

For Richer or for Poorer, They Said

Four couples give a behind-the-scenes look at what it took to stage their fairy-tale—and very expensive—weddings



they stood on, the hedge that blocked hotel guests from walking through the ceremony backdrop. “You take it for granted, like it just comes with the wedding,” she said.

Pankti Doshi & Avish Jain Embrace the surprises

Their wedding was a five-day “love letter to Manhattan.”

Pankti Doshi and Avish Jain’s festivities included a musical with 140 performers at a rented Broadway theater, a turmeric ceremony at Rockefeller Center and shutting down part of Fifth Avenue for a baraat, an Indian groom’s celebration, that included a float.

The curveballs they encountered ended up becoming part of the experience of pulling off the event, which they wanted to reflect New York, South Asian culture and their creative lives. Doshi, 33, is a cancer genetics counselor and co-founder of a music festival. Jain, 30, is an endocrinology fellow and musician who records with Universal Music India.

The first time they saw the float in person, for instance, was when it pulled up for the procession. It arrived partially decorated, looking almost like a cardboard box, the couple said. So they requested some changes. “We didn’t realize we’d have to pay to wrap the whole thing in vinyl,” Jain said.

They improvised and found ways to save here and there. The open bar at the reception ended up costing \$62,500—\$250 a head for 250 guests—so they chose not to have one at all seven events.

The couple said they spent under \$1 million on the entire event, and they regret nothing.

Bridget Bahl & Michael Chiodo Budget for logistics

Bridget Bahl, 43, started with a budget of around \$300,000. She doesn’t like thinking about how much they actually ended up spending.

“We were way, way, way over,” said Bahl, who married plastic surgeon Michael Chiodo, 37, in Manhattan roughly three years ago before about 130 guests. “I had to black it out of my mind.”

Bahl, a social-media content creator who runs a fashion brand, wanted the rehearsal dinner outdoors, on a street downtown. Her production company made it happen, though it took some work.

“You have to build a porta-bathroom situation that doesn’t look like a port-a-potty,” she said.

To avoid transportation hassles around the city, they also rented two double-decker tour buses to ferry guests from the ceremony to the reception. Afterward, a fleet of decorated pedicabs was waiting outside to take everyone to the afterparty.

Last-minute hiccups came up, too. The rooftop ceremony site wouldn’t let her swap out its flowers, for instance, so a crew laid metal netting over them and mounted hers on top.

“You can change anything,” Bahl said. “You just have to pay for it.”

BY DALVIN BROWN

An exchange of vows at a historic villa on Lake Como. A celebratory groom’s procession down a closed off Fifth Avenue. A quiet ceremony at an exclusive luxury resort in Florida.

Couples who’ve shelled out big for their dream weddings say the photos don’t capture what it takes to stage such storybook affairs, like the costs to ferry guests around a city or the surprise \$100,000 bill that arrived after everyone went home.

These are weddings that come with price tags that reach well into the six or even seven figures, and they offer a hint of the scale of preparations that went into Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce’s nuptials at Madison Square Garden.

Costs can rack up especially quickly when couples pick unusual venues, which often require temporary structures, makeshift bathrooms or other adjustments to make the proceedings feel seamless.

“When something is really beautiful and elegant and easy, you kind of don’t notice,” said Kellee Khalil, who runs the wedding-planning site Loverly.

Here’s what four couples said they learned from pulling off their big-ticket weddings.

Grace Kennedy & Hayden Tobin Expect surprise charges

The first wedding planner Grace Kennedy and Hayden Tobin met gave them a \$1.3 million quote for the ceremony they were envisioning on Lake Como. It wasn’t the price that made them hesitate, but

▲ **From left: These couples Grace Kennedy and Hayden Tobin, Pankti Doshi and Avish Jain, and Caroline and Darian Alter staged high-end lavish weddings.**

that she kept circling back to the cost. Kennedy, 27, and Tobin, 45, decided to walk. “She just talked about money,” Kennedy said. “She wasn’t listening.”

The couple, both musicians, found a planner who focused on the wedding itself. They also ended up trimming the total cost to \$1 million.

They married in May 2024 before more than 100 guests at a historic villa on Lake Como in Italy. Lilies were omnipresent, and a jazz band played through the event.

Then after the guests had flown home the couple was hit with an unwelcome surprise: Another bill for about \$100,000.

It was for damage from the celebrations, which included a torn up lawn, a scuffed wall and broken glasses. Kennedy said she didn’t realize they would be liable for such costs.

“I would have liked to know we’d be charged after,” she said.

Another hard-won lesson came the night before the wedding. The forecast called for hail and rain, so when the planner called about a backup, they said yes to a \$30,000 tent. It never

rained, but they used it anyway. Kennedy ended up liking the look more than the open-air setup they had planned.

“Always have backup,” she said. “And always have money to be able to have that backup.”

Caroline & Darian Alter Do it your own way

Caroline Alter isn’t really a flower person, but ended up paying \$55,000 for them anyway.

Alter, a copywriter, and her husband, Darian, a sports betting professional, married at the Boca Ra-

ton Resort & Club in January 2023 before about 220 guests. The resort had long been part of Darian’s family life, and the couple lived there for part of the pandemic.

The couple, who are now both 30 and live in San Francisco, spent under \$500,000 on the event, which their parents helped cover. Looking back, Caroline Alter said she would’ve questioned how much to spend on flowers.

It seemed like a given that flowers would be a huge cost, so she approved a lump-sum budget for them without pushing to see exactly what it would include.

When she saw the results, she ended up questioning whether all the flowers were needed for the decor.

“I wonder how it would have looked without flowers, or with less flowers, or with that money going somewhere else,” she said.

She didn’t even end up holding her bouquet in many pictures because she didn’t want it to cover her dress.

“For something that’s such a huge chunk of the budget, I’d redline it more and see exactly what’s going to what,” she said.

Otherwise, she said the biggest surprise was the costs for making everything look seamless: the lighting, the platform



◀ **Bridget Bahl and Michael Chiodo chose an outdoor ceremony on a Manhattan rooftop.**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: STAS MOSEEV; PTAUFIQ PHOTOGRAPHY; SYDNEY MARIE CO. JOSE VILLA