

# The “Weekend Warrior” Wedding

When hosting a weekend full of events, hospitality and careful planning are paramount. “We wanted a multiple-day affair so that our guests could really get to know one another,” says Jessica Stanley, who, along with TJ Michie, hosted a well-executed wedding weekend worthy of imitation. Here’s how it all went down.

BY LAUREN MATTHEWS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY GIA CANALI PHOTOGRAPHY



## Choose one great location.

Jessica and TJ chose a single all-inclusive venue so that their guests would have no obligation to drive anywhere off-site. The couple’s planner, Stacy McCain, suggests that if you can’t host all of the events on the same property, make sure the venues are within 15 minutes of each other.

## Hire an expert to assist.

“Our planner, Stacy, was invaluable when it came to finding and negotiating with vendors,” says Jessica. “Because she knew what was and what wasn’t a good deal, she was able to save us a lot of money. And the week of the wedding, Stacy executed everything flawlessly—we wouldn’t have enjoyed

ourselves nearly as much if we had to deal with the logistics.”

## Be generous but smart.

“We wanted to pay for a portion of our guests’ lodging, and with Stacy’s help we were able to negotiate a great deal with the ranch,” says Jessica. “The second-biggest cost was alcohol. Instead of a full bar each night,

we decided to have a full bar at the wedding only and have a limited bar at the other parties.”

## Send a save-the-date.

When the majority of guests are traveling, give them as much time as possible to make arrangements by sending save-the-dates a year in advance, like Jessica and TJ **CONTINUED** ➔

## LOCATIONS & PLANNING

did. “We also included a gentle reminder in our holiday cards,” says Jessica. “The text read, ‘Looking forward to seeing you at the ranch for our big day!’”

### Create a wedding website.

The save-the-date should urge guests to visit your wedding website—a nonnegotiable for

a wedding weekend and/or destination event. Your website should help guests get a feel for the wedding, tell them what activities are planned, and include detailed information about lodging and transportation. “Because guests already have the save-the-date and access to the website, the formal

invitation is more about getting RSVPs,” says Stacy. “But you can never overload guests with too many details, so it’s always nice to have a rundown of the events included with the invite, too.” Jessica and TJ enclosed an accordion-style card that reiterated all of the weekend’s goings-on.

### Offer rides if possible.

If you can’t provide transportation to and from the airport to guests’ hotels or to the venue, make sure you’ve provided very explicit directions. “Thanks to the website, we actually had to field very few phone calls about how to get there,” says Jessica. But for elderly guests, definitely

## WELCOME PARTY

The majority of Jessica and TJ’s 220 guests arrived on Thursday evening at C Lazy U Ranch in Granby, CO. The couple kicked off the weekend with a hoedown, where picnic fare like watermelon, corn on the cob, and barbecued chicken were served. Later on, everyone headed to the corral for a square dancing lesson, followed by s’mores by the campfire.



Square dancing lessons



S’mores at the campfire



arrange to have a car service or relative pick them up.

**Suggest dress codes.**

The couple dedicated a section of their website to attire. In addition to suggestions of what to wear to each of the events (like cowboy gear for the hoedown), it also included guidelines to make

sure everyone packed appropriately for the weather and the setting. "Our guests said they really liked having guidance on what to wear," says Jessica.

**Provide welcome baskets.**

Have a basket or bag waiting in guests' hotel rooms that includes (at the minimum) a copy of the

weekend's itinerary, water, and snacks. Jessica and TJ's guests received various made-in-Colorado treats (Boulder chips, Chocolove bars) and water bottles that they could refill throughout the weekend.

**Keep the events distinct but cohesive.** Jessica handled the

majority of the décor herself. (She now has her own wedding design company, Duet Events.) "Each event had a distinctive vision, but I weaved the country influence throughout," says Jessica. "I wanted to make sure the décor meshed with the setting." For example, even though the

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**REHEARSAL DINNER**

Jessica and TJ wanted their Friday night rehearsal dinner to be the fanciest of the weekend's events. Beneath a tent decked out with crystal chandeliers, guests enjoyed a buffet meal that included prime rib, creamed spinach, Yorkshire pudding, and croquebouche for dessert, while friends and family members toasted the couple with heartfelt speeches.



rehearsal dinner was the most formal of the weekend's events, she included country-chic touches like burlap runners.

**Suggest places to visit and things to do.** "We scheduled activities like a field day on Friday afternoon and a poker tournament after the rehearsal

dinner," says Jessica. "The feedback was overwhelming—our guests really appreciated not being left to their own devices, and it helped everyone bond." If you think your guests would prefer to explore on their own, at least provide suggestions of things to do and places to eat in the area.

**Take care of your guests...** During Jessica and TJ's ceremony, it started to rain, but luckily everyone was prepared. "Due to the unpredictable weather, we suggested that guests bring umbrellas," says Jessica. "And the ranch provided extras for those who forgot." It's also a good idea to have bug

spray and sunscreen on hand if you're having an outdoor event.

**...and make them feel included.** The couple asked guests to enclose a small swatch of fabric with their RSVP cards; they used the pieces to make a quilt that served as the photo station backdrop at the reception.

**WEDDING CEREMONY AND RECEPTION**

On Saturday afternoon, Jessica and TJ wed during a mountaintop ceremony, followed by a reception in the ranch's horse arena. The couple wanted the evening to blend the fun, casual vibe of the hoedown with the more sophisticated tone of the rehearsal dinner. The menu included ribs, pulled pork, and collard greens.

In addition to dancing, guests could play horseshoes and ride a mechanical bull.



**The story continues at [Brides.com/FW11](http://Brides.com/FW11) with more photos from Jessica and TJ's wedding and their vendor list.**

**Invite**

