.

But natives are not the only ones choosing to wed in our great city. Neither **Ariane Reinhart** nor her husband-to-be, **Vlad Kharaz**, called Durham home, nor did they plan to. However, that didn't stop them from throwing a Bull City wedding for the ages. And they owe it all to a grumbling stomach.

Ariane, who splits her time living in New York City and Chicago, was in town working for the **American Dance Festival** – her father is ADF Director **Charles Reinhart** – when it occurred to her that she had completely forgotten to eat lunch. “I wanted to try [the café] at the **Nasher**, and as I was walking



PHOTO BY JERRY DILLARD | www.dillardstudios.net

■ For Kesha Harris, this Duke Gardens wedding was the fulfillment of a long-held wish – and perhaps the start of a family tradition.

back through the main hall, I realized I was standing in the most beautiful space.” Although she had not originally considered Durham in her wedding plans, she thinks of it as a partial home because, she says, “I have spent every summer of my life in Durham since 1978.”

Ariane wanted a wedding venue where she could hold the ceremony and reception in the same space, which, due to the museum’s publicly open hours, made the Nasher an impossibility. But Ariane was already hooked on Durham. And the first visit she made with Vlad to **Bay 7** on the **American Tobacco Campus** sealed the fate of their wedding. “I walked in the door and said, “This is it. We have to get married here.”

Ariane says one reason that she chose Durham over one of her home cities is that she wanted her wedding “to be a whole weekend experience, rather than just a one-night event.” Many of the couple’s friends are foodies, so, to get them excited about

their trip to Durham, Ariane sent them all copies of *The New York Times* article about our bustling food scene. Ariane adds, “All of our guests said it was the best wedding they had ever been to, and everyone loved Durham.”

Love, Locally

Amanda Scott, an event specialist and owner of **A Swanky Affair** (www.aswankyaffairnc.com), planned Ariane and Vlad’s wedding. She says many couples are looking for a distinctly local feel for their big day. “People are enjoying the renaissance of downtown,” she says. “Instead of going for a fancy hotel, many couples are going for downtown Durham.”

An all-inclusive venue for couples seeking that distinctive downtown vibe is **The Cotton Room** at **Golden Belt** (www.thecottonroomdurham.com). Co-owner **Michelle Aldred** says, “People who come to our venue are less traditional, but they are

very loyal to Durham. We are finding a lot of people who want their weddings to be all Durham.” A couple hosting their wedding reception at The Cotton Room this spring used an illustration of the Durham skyline for their save-the-date card. The resulting effect is a bold ode to Durham, which serves as a creative way to get guests just as excited about the weekend’s destination as they are about the weekend’s events.

Giving your wedding a local twist can be as easy as using local vendors. Michelle loves working with **Tre Bella** (www.trebellabridal.com), a Durham company run by three sisters that offers everything from couture wedding gowns, to flowers, to gifts for your bridesmaids. Michelle says, “For three sisters to all be so talented is amazing.”

Green Is the New White

The use of local food products is also becoming popular on the wedding scene and is a key component of another rapidly growing trend: the green wedding. **Diane Tighe**, director of catering at the **Washington Duke Inn**, points out that many of the brides whom she encounters are now requesting local products and local,



PHOTO BY LISA MARIE ALBERT | www.lisamariealbert.com

■ **Merywen Wigley’s downtown wedding to Kevin Magill was decidedly green, from a trip to the Farmers’ Market to a carbon-neutral walking processional from the ceremony to the reception.**

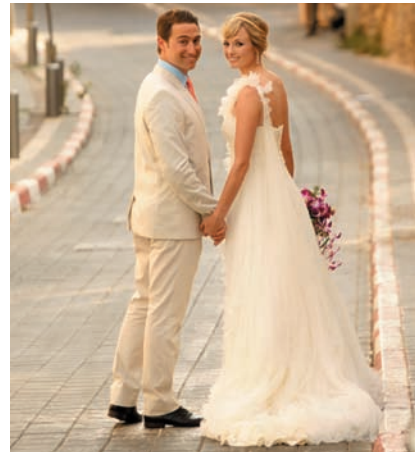
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PHOTO BY KENT MURRAY | www.kentmurrayphotography.com

■ **Chaffraix Lelong and Rosemary Nye chose the most recognizable Durham wedding locale – Duke Chapel – as their place to say “I do.”**

farm-fresh foods for their receptions. In placing more importance on ingredients that don't have to travel far, Diane says, “We are beginning to put more focus on the season. Local fruit is fresh in the summer, but the same things cannot be served in the winter.”

A word of caution: While hosting a green wedding may be the best eco-friendly option, it is not always the most wallet-friendly one. **Samantha Dockery**, professional wedding planner and owner of **Bliss by Sam** (www.blissbysam.com), says, “Green does not equal inexpensive. Brides have to ask themselves ‘Do I want to go all out, or do I just want the look and feel of a green wedding?’” To save on cost, Sam suggests picking only those elements of the wedding that will make the biggest ecological impact.

Amanda has also seen an upswing in what she calls “The Green Movement in Wedding Planning.” She says, “A lot of caterers are making a point to use organic meats and local cheeses.” Amanda has had great success working with **Green Planet Catering** (www.greenplanetcatering.com), a Raleigh-based company that offers a hormone-free, locally grown, sustainable catering option for wedding receptions and rehearsal dinners.

Making It Personal

While many are following the latest trends, weddings are most successful when they are a true reflection of the bride and groom. When Sam planned Kesha and Winfrey's wedding, she suggested incorporating the couple's love of wine into their reception, with a wine tasting during the cocktail hour and a sommelier on hand to educate guests on wine and hors d'oeuvre pairings. Kesha says, “It was something guests had never seen done before, and we wanted to do something a little out of the box. It was the highlight of the reception.” Sam also recommends using the entertainment as a way to teach guests a little more about the couple. A steel drum band performed during the cocktail hour of a wedding she planned in which the couple was from the Caribbean Islands.

Even wedding décor is getting more personal. Michelle says, “We've seen girls do flowers in antique coffee cans.” Another bride Michelle worked with collected a wide variety of cups and saucers for a whole year, and guests were invited to choose their own. The look “was very impressive.” Michelle adds that the most important element of any wedding is that “brides need to bring out their personalities. You want people to walk away from a wedding saying ‘that was so her.’” **DM**