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a day of wine & roses



The setting—a lush vineyard in the Napa Valley—seemed heaven-sent to earthy *Angel* actress Amy Acker when she wed actor James Carpinello

BY AMY E. GOODMAN ■ PHOTOGRAPHED BY MEG SMITH



Acker in a sheath gown by Reva Mivasagar, and Carpinello in Armani. The bouquet, by Leah Lowery for Sasha Souza Events, featured red roses, chocolate cosmos and crystals.

"Since we are really into food and wine we chose Napa," Carpinello says. "It was a fairy-tale escape, a true vacation for everyone."

PLANNING A VINEYARD WEDDING

Don't worry that a wine-country venue restricts your décor options to autumn leaves, bunches of grapes, and wooden casks. Wedding planner Sasha Souza explains how she gave modern flair to Acker's celebration at the Hans Fahden winery in Calistoga, Calif.:

- **Create a distinctive, romantic atmosphere.** "I designed the entire event around a picture of a mosaic tabletop that Amy gave me," says Souza, who had dinner served in the vineyard's wine cave on a similar mosaic table (right) that she had built especially for the occasion. It was decorated with 1,000 glittery crystals.
- **Choose a unifying detail.** Souza worked with Exclamation Invitations to create a gothic monogram using the initials of the couple's last names: "AC," which appeared on the invitations, place cards and cookie favors. The monogram also was projected onto the reception wall. "It gives the party identity and makes the event more personal," the planner says.
- **If the walls don't work, create your own.** "Many walls are not that attractive," acknowledges Souza, who brought in 18 4-by-8-foot padded linen panels with decorative buttons to surround the dance-floor area. She also dressed up the cave's walls with cream-colored scrim.
- **Pour more than wine.** Several local wines were served, but Souza made sure to add a specialty drink to the bar menu: a pomegranate margarita, aptly the same red color as the party décor.
- **Offer a space for a cozy retreat.** Souza created an indoor lounge adjacent to the dance floor, using a sofa, love seats and a coffee table. "Placing the seating so close to the dance area made it more homelike and gave tired guests a place to sit, snack and watch people dance," she says.
- **Give the scene a soft glow.** Using hundreds of candles in vintage candelabras, lanterns and chandeliers, Souza produced a warm, elegant atmosphere in the winery.



You might say that on Amy Acker's wedding day the bride herself was something blue. Bundled up in blankets in a cold, dark guest cottage on the Hans Fahden Vineyard just hours before her nuptials to actor James Carpinello, the *Angel* star and her bridal party waited for a raging storm to end and the power—and heat—to return. "It was 35 degrees, and no one had the courage to get dressed!" says Acker, who managed to keep everyone smiling

despite the tempest. Then, five minutes before the April 25 ceremony, luck smiled on her, when the sun came out and the power flickered on. "The timing was simply a miracle," she says.

For the 27-year-old actress it was another apparent divine intervention on the way to the altar. First came the retrieval of the engagement ring that had been stuck in customs, just in time for Carpinello's proposal on Australia's Gold Coast in June 2002. Then came the quest for a venue that led Acker to 45 sites in California's Napa Valley, before she stumbled upon her dream location. "I walked into a wedding in progress," says Acker, who was so impressed with the mountainside winery

that she booked the site and the same planner a few days later.

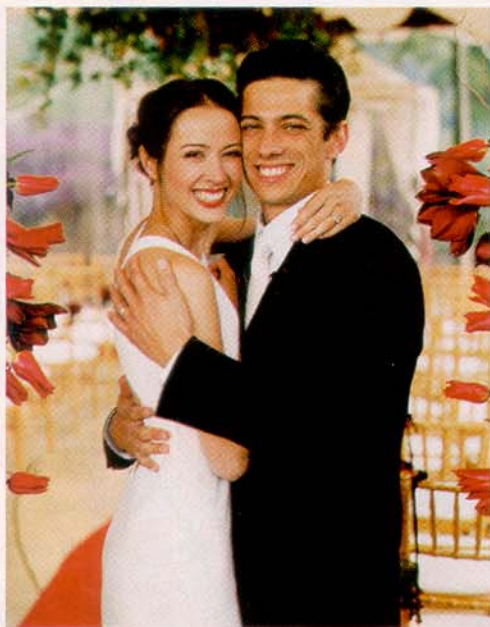
That planner, Sasha Souza, immediately understood the vibe Acker wanted. "James and Amy are so laid-back that we created a hip bohemian mood," says Souza, who suggested rich red colors and a crystal theme for the ceremony in the winery's Monet-style garden and the reception dinner that followed.

As the big day drew near and the rains seemed relentless, Souza had a tent with clear side panels constructed for the ceremony. "Guests still saw the gardens, but inside we covered the tent poles with moss, hung rustic chandeliers filled with red roses and ivy, and added a garden gate to the head of the aisle," she says. "It was Amy's dream to be married in a garden, and rain or not, she was."

As it turned out, sunlight streamed through the tent, and 65 guests sipped from miniature bottles of Pommery Pop champagne



Clockwise from top right: Alyson Hannigan and Alexis Denisof (who wed five months later) with the groom. For Acker's "something borrowed," she wore rings from her grandmothers. She co-designed the bridesmaids' dresses with Heather Sladenski, former *Angel* wardrobe stylist. The couple share a hug. Bejeweled metal mesh cones, hung on select ceremony chairs, overflow with burgundy carnations. Hairstylist Jim Avila placed roses in the bride's curly updo. "We left a strand of hair loose to cascade down her neck," he says. An ice sculpture featuring five varieties of raw oysters was a popular attraction during the cocktail hour.





"I used 1,000 crystals and 300 candles," Souza says of the vibrant, all-red reception table. Informal escort cards directed guests to sit on either the right or left side.

"I wasn't nervous until I took my vows," the bride says. "It was pure excitement, that indescribable feeling of being with the right person."

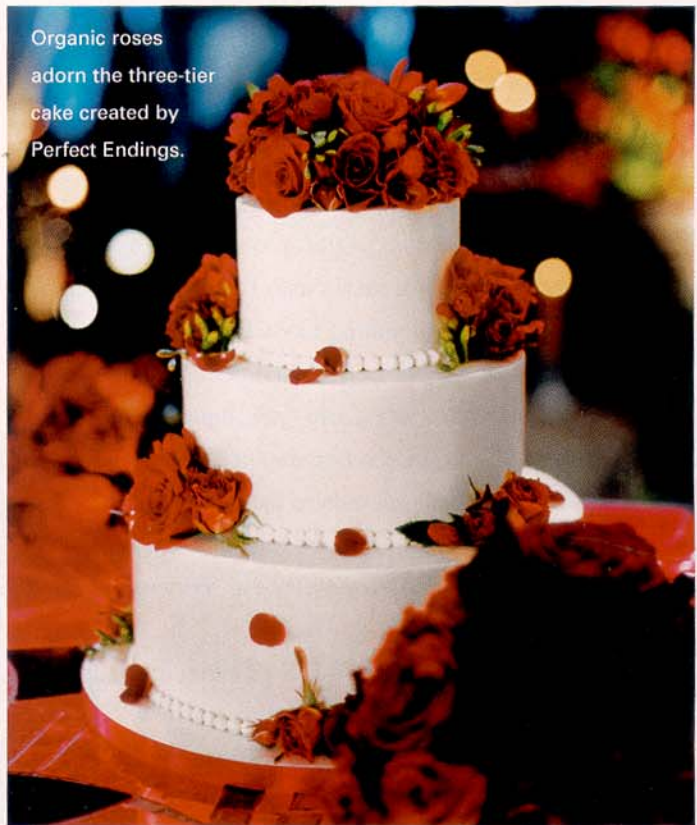
as Acker, accompanied by her father, walked down the aisle, which was covered with red douppioni silk. An all-family bridal party surrounded the couple, and Acker's pastor from her hometown of Dallas officiated. Carpinello's childhood friend Tim Fitzgerald, of Broadway's *The Boy from Oz*, sang an emotional rendition of Andrea Bocelli and Celine Dion's "The Prayer." "With the sunlight, flowers and crystals, the tent looked like a painting, like we weren't on earth," says Carpinello, 28.

Guests walked up a short path to a covered deck for the cocktail hour, where waiters from Alex's Catering of Vallejo, Calif., served little beef Wellingtons, Moroccan-spiced duck and other hors d'oeuvres complemented by wines from the vineyard. Then the newlyweds opened two large doors that revealed a wine cave, originally used to store barrels but now outfitted with a 56-foot-long mosaic table dripping with crystals and covered with candles. "The first time we saw the table, after months of planning, we didn't know what to expect," Acker says. "It was amazing."

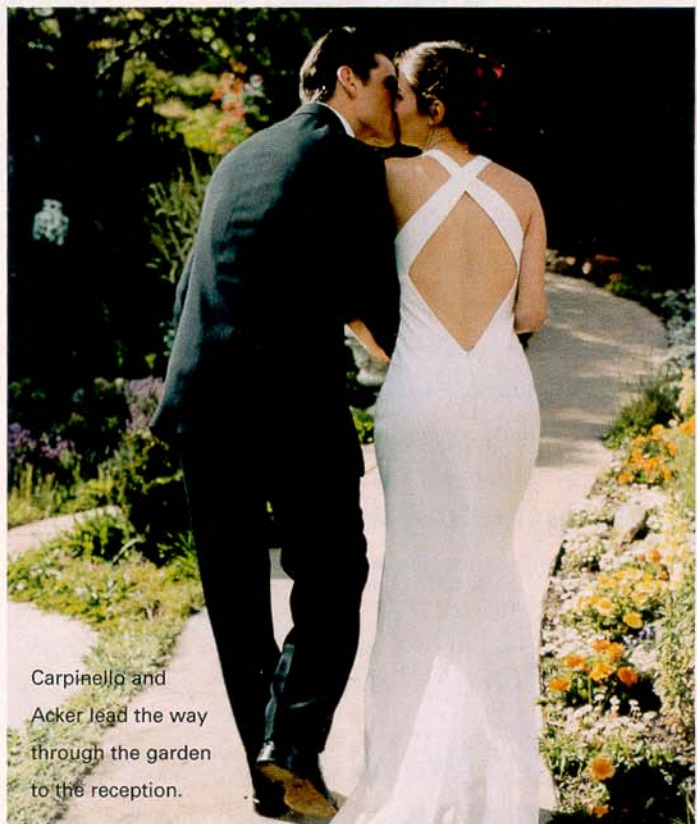
After a three-course sit-down dinner featuring beef tenderloin, the groom—who played the lead in the Broadway version of *Saturday Night Fever*—serenaded his bride with "My Girl" during the father-daughter dance. Their talented friends, including Neil Patrick Harris of Broadway's *Cabaret*, soon followed suit, belting out pop songs with the Midwest Coast, a five-member band.

The party kicked into full swing when guests break-danced and limboed across the room, with even the groom's 86-year-old grandmother rocking out to Nelly's "Hot in Herre." And for anyone working up an appetite on the dance floor, Carpinello announced the opening of a food station called the A&J Diner, where guests enjoyed mini grilled ham-and-cheese sandwiches, french fries and gelato cones. More than one future bride made mental notes. "I've been to weddings where all people do is look at the clock because they can't wait until the bride and groom cut the cake," says friend Alyson Hannigan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *American Wedding*, "but this is the kind of wedding where no one wants to leave."

And guests continued to celebrate long after a light rain began to fall and the newlyweds pulled away in a 1947 Packard convertible—with the top down. "I wasn't ready for the day to end," Acker concedes, "yet I was excited to start this new phase of life." ■



Organic roses adorn the three-tier cake created by Perfect Endings.



Carpinello and Acker lead the way through the garden to the reception.