

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

HAPPY MENOCAL AND JOHN SWANSBURG DECEMBER 10, 2011

A PICTURE IS WORTH a thousand words, but when John tweeted at Happy to commission a hand-drawn portrait of his mother's beloved basset hound, Virgil, he was limited to just 140 characters. Happy was, well, happy—and a little shocked. She'd noticed John 17 years earlier, when they were both students at Phillips Academy boarding school in Andover, Massachusetts. They hadn't officially met back then (he was a senior; she was a sophomore). But now, he was an editor at *Slate.com*, so she'd been following him (as well as Mike Tyson and Patti Stanger) on Twitter.

A watercolorist and illustrator, Happy made quick work of the picture in her Manhattan studio, and then offered to deliver it personally to John in Brooklyn. He agreed on one condition: dinner on him. "We got on like a house on fire," she says of their first official meeting. "He was handsome, funny, and smart." Ten months later, during a visit to her family in Charleston, they went for a long stroll to see the house where Happy's mother once lived. "It was such a hot day, but he insisted on bringing a bag—or 'purse' as I was teasingly calling it—to hold his sweater," she says. When he proposed outside her mom's old home, Happy discovered the "purse's" true purpose: to hide an engagement ring. After jogging several laps around John to calm down, she breathlessly said yes.

The couple decided on a winter wedding in Charleston. "John loves its Civil War history, and I adore its soft, haunted air," she says. Once they found Lowndes Grove, a grand riverfront plantation, the rest of their black-tie affair easily fell into place, in part due to its simplicity. "We wanted it to feel natural—no over-the-top details, no extravagant flowers, no chichi foods," she says.

After nixing the idea of opulent (and pricey) florals and opting instead for greenery and herbs, a moss-and-white color palette seemed like a no-brainer. The couple used cedar, fir, and magnolia leaves as entryway garlands and centerpiece wreaths; dusty miller and rosemary made up the bridesmaids' bunches. Even the stationery, designed and

hand-painted by Happy, was decked out with sprigs. The crowning touch? Her halo of leaves and white ranunculus. "It framed my DIY, Dutch-girl braids," she says. The headpiece also distinguished the bride from her six attendants, who wore ivory J.Crew wedding gowns with green velvet sashes.

The night before, guests arrived to welcome bags full of clementines and brownies, then gathered for the rehearsal dinner in an old carriage house. At sundown the next day,

ONE THING I LEARNED

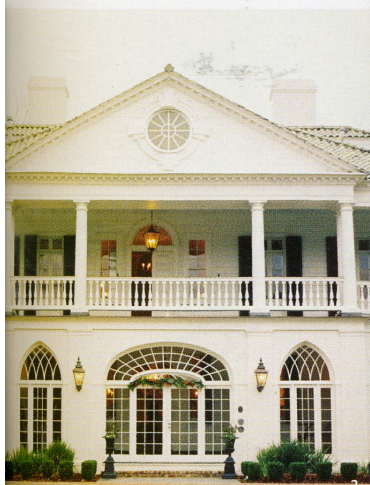
"Don't let the bridezilla stereotype stop you from asking for help or making requests," says Happy. "It's fine if you do so nicely."

the bride walked down the grassy aisle to a friend's acoustic guitar rendition of The Beatles' "Dear Prudence," joining John at the end to exchange self-penned vows.

While the newlyweds slipped away for photos, guests nibbled on fried green tomatoes and sipped cocktails on the black-and-white tiled veranda before sitting down to a hearty meal of roasted chicken with fingerling potatoes in a huge tent on the lawn. After their last bite, the just-marrieds danced to "Our Love Will Still Be There" by The Troggs. "We love the lyrics," says the bride, who searched high and low for the obscure track. As the DJ turned things up, Happy's father did The Gator (akin to The Worm) in his circa 1978 suit, and Klondike Bars, a childhood favorite of both the bride and groom, were served. A round of tequila shots at a nearby bar (compliments of a gregarious group of Texas cotton farmers in ten-gallon hats) capped off the incredible celebration.

The next morning, the lovebirds flew off for a two-week honeymoon split between Hawaii and Palm Springs, California. And, despite the fact that social media had helped unite them, their respective Twitter feeds fell blissfully silent. —Sarah Smith





THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: TEC PETAJA

1. STATIONERY

The entire suite was designed by the bride: A gatefold invite, graced by a family crest, shared info on the rehearsal dinner, ceremony, and next-day brunch.

2. VENUE

"We rolled the dice and lucked out," says Happy about booking their *Gone-With-the-Wind*-esque manor online without seeing it in person.

3. VOWS

A friend officiated the nondenominational service, held on the banks of the Ashley River. Though a tad chilly, "I had on my adrenaline sweater," says Happy.

4. THE COUPLE

The bride wore a draped Ivy & Aster gown; the groom, a Paul Stuart suit and hunter-green gros-grain bow tie from Ben Silver, his favorite store in Charleston. He gave similar styles to his groomsmen.

5. BOUQUET

White ranunculus, flat cedar, holly, rosemary, and seeded eucalyptus were bound with a plush velvet ribbon.

6. BOUTONNIERES

John pinned a cluster of cedar, rosemary, and ranunculus to his lapel. His crew wore sprigs of juniper in lieu of flowers.

7. TABLESCAPES

Hurricane vases were filled with moss and a candle. The place cards and table numbers were cut and hand-painted by the bride at 5 A.M. the morning of.

8. DESSERT

After getting engaged, Happy and John had celebrated at Charleston's Peninsula Grill, ending their meal with the restaurant's famed coconut cake. Their caterer's take on the classic was equally delicious.

9. GUESTS

Attendees donned black-tie duds. "I thought formality would help make everyone feel extra special," says Happy.

SOURCES

LOCATION Lowndes Grove Plantation (pphgcharleston.com)

PLANNING Red Letter Events (redletterevents.com)

CATERING Fish Restaurant (fishrestaurantcharleston.com)

FLOWERS Stems (charlestonstems.com)

STATIONERY AND CALLIGRAPHY Happy Menocal (the bride's company; happymenocal.com)

PHOTOGRAPHY Tec Petaja (tecpetajaphoto.com)

> SEE THE GUIDE FOR MORE VENDOR SOURCES

FOR MORE FROM THESE SOIRÉES, check out marthastewartweddings.com/travel2012