

It's All About the Green

Saving Money and Mother Earth

By Cliffe Kwon

What groom wouldn't want to give the love of his life her dream wedding? You can. And, you can for less money than you think. According to theweddingreport.com, the average wedding in 2006 costs \$26,000. That may be a hard pill to swallow. Surprisingly, there is a very simple solution. Have you considered going green?

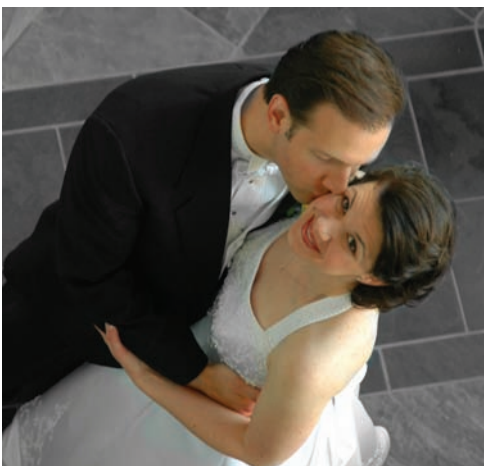
Green is no longer a fad. More and more, couples are designing their dream days as more affordable, elegant yet simple, ecologically intelligent and socially conscious celebrations. You may be surprised to hear that they are regular people who want to make a difference in life.

Mark Robinson from Houston, Texas is a typical, recently married, 30-something guy: He plays ice hockey, loves fishing, volunteers at a Christian youth group, and even has his own management consulting firm (momentumbay.com). And, like most guys, Mark spent years looking for "the one," that one-in-a-million woman created uniquely for him for the rest of his life.

Mark found his wife-to-be while consulting for a struggling sawmill in Georgia. (No, she wasn't operating heavy machinery at the mill. Her younger sister's best friend met Mark and introduced the couple via email.)

The perfect match. Mark and Stephanie made an instant connection. They shared a passion for God, working with international youth, traveling, and for the outdoors. So six months, 13,239 free Sprint-to-Sprint cell phone minutes and six long-distance dates later, Mark proposed on his favorite lakeshore while the family was visiting grandma, and the couple began planning their green wedding.

They wanted a courtship, engagement, wedding, honeymoon and marriage that reflected everything and everyone important to them, particularly their commitment to a sustainable lifestyle





Native Wildflower Seeds



Mark & Stephanie
April 1, 2006

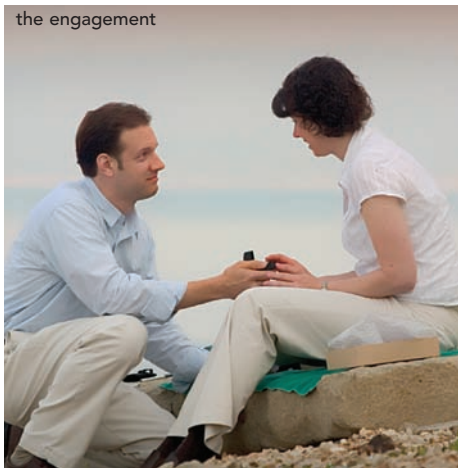
"God gives such beauty to everything that grows..."
(Matthew 5:30)

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a beautiful scene from the world's most sustainable country, New Zealand



the engagement



Mark and Stephanie on a glacier in New Zealand



for our country in World War II and during the Korean Conflict, and returned to build his dream retirement home with only the help of his grandson. For 14 summers, he taught Mark how to build a home, fish, garden, and live a sustainable lifestyle. His teaching encompassed healthy living, a strong faith in action, social responsibility, and ecological intelligence. Mark's curiosity in these things turned to passion and commitment after his grandpa's two nearly-deadly heart attacks.

Mark and Stephanie live with a strong sense of purpose, to make a positive impact in our world. This dynamic duo accomplished all of their goals and saved roughly \$20,000 by holding to their principles. Here are a few of their green finishing touches:

Minimize waste, give back to the community, incorporate faith, and keep a sense of adventure

DIAMONDS ARE A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND

and good stewardship of God's creation, or "creation care." Their goals included: minimize waste, give back to the community, incorporate faith, and keep a sense of adventure.

Why did they choose these goals, especially to go green? Mark's inspiration to have a green wedding is not rooted in

"new age" philosophy or a shallow cultural fad. It comes from the values taught to the greatest generation this nation has ever seen and from Mark's hero, his grandpa. Bennie Robinson survived the Great Depression as the youngest of six kids, even though his own dad died soon after Bennie's birth. His grandpa fought

The engagement ring holds a modest princess cut diamond since his wife's name "Stephanie" means "princess" or "crowned one." But this is no ordinary diamond. This cultured diamond by Apollo Diamond, Inc. ([apollo-diamond.com](http://apollodiamond.com)) is chemically, structurally, and optically identical to a pure, flawless, mined diamond without the harmful social and environmental consequences

caused by mining. And, these diamonds cost 15 to 25 percent less than conventional conflict diamonds. Her wedding band was also made of five smaller Apollo diamonds. Mark wears his late-grandfather's wedding band, saving money by reusing a family heirloom.

COMMUNICATIONS

WeddingChannel.com enabled the couple to avoid expensive printing and postage for engagement announcements to friends and relatives. Wedding programs were replaced by a PowerPoint presentation, saving trees and dollars. Invitations were printed by a leading environmentally friendly printer (gregbarberco.com).

DRIVE LESS, PARTY MORE

All guests were encouraged to stay at one hotel only four miles from the amazingly designed church, where the rehearsal, wedding, and reception were all held. This allowed for carpooling and no late arrivals.

GIVE SMART, GIVE LESS

Since Mark and Stephanie have been out of school for a decade, they needed less stuff. Registries focused on useful, creative, and sustainable gifts, like bamboo kitchenware, organic cotton and linen bedding and towels, ENERGY STAR appliances, and recycled china. That is, they reused Stephanie's great-grandmother's china and asked guests to replace broken or missing pieces at replacements.com.

The gifts for the wedding party and the guests were kept simple and thoughtful. Bridesmaids' gifts were natural products from burtsbees.com. Groomsmen's gifts were monogrammed organic cotton handkerchiefs from hankettes.com. Attendees received packets of native Texas wildflower seeds, made by the Native American Seed Company.

GIVE AWAY

Speaking of flowers, the couple tried to use custom-grown, potted, organic sunflowers to limit the use of cut floral

decoration. In the end, the buds never opened, so they had to use organic cut florals. The fresh flowers were delivered by wedding guests to local nursing homes and nonprofit healing ministries. Besides potted flowers, permanent floral arrangements (distinctivedesigns.com) were used for the altar pieces instead of fresh cut flowers.

EMIT NO GAS

Green Mountain Energy, a renewable electricity provider, donated carbon offset credits to cover all of the pollution caused by the church facility's electricity. And, DriveGreen.com, which helps companies offset pollution created by their fleet vehicles, offset the couple's portion of the pollution for their roundtrip flight from Houston to

They cruised the South Island's mountaintops by parasailing updrafts and hiked three of the country's 3,500 glaciers. They saw boulders as large as houses and trees larger than grain silos. They saw eight rainbows in one day. They watched the sunrise on a pristine, crystal lake just around the corner from Shania Twain's 60,000 acre high-country sheep ranch. There, Mark and Stephanie enjoyed an amazing, quaint eco-lodge (wanakahomestead.com), which they discovered among 1,550 green hotels on bestgreenhotels.com. Their spacious two-bedroom cottage was the epitome of solar-powered, state-of-the-art elegant simplicity AND cost much less than what their recently wedded friends paid for their lodging in Hawaii.

“During their layover in Los Angeles, the couple also rented a hybrid car to tour the city”

an eco-tourism destination (see below), equivalent to six tons of carbon dioxide. During their layover in Los Angeles, the couple also rented a hybrid car to tour the city.

GREEN SHEETS TO THE WIND

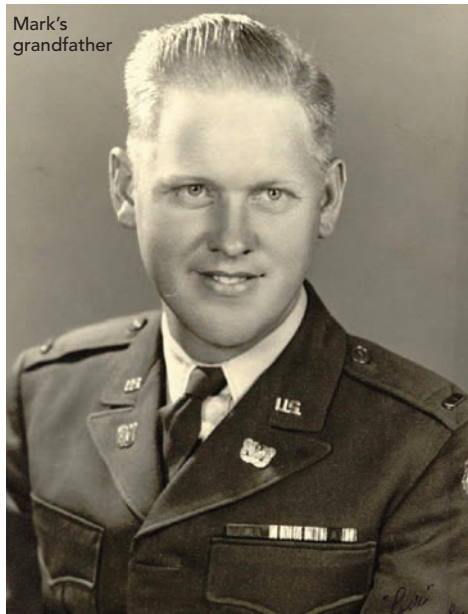
Where did they recuperate post-wedding? They spent their wedding night nearby the church and closer to the airport at a luxurious hotel, one of Houston's only “green” hotels.

Then, they crossed the ocean to the world's most sustainable country – New Zealand – and the world's adventure capital – Queenstown. Yeah ... Lord of the Rings. New Zealanders (“Kiwis”) care about their environment, but still struggle, like us, with electricity and fresh water shortages.



the big day

Mark's grandfather



CREATIVE CASH

By using his business skills, Mark bartered (and will declare to the IRS) consulting services for catering services with Houston's second largest caterer, a woman-owned business (melangeevents.com). He's helping her start a mainstream, organic catering division. For example, the rehearsal warmed hearts and stomachs with great Texas BBQ served on biodegradable plasticware (simplybiodegradable.com), and the reception readied everyone's dancing shoes with locally grown, fresh, organic produce and cheeses. To reduce waste and trash, fine, washable dinnerware was used for the reception

Beyond the catering, their total rehearsal and wedding price was well below the

than half the wedding expenses themselves. Even though they needed and wanted to economize, they refused to settle for less. They wanted their wedding to show who they are. They wanted a wedding that was unique, that redefined elegance, and that would make a positive impact on the community. And, they achieved that. They proved that you can pay less for a dream engagement, wedding, honeymoon and marriage. Green is no longer a fad; it's a force that fits our faith and our pocketbooks.

Writer's note: You might be wondering why you are reading a wedding article written by a high school senior. I admit I am probably not the best guy to go to for advice on marriage, but I do know the character of a man. Mark Robinson is an alumnus of my high school. He

and Stephanie returned to help several high school journalists develop our talents and propel our careers. More than that, Mark taught me that getting married is really about becoming a man. Being a man isn't about who can throw the football the longest or who can earn the most money. It's stepping up to the plate and taking responsibility for your actions and the lasting effects they will have on your

family, your friends, your country, your planet, and your God. When you die how would you want to be remembered? When it's all said and done, the cost of your wedding includes more than the price. What matters is that you are true to who you are and to who you are built to be, not only on your wedding day but also for the rest of your life.

“Saving \$18,000 was very important to this couple in part-time ministry and full-time entrepreneurship”

By frequenting organic restaurants and splitting five-course gourmet dinners, including local salmon, venison, and lamb nearly every evening, they saved while living at the extreme. Less can be more. Mark even unintentionally lost seven pounds in eight days. Of course, the hiking helped. Talk about a manly, romantic and healthy eco-adventure!

price of today's average wedding, and 50 percent less than a comparable 230-person conventional event. Saving \$18,000 was very important to this couple in part-time ministry and full-time entrepreneurship who were responsible for paying more

CLOSE-TO-THE-HEART MUSIC

Think globally, act locally. The music was provided by Mark's close friend, mentor and an aspiring Christian recording artist (jeff-morrison.com). Their families also played a significant part in the ceremony: Stephanie's sister played the flute and Mark's lyric tenor dad serenaded them with preludes. A local Latin, Country and Jazz band spiced up the reception (yelba.net).

DUDS

As for wedding attire, Mark and his groomsmen wore tuxes they already owned saving the expense of renting new ones. In addition, after wearing her gown for the wedding, Stephanie donated her dress to a local resale shop benefiting abused women.