

Bridal path

One bride shares how The St. Regis Atlanta helped create her dream wedding.

BY ERIN VAUGHEN | PHOTOS BY RACHEL LACOUR NIESEN

IT WASN'T A LACK OF TALENT THAT MADE THE WEDDING BETWEEN LAUREN Loef and Marc Skalla a challenge to plan. "Loef is a well-known interior designer and has exquisite taste," says wedding planner Christina Zubowicz, of Magnolia Events & Planning. In fact, the entire planning team was a perfect melding of designers and expertise. The challenge, then, was to execute a high-end vision for the wedding when the St. Regis was, at the time, very much under construction.

"We took a huge leap of faith," Loef concedes. "We chose the venue in September 2008 and had a couple of hard-hat tours a few months before our wedding." The bride planned her ideal wedding in a space dominated by dust, smoky air, beams and exposed walls. "I think being an interior designer worked in my favor because I could visualize the space. But it was even more amazing than I imagined when it opened." Prior to the opening in April 2009, much of the Loef-Skalla wedding planning was done by storyboards and envisioning the space as it would be with chandeliers, exquisite furnishings and ivory painted millwork intact.

When Loef met Harrison Rohr, director of catering at The St. Regis Atlanta and executive chef Jonathan Jerusalem, she knew that her wedding was in the right hands. "Jonathan and Harrison are both quite dashing and very stylish," explains Zubowicz.

What resulted on June 13, 2009 was the wedding of Loef's dreams. "They pulled it off flawlessly. The staff catered to us in a way that made us feel so taken care of," says Loef. She and her husband envisioned a French-inspired wedding, which led them to choose the St. Regis when they heard it was being built. "We both love French architecture. We really liked the estate feel at the St. Regis created by the large scale limestone fireplaces, the intricate metal work on the sweeping staircase and the enormous crystal chandeliers."

Indeed The St. Regis Atlanta does feel like a regal residential estate. "We love the majestic feel of the space when you walk into the lobby, but at the same time there's a real intimate boutique feel as if you are in someone's residence," Loef says.





The Right Address

The Buckhead neighborhood is renowned as the epicenter for Southern luxury. Surrounded by grand homes in Georgian, Federal and other classical styles, the hotel is adjacent to such architectural landmarks as the Swan House and the Georgia Governor's Mansion. "The St. Regis is on a very exclusive address," says Zubowicz, who as a wedding planner is familiar with the top venues of the city. "It's set among mega million dollar homes."

Upon entering the St. Regis through the porte cochere, one is immediately confronted with two grand staircases that swing down to meet Marie Antoinette hand-carved walnut hardwood flooring. The 9,042-square-foot Astor Ballroom resides at the top of the staircases and accommodates as many as 570 guests for seated dinners. The ballroom, which is dressed in a garden-inspired color palette, is used for wedding ceremonies, banquets, or—in the case of the Loef-Skalla wedding—both.

For the ceremony, Loef designed a chuppah, or a marriage canopy, made from thousands of fragrant white orchids and hanging candles. After the couple walked down the aisle, "her décor team flipped the ballroom, meaning they broke down the ceremony and transformed the ballroom into an incredible décor extravaganza," Zubowicz explains. "The reception was very elegant, with long luscious floral tablescapes, set with silver."

While the ballroom was being transformed from a ceremony to a dining space, the bride led guests down a long corridor into the cocktail hour. They draped the hallway with fabric to create an intimate and dramatic entry. "We wanted the entry to be the prelude for a magical evening. I've lived in some pretty amazing cities and wanted to bring that chic lounge feel to our cocktail hour," Loef says.

The couple held their cocktail reception in the Pre-Function Room, which is used often by the St. Regis for events. One of the prominent features of the room is a cut marble bar. For the Loef-Skalla wedding, Tony Brewer and Company collaborated with the bride to build elaborate uplit bar tops that extended the counter space so that none of the guests had to wait for drinks. They transformed the pre-existing marble top into a working sushi bar, where real sushi chefs cut sashimi to be presented on a bed of ice. "The ice on marble was a gorgeous effect," Zubowicz says. The couple complemented the room with ice sculptures and blue lighting, which created a magical effect once the setting sun illuminated the reception area.

Perfect Touches

High-end customizations like the couple's extended bar top are common at St. Regis weddings. "Depending on your guests count and menu, they have so much entertaining space," says Zubowicz, who has done five other events at The St. Regis Atlanta since the Loef-Skalla wedding. Marketing Manager Kimberly Murdock agrees. "There are no strange requests when accommodating a St. Regis bride," she says. "A bride spends her entire life envisioning what her wedding day will be like. A St. Regis wedding is as close to perfection as you can come. Every detail is tended to with intimate care and reflects the personal character of the bride and groom."

In addition to a highly qualified staff focused on weddings and events, The St. Regis maintains a prestigious vendor list that they provide to their clients. The list serves as a guide to the very best designers, event planners and vendors in town. "The St. Regis routinely invites the finest designers in Atlanta to work on property," says Zubowicz, whose company, Magnolia Events & Planning, indeed appears on the list. Maintaining the elegance and refinement that is The St. Regis, combinations of talent and the uses of the venue spaces are endless.

Just beyond the chandeliers and silver-leaf ceiling of the Astor Ballroom is an outdoor veranda with European-inspired landscaping, high arches, cut stone and a pleasing fountain. Likewise, the seventh floor Grand Terrace takes weddings and receptions outdoors in a most enchanted way. The 3,721-square-foot terrace is composed of Italian tumbled marble and manicured lawns. It overlooks the emerald trees and rolling estates of Buckhead as well as the outdoor pool piazza area.

Curated Cuisine

No matter the venue, dining is one of the most remarkable feats of a St. Regis wedding. A St. Regis dining experience is curated rather than catered; that is, every menu is customized to meet the desires and tastes of the couple in mind. Execution of the menu is often overseen by executive chef Jonathan Jerusalem with the utmost care. Often, Jerusalem will attend and execute a private tasting with the bride and groom to determine a menu for the milestone event.

Loef recalls the dining particulars that she and her husband desired for their reception. "Marc wanted the seated dinner to be experienced as if everyone was at a top restaurant with five-star service. He wanted



to be sure that the waiters lined up at the estate tables and placed the food on the table in a choreographed production. They pulled it off flawlessly," she says. For dessert, tuxedo-clad waiters moved through the reception carrying hand-passed mini milkshakes, ice cream cookie sandwiches and cheesecake lollipops on silver trays. "The hotel made them extra delicious," Loef recalls. "They were definitely a hit among the late-night party crowd."

Dessert wasn't the only hit among Loef's guests. "Ninety percent of our wedding guests were from out of town since we recently relocated to Georgia," she explains. "It was important to us to choose a hotel that had areas for all of our guests to hang out and get to know one another." The St. Regis Atlanta proved to be the perfect place to plan a destination wedding. The 40,000-square-foot pool piazza is a relaxing area for guests to spend the day, where anything can be served poolside. The St. Regis Bar offers a bit of night life with a local flair, as it is a favorite among the neighboring upscale community. The bar atmosphere is warmed by dark wood and cozy leather couches. Impressive art adorns the wall, and true to St. Regis style, the wine list is extensive and well-appointed. Remède Spa features a variety of luxurious spa services for bridal parties and wedding guests, including facials, massages, body treatments and nail services. The premier butler service ensures that any guest needs were met, be it dry cleaning, suit pressing or special mini bar requests. "Most of our guests didn't leave the hotel all weekend," Loef says. "Everyone had a different story after the weekend about their great experiences at the St. Regis."

At the end of the poignant day, Loef felt that her uncompromising standards for excellence were met by the St. Regis—from the commitment of their staff, the elegance of the venue and the dedication of her team. The St. Regis Atlanta remains a place where she visits often. "It's such a great feeling when we return to the hotel for events and everyone remembers us by our first names." 🍷

Address Book

Bride Lauren Loef owns an interior design firm and contributed her expertise to her own wedding: LAUREN LOEF INTERIEURS; (404) 961-0578; laurenloef.com.

The couple chose photographers Andrew Niesen and Rachel LaCour Niesen of LACOUR to photograph their wedding: 1661 La France St., Ste. 323; (404) 275-5460; lacourphoto.com.

Tony Brewer collaborated with Lauren Loef on rentals and floral design: TONY BREWER & COMPANY INC.; (404) 627-1666; tonybrewerandcompany.com.

Christina Zubowicz served as the Loef-Skalla wedding planner, ensuring a seamless collaboration between all outside venues and The St. Regis Atlanta: MAGNOLIA EVENTS & PLANNING; (404) 291-9525; magnoliaeventsatlanta.com.

Lauren Loef wore a Monique Lhuillier dress from Impressions A Bridal Salon: 99 W. Paces Ferry Rd. NW, Atlanta; (404) 841-6202; moniquelhuillier.com. (The groom wore a Tom Ford suit: tomford.com.)

Jewelry was designed by the bride's good friend and wedding guest, Dana Levy: DANA REBECCA DESIGNS; dana.rebeccadesigns.com.

For weddings at THE ST. REGIS ATLANTA, contact Harrison Rohr, director of catering and conference services, at Harrison.Rohr@stregis.com. Planning a St. Regis wedding generally takes a minimum of six to nine months.

