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BELLES IN BLOOM
Florists Sonning Flowers filled a variety of Susie's own bud vases, silver vintage-style beakers, and Moroccan tea glasses with roses and

hydrangea for an eclectic look. Susie also carried a rose bouquet, and the bridesmaids' rose corsages echoed the classically English look

SHADES OF SUMMER

Susie and Patrick chose pinks, lilacs and lots of roses for their elegant country tea party

Every proposal story I hear usually involves some romantic destination, but not ours," jokes Susie Clarke, 33, of her engagement to Patrick Devlin, 37. In his defence, Patrick had organised a special dinner out for Susie's birthday in January 2003, but she wasn't feeling up to it. So he decided to drop the plan and pop the question anyway, right there in the cramped one-bedroom flat they shared. "I didn't hesitate to say yes," she beams. "In truth, an exotic location wouldn't have made me want to marry him any more than I already did. It's just geography, after all!"

Geography, however, would come to play a major role in their wedding plans, as the couple pulled off not one but two celebrations – one on each side of the Atlantic – five years later. After a glam but intimate Manhattan wedding in November 2008 (just 18 guests made up the wedding party), they knew they wanted to throw a second party back home. The question was when – and how? "We didn't want to try to recreate or out-do our actual wedding day, so whatever we did needed to be distinctly different," Susie says. ▶▶



WORDS BY JULIA SCIRROTTO





► A classic English afternoon tea party proved the perfect balance to their city-chic New York nuptials, and the date was set for 6 September 2009.

On the day, 80 guests joined the couple for a church blessing before the reception, which Susie explains added an important dimension to the celebration. "It was simple and succinct but poignant," she says. "It focused all of our minds on the whole point of the event so it didn't just feel like a party."

Of course, the champagne tea reception that followed at 17th-century Stoke Place Hotel couldn't help but be fabulous. "A well-decorated venue can do a lot of the work for you, saving you time and money," Susie says. "Stoke Place has some stunning details, like amazing antique chandeliers, but it also has a modern twist running throughout the décor. All we had to do was add a few highlights and some small touches."

Blue Curiosa, Metallina, Coolwater, Sweet Avalanche, Cezanne, Vendella and Amnesia roses in muted shades of lilac, cream and deep pink helped to create the vintage look Susie wanted, while the bridesmaids' dresses, pretty corsage ribbons and matching over-sized clutch bags provided bold pops of teal. "The palette evolved spontaneously, but I did know that, after having a very white winter wedding, I wanted to go to the other extreme and inject lots of summery colour into the day," she says. All-white picture frames with photos from the New York event, their parents' weddings, and a collage of Susie's mum, who died in 1995, adorned windowsills, side tables and the mantelpieces, adding a touch of home to the venue. "We also had a projector screen showing a looped slideshow of our NY wedding photos, which the guests loved as it was their first look at the official pictures."

Susie's all-rose bouquet contained a mix of colours and sizes, and created a beautiful contrast to her sleek, slinky white-satin gown by David Fielden, which she bought especially for the occasion. "I was going to wear my original dress, but when I tried it on again it was a bit snug in a few places," she explains, "so I decided to look for a second one. It was actually a good thing to do, because it really helped the blessing have its own identity – and what girl wouldn't want to have two wedding dresses?"

Throughout the afternoon, as an iPod played a selection of classics by Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole and Harry Connick Jr, guests enjoyed cut sandwiches, mini goat's cheese tartlets, homemade sausage rolls, scones, cakes, strawberries and cream, and a selection of teas, including Susie's favourite: Earl Grey. "With no formal seating, it gave a mellow, free-flowing feel to the party," she remembers. "Some guests said they felt more relaxed than at any wedding they'd ever been to. It was a lovely, lazy summer Sunday afternoon!"



SET THE TABLE

Susie made the menu cards for the afternoon-tea herself using teal cards and a font she found online. The scones and cakes were laid out on vintage-style cake stands in the garden room and became another decorative touch

SUSIE'S ADDRESS BOOK

- Photographer** Polly Alexandre (alexandreweddings.com)
Venue Stoke Place Hotel, Buckinghamshire (stokeplace.co.uk)
Bride's dress David Fielden (davidfielden.co.uk)
Bridesmaids' dresses Monsoon (monsoon.co.uk)
Bride's shoes Filippa Scott at Luella's Boudoir (luellasboudoir.co.uk)
Bride's accessories Isabel Kurtenbach (isabelkurtenbach.com)
Groom's suit Oswald Boateng (oswaldboateng.co.uk)
Flowers Sonning Flowers (sonningflowers.com)
Invitations Heather Marten (theweddinginvitation.co.uk)
Cake stand hire Idyllic Days (idyllicdays.com)

