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QUOGUE, NEW YORK

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COLLEEN CHOSE A PALETTE OF SOFT BROWNS, GREENS, & WHITE TO GIVE THE CELEBRATION A WARM, ORGANIC FEEL.



For Colleen O'Keefe and James Rybakoff, their home in Quogue really is a house of dreams.

James' Hamptons home wasn't much more than a construction site when he started dating Colleen in the fall of 2004, but that didn't keep him from bringing Colleen with him to walk around the house, imagining the life they'd have there.

"He'd say, 'This is where our bedroom will be,' or 'Here's where I will make fires for you and tuck you in at night,' or 'I'm building you a big kitchen so you can whip up some of your delicious onion soup for us,'" remembers Colleen. She was equally sure that James was the one.

The couple met through a mutual friend over drinks when James made an unexpected appearance at a lounge where Colleen and her friend were chatting. Colleen later learned how serendipitous their meeting had been as she became familiar with James' busy schedule. Colleen's friend thought Colleen and James would make the perfect couple and worked a little matchmaker magic, inviting James to come to her own upcoming wedding. Colleen and James didn't need much encouragement — the attraction between them was evident, and when James drove Colleen home from the wedding that night, he invited her to come out to the Hamptons with him the next day.

In spite of that sense of instant rightness, it took James four years to pop the question. Colleen and James had talked about marriage, but he was taking his time. "There were a lot of girls' nights out discussing what he was waiting for," laughs Colleen. "But I knew James loved me and wanted to marry me — I knew I just had to have a little more patience." The wait, of course, was worth it, when James took Colleen on an engagement ring shopping trip to Tiffany, Graff, and Cartier. He made her wait four more months before he popped the question on a London holiday.

There was no question that Colleen and James wanted to have the wedding reception at their Quogue home, but Colleen knew that a home wedding comes with plenty of challenges. Though she's a very detail-oriented person and loves to plan events, Colleen enlisted the help of a professional wedding planner to ensure that everything ran smoothly for the big day. Colleen also spent a lot of time researching different vendors to find the ones that could give her exactly what she wanted. "All that research definitely paid off," Colleen says. "There is literally not one thing about our wedding I would change."







Colleen and James wanted to make their guests feel right at home, as though they were guests at an intimate dinner party rather than at a crowded reception. Colleen kept the guest list fairly small. “We had 60 guests, which I thought was a perfect number — I never felt overwhelmed by the number of people, and we had a chance to connect with everyone,” she says.

Colleen chose a palette of soft browns, greens, and white to give the celebration a warm, organic feel. Tents in the couple’s yard housed reception tables and a dance floor complete with a band. Guests clustered around rustic tables topped with an eclectic mix of flowers and herbs in mason jars perched on slices of birch wood and flanked by mercury glass votives to nibble a Southern-inspired menu of hushpuppies with chipotle sauce, braised short ribs, and sliders made with pulled pork. The soul food fare continued for dinner with crab cakes, mashed sweet potatoes, and tiny banana cream puddings with classic vanilla wafers.

Their wedding celebration was everything Colleen and James had dreamed of, and as they danced among their guests, happily surrounded by the people and the place they loved, it was clear that there’s really no place like home.

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COLLEEN & JAMES’ ADVICE

No. **1** hire a wedding coordinator for your wedding day so you will be able to relax and not worry about last minute details.

No. **2** consider a smaller wedding for a more intimate, inviting celebration; you’ll really be able to spend time with your loved ones, not just say hello.