



By

By Stacey Marcus

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Warm Welcome

Trends in Getting the Party Started

by Stacey Marcus

*W*edding planning brings together people from every aspect of your life: college roommates, distant relatives, co-workers, and friends—sometimes from different parts of the world. More and more couples are setting the merry mingling mood with a welcome reception party. Read on to find out what's trending in New England welcome parties, along with some tips to get your guests in the right spirit.

Replacing Rehearsal Dinners

Rachel Dodson, wedding and events manager for the Nantucket Hotel + Resort and Winnetu Oceanside Resort, has seen an increased number of welcome receptions in lieu of formal rehearsal dinners. "Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres lend themselves to including anyone who would like to attend, and allow guests to meet one another before the wedding. These are ideal for destination weddings since guests who have traveled want to see the bride and groom before the wedding and want a more relaxed evening before the more formal event the next day," says Dodson.

Welcome receptions often take the place of rehearsal dinners at Stoweflake Mountain Resort and Spa, which allows all wedding guests to feel included in the celebration, giving the couple a chance to visit with friends and family who have traveled from out of town, but are not in the wedding party. Typically, the rehearsal dinner breaks into a welcome reception/dinner for many of the guests who choose to stay the weekend. At Stoweflake, the team members always take the extra step by presenting

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Boston Harbor Hotel

unique welcome options such as Vermont goodies or small touches throughout the resort that tie the wedding theme together.

With the current trend in destination and intimate weddings, guests are having to travel to the celebration more often than in past years. "Couples are aware and respectful of the cost of travel and attend a weekend wedding. They have now started to extend an invite to these guests to join them for a "welcome dinner" instead of a traditional rehearsal dinner," says Tasha Gray, private dining sales and events manager at the Boston Burlington Marriott.

Couples who host weddings in the Berkshires, a destination wedding hub, often want to be inclusive. This is another location where welcome parties are gaining in popularity over the more traditional rehearsal dinner that only includes the wedding party. "In the Berkshires, we have such a great variety of venues that the bride and groom can craft the perfect welcome party to suit their style, so they truly vary, as weddings do too, from infor-



mal to formal," says Lindsey Hammond-Schmid, marketing director at 1Berkshire.

Post Rehearsal Dinners

"We are seeing welcome receptions that are starting later in the evening (after a formal, small rehearsal dinner) where all guests staying at the host hotel are included. Guests come and go and the recep-

tions often feature lounge-style seating with an open bar and snack foods. These gatherings give wedding guests an opportunity to join together to kick off the weekend festivities. This also gives the bride and groom an opportunity to interact with more of their guests," according to Michael Boivin and Ted Daniels, wedding planners at the Boston Harbor Hotel.

Blending Rehearsal Dinners with Welcome Parties

Michael Oaks, director of sales and marketing at Gurney's Newport Resort & Marina, has noticed a trend of welcome parties rather than formal rehearsal dinners, allowing guests to enjoy a more casual atmosphere at the start of the wedding weekend. "We've also seen that couples who have a traditional rehearsal dinner for the wedding party will often host a welcome party following the dinner for all of the wedding guests, offering cocktails and light bites," says Oaks.

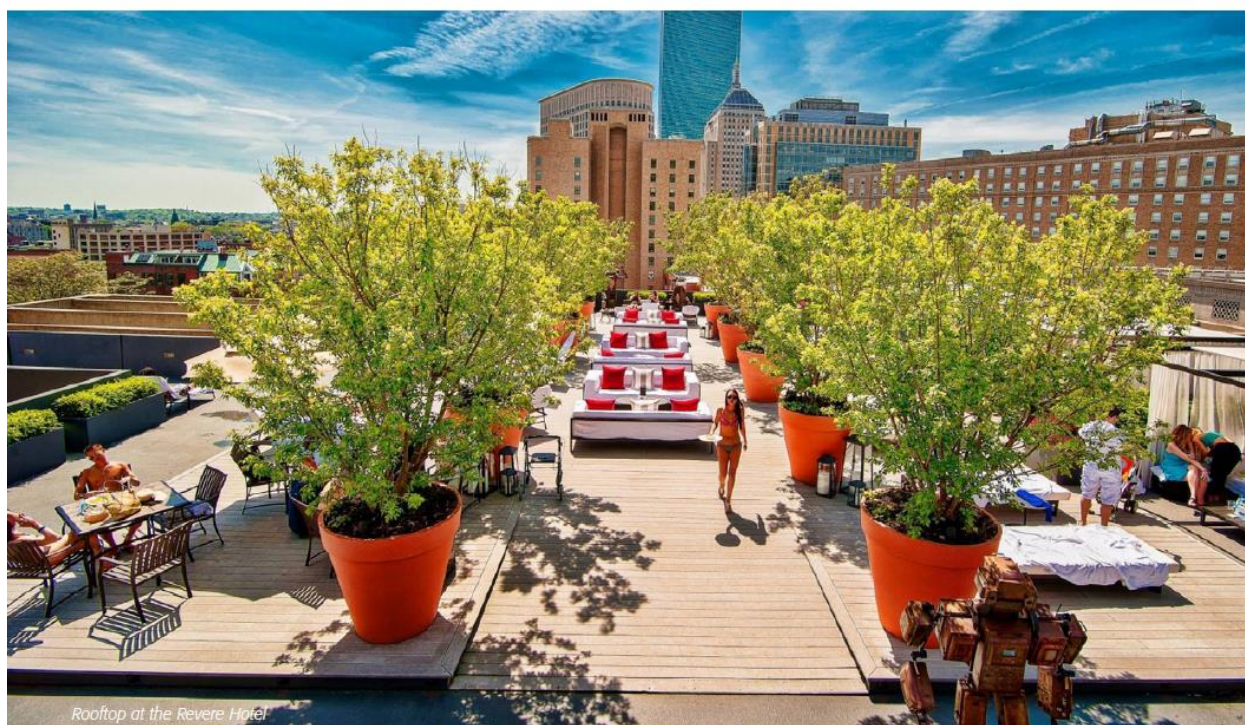
At the Revere Hotel, welcome parties have become a standard replacement for traditional rehearsal dinners, or they are being added as an additional event. "Our clients want a casual, relaxing environment to allow wedding guests the chance to get to know each other before the big day," explains Gary Roderick, director of catering at Revere Hotel Boston Common.



Gurney's Newport Resort & Marina

Whatever way you choose to kick off your wedding weekend, be sure to take a moment to savor the wonderful feeling of sharing special moments with family and friends. **B&G**

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Rooftop at the Revere Hotel

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