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From Paris, With Love

Sebastian and Fritz create an elegant French-themed wedding on the California coast.

By Patti Verbanas



It was a beautiful May night in Paris in 2010, on a bridge over the River Seine when Sebastian Russell, against the backdrop of the Eiffel Tower, started to cry, then dropped to one knee and asked Fritz Williams, his boyfriend of eight years, to marry him. Fritz's response: shocked laughter—and a resounding “yes.”

“It was an amazing, complete surprise,” says Fritz. “I had discussed getting married but Sebastian had always said it ‘wasn’t necessary’ so I let it go. It couldn’t have happened any more perfectly—in the city we both love more than any other.”

The Los Angeles couple has been inseparable since they first locked eyes at a party in 2003 and moved in together three months later. They moved equally quickly to start finessing the details of their wedding—themed, fittingly, “Paris in Summer.” The challenge was to find a location for the ceremony and reception that would accommodate family and friends who would be flying in from all over the world. It was natural that Fritz, the owner of FormDecor Inc., a modern furniture rental company, discovered the Hotel Maya in Long Beach after following up on a tip. “His coworker highly recommended the hotel due its location on the water and amazing views,” says Sebastian, who works at a Santa Monica law firm. “Fritz has a special eye for design, so he really fell in love with its architecture and design.”

The site selection presented its own challenges, however. “Coordinating the minister’s schedule with the hotel’s availability proved very difficult,” Sebastian says. “We lost our first and second choices for wedding dates through the process, but it worked out in the end.”

The wedding date set for July 3, 2011, the couple set to work to bring a rich Parisian flair to their California beach event. And, of course, the stars aligned. The hotel chef, Victor Juarez, turned out to be a classically trained French chef, and the couple enlisted the assistance of Freddie Georges, one of their wedding planners, to ask her French mother to create an authentic French menu. They likewise decided to serve a typically French cocktail, Kir Royale, as their signature drink. The couple originally wanted a black cake, but decided against it when they learned the food coloring would stain their guests’ hands and face blue/black. The cake they ultimately sliced through—created by Rossmoor Pastries in Long Beach—was a square three-tier cake with German chocolate, dulce de leche, and carrot cake layers.

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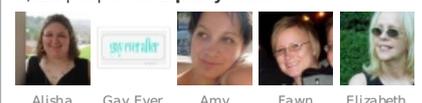
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It took about a year to plan the wedding—including elegant details such as obtaining dining chairs from Absolutely Fabulous in Costa Mesa, scheduling a rehearsal breakfast on the Queen Mary ship next door to the Hotel Maya, and booking violinist Chris Woods—but finally, the big day arrived.

As Pasadena photographer [Rob Greer](#) chronicled the event, the grooms entered separately in matching charcoal-gray Hugo Boss “Red Label” suits, textured white Thomas Pink shirts from Nordstrom, yellow/silver tribal cufflinks from Gemelli in Beverly Hills, and yellow boutonnières from Elegant by Design florist in Fountain Valley. “I walked down the aisle first, and when I saw Fritz walking in, I couldn’t believe we were getting married and that the day had finally come,” Sebastian says.

There were moments of poignancy: Since the grooms’ mothers had both passed away, Sebastian was escorted in by his cousin, Carolyn, and Fritz walked with his sisters, Teri and Toni. “Our minister, Rev. Greta Sesheta, incorporated a rose ceremony in which we exchanged yellow roses as our first gift to each other,” Sebastian says.

“It was everything I hoped the day would be,” he continues. “To have found the love of my life, married him in front of family and friends, be surrounded by so much love, and have everything go perfectly, was amazing.”

Although gay marriage is not legally recognized in California, the partners—they refer to each other interchangeably as “partner” and “husband”—married for love. “We most likely will get married this Christmas in New York, then we won’t have to wed again when California same sex married is finally approved,” Sebastian says, but emphasizes that “no piece of paper, no governmental decree or law can define our love.”

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COMMENTS

#3 **Kent Shuff**  2011-10-19 05:11

  0

A beautiful day for two beautiful people. We were honored to be a part of it. Kent & Steve

Quote

#2 **Gregg Girard**  2011-10-18 23:14

  0

It such Honer to a part this day with two of the most amazing people.It was a blessing having my son be there with as their ring bearer too .Everything about it a was beautiful and magical .It is a shame the state of California is so behind the times given it most been a forerunner it most of these kind issue' s .I thought CA would been the first state out all 50 that would honer same sex marriage or civil union.

Quote

#1 **Rob Greer**  2011-10-18 21:17

  0

What a great write-up of a magnificent event! I feel privileged to have been allowed to photograph such an amazing event featuring two fabulous guys!

Quote

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