

REAL LIFE WEDDINGS

BLOOMING *lovely*

All was bright and beautiful at Anna and Paul's sunflower wedding at Combermere Abbey

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Anna & Paul Thomas

Venue: Combermere Abbey

Photography: Peter Naylor

We bumped into each other in the car park of our work place. Paul felt it was love at first sight, I however needed a bit of convincing! It didn't take me long to realise what a lovely gentleman he was though.

I grew up on the north Norfolk coast and Paul took me there for a weekend visit on my birthday. Having set up a small beach tent and BBQ picnic, he handed me a shoe size box which I thought was a present for my birthday (I was imagining designer shoes). However, as I opened the first box I found a smaller box followed by a number of smaller boxes until I reached a ring box which was empty. Paul had the ring in his pocket and got down on one knee. I was totally surprised and even thought he was joking.

We knew we did not want to have a church wedding and that we really wanted a venue that had lots of natural brightness and also exclusivity, therefore, Combermere Abbey was ideal for us. It was the first venue we went to see and it was the benchmark when we looked at other venues. The Glasshouse where we got married is set in a gorgeous fruit tree maze and the beautiful gardens were a perfect sunny setting for our afternoon

drinks reception and canapés, with the amazing Dotted Crotchets, our string quartet, playing in the background and the guests playing croquet. The cottages at Combermere Abbey were also great for all our family and close friends to stay, and enabled us to have a real weekend celebration, including a hog roast and small party on the Friday night beforehand (followed by a late night swim in the lake). The Pavilion where we had the evening reception was also fabulous and gave us a blank canvas which we were able to transform to suit us.

We allowed ourselves nine months to plan the wedding. We already had a lot of ideas and the suppliers were key in helping us bring together our vision. Paul and I worked as a really good team in the decision making and we had lots of fun on

the way, I loved every minute of it and although stressful at times, it is great thing to do together (I actually miss wedding planning). Paul created our "to do" excel spreadsheet which enabled us to keep track on priorities and timescales. Obviously the food and wine were his favourite parts to choose! I think we were very lucky to have suppliers who were all so professional and helpful. The suppliers and the venue's wedding team were all brilliant in contributing in getting the finer details right and understood how

MAGIC MOMEN

How everything we'd organised came together



important those items were for us. This included our cake designer actually hand-stitching bird wedding cake toppers and a sunflower bouquet for the bird bride decoration.

I knew that I wanted a fishtail, mermaid style dress and most of the dresses I tried on were this style. In the end I opted for a lovely lace strapless Benjamin Roberts number. I can't say that when I tried on my dress that I knew it was "the one" but the wedding dress shop were so amazing and flexible in that they said they could make any adjustments that I wanted. My dream dress was created by them adding some lace to the top of the dress to give a

wanted some lace pieces too. The flowers we had were a mixture of sunflowers, lemon freesia, ivory lisianthus, ivory roses and aster daisies. We opted for navy lace bridesmaid dresses and the groomsmen had traditional morning suits with sunflower buttonholes and navy ties with white polkadots - I thought the navy looked really classy. We had shabby chic bird cages and cake stands as our flower table centrepieces, as well as a range of different sized jars that we had decorated with lace and twine dotted around the venue for flowers. We had handmade lemon and cream floral bunting and matching fabric flag table numbers. We

we still had chance to socialise without missing out on anything. The ceremony was lovely and intimate and included my brother and Paul's sister reading "The lovely love story" and "The little yellow leaf" which made it feel really personal.

We were both very excited on the day! I had butterflies for the whole week before hand but not nerves, just excitement, and all the wedding plans kept going round and round my head. I kept day dreaming of what the day would be like and also couldn't sleep. The morning was quite relaxed for me, getting ready with my bridesmaids, having our hair and make-up done and drinking Bucks Fizz. Paul spent the morning checking the venue decorations and everything were how they should be for me. We didn't see each other during the morning and I couldn't stop smiling when I walked into the Glasshouse and saw him.

The whole day has given us so many fabulous memories. I loved how everything we'd organised came together and how relaxed the day felt and that the details looked even better than we envisaged! It was the happiest day ever. I think every bride and groom should take a few minutes to themselves to watch all their guests enjoying the day and to think that all your favourite people are there to

“Ever since visiting France on holidays as a child, my favourite flowers have been sunflowers”

more vintage style, sweetheart neck line, they adjusted the bottom of the dress to pronounce the fishtail style, and I also had a Jenny Packham brooch, that Paul bought for me, sewn on to the dress. I loved wearing it! What made it even better were the beautiful nude Christian Louboutin shoes I wore, I think Paul is worried that I will now have the taste for expensive shoes in future.

Ever since visiting France on holidays as a child, my favourite flowers have been sunflowers so I always knew they'd be my wedding flowers, especially as we were having a summer wedding. Our theme had to work around the sunflowers and I also loved the lace of my wedding dress so

had lots of elements that we created ourselves, with much assistance from friends and family, including our wedding favours of sunflower seeds and mini bottles of limoncello and some confetti cones that we made out of paper doilies. I loved all the personalised touches like our chalk board order of the day and plant crates to hold our confetti cones. We also put together our own sweetie table and a wishing tree where guests left messages on bird tags. We wanted things to be personal and so many guests said how much our wedding day represented "us".

There were just over 80 guests which was the perfect number for us as it meant that even though the day went so quickly,

Useful contacts

Photography: Peter Naylor Photography, www.petenaylor.co.uk

Organisers: Dreamweavers, www.dreamweaversweddings.co.uk

Cake: Cake Temptations, www.caketemptations.com