

# Simply Ballroom

TRADITIONALLY MADE FOR DANCING, LARGE ROOMS CAN UNIQUELY SHOWCASE YOUR VISIONS. HERE, FIVE TAKES ON THE CLASSIC WEDDING SPACE.

by Linda Bernstein



Garlands of roses and lushly draped organza transform a traditional chuppah into a jewel box.



Spectacular lighting and dramatic fountains add to the grandeur of this ballroom.

“I could have danced all night,” Eliza Doolittle sings in the musical *My Fair Lady* after attending her first ball. The focal element of a ballroom-style wedding is often the floor itself, where couples whirl, boogie and get down, dance-wise, during the nuptial celebration. The very word ballroom conjures up glamour, fashion, luxury and fun; these spaces are the epitome of elegance. Ballroom settings not only provide a perfect venue for brides with long guest lists but they can also be made cozy for a more intimate affair. A ballroom is a tabula rasa—a neutral space that designers can make over into either sumptuous visions of grace and style, or tailored, modern rooms that shout out “chic!” Be inspired by these celebratory spaces.

## TAKE ONE: MAKE IT ULTRA ROMANTIC

New York City-based event designer Preston Bailey, of Preston Bailey Designs, created a fantasy garden for a long-time client and her daughter who both like things soft, feminine and pink. The effect was such, however, that the groom and guests never felt they had inadvertently stumbled into a little girl’s tea party. Instead, the abundant floral arrangements, fountains, lighting and huge dance floor worked together to sophisticated effect. The designer’s artistry is immediately evident in the jewel-box-like *chuppah*, *opposite page*. Preston draped the columns and roof with satin and organza and then worked garlands and bouquets of roses and hydrangeas around the domed top and down the sides. Serendipitously, the crystal chandelier at the Waldorf Asto-

ria Hotel in New York City mimicked an inverted dome. The end result: a creation that resembled a life-sized jeweled Fabergé egg, only made of flowers.

Preston credits the bride’s mother with the idea to build tall fountains overflowing with flowers, *above*. He echoed these structures in the uplighting to retain the grandeur of the three-story ballroom. A glossy floor imprinted with a romantic toile pattern provided a festive surface for dancing feet and created the perfect finish to a room now elegant from top to bottom.

**PRESTON’S TIP:** “The key is to always pay attention to dimension. In a large space, you need something tall, like the fountains of flowers here. But because guests will be seated much of the time, you will need eye-level beauty and details, too.”

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1.

1. **Rose-tinted** lighting washes over the glossy floor, casting guests in a flattering glow. 2. **Branches** of manzanita in tall vases add a natural, woody element to the serene space. 3. **Silver** chargers, crystal vases and lush blooms convey all-out glamour.



2.



3.

## TAKE TWO: TRANSFORM WITH COUTURE TOUCHES

The ballroom at The Montage Hotel in Beverly Hills may be known for its Tuscan theme, but Southern California-based wedding planner Carolyn Chen of The Special Day had something different in mind. Channeling Coco Chanel, she transformed the rustic hall into a chic, shining space with a black-and-white theme, *opposite page, top*. To begin, she draped the walls with two layers of satin and chiffon. Then she created a backdrop for the head table, using large paper flowers that resembled the couture house's signature camellia. In a playful nod toward French lingerie, black lace overlays adorned the ivory tablecloths. Warm-hued lighting washed the pure white dance floor with color. A fun and finishing touch Française: Atop each napkin was a macaroon tied with a ribbon that said, simply, "merci." **CAROLYN'S TIP:** "It's all in the accessories. Think of your space as a dress, then go about picking the right shoe, handbag and so on."

## TAKE THREE: BRING THE OUTDOORS IN

Taking a theme and running with it: that was the approach used by California-based event designer Joyce Scardina Becker of Events of Distinction. In this case, the bride and groom requested a "Zen" wedding. Both ceremony and reception were held in grand spaces on the Imperial Floor at the Westin St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco, *opposite page, bottom left*. The goal: to create a tranquil ambience with touches of natural elements. Joyce began by branding the nuptials with the tagline: Love is the Water of Life. Save-the-date cards and invitations featured a blue water droplet flanked by the couple's initials. Blue droplets were engraved onto the menu cards, and the



**Cream-colored** draping on the walls and ceiling create a sense of intimacy.

watery hue was echoed in the table centerpieces as well: white cymbidium orchids and blue hydrangeas sat atop crystal vases holding manzanita branch arrangements. Narrow cylindrical vases with floating candles surrounded each water and flower arrangement. The overall effect was one of a modern, luxurious spa, Joyce says—far from the busy streets below.

## TAKE FOUR: CREATE DRAMA

To brand the bling-ier feel of a wedding held in another hotel ballroom—The Four Seasons Hotel in San Francisco, *opposite page, lower right*—Joyce used the tag "From Russia With Love." The bride, from Kazakhstan, had met her Boston-born-and-bred groom in Moscow. The design challenge here was to bring a sense of warmth, luxury, and yes, drama to a somewhat standard-issue room. Taking center stage: marvelous tall arrangements that graced each table. Lush roses and white hydrangeas burst from tall crystal tulip-shaped containers, and white dendrobium orchids floated in the water. More flowers buried the base of the vases; beyond that, votive candles flickered out of a bed of scattered rose petals. Also eye-catching were the pillar arrangements at the pe-

rimeter of the space, Uplighting from low-lying sconces at the base of each pillar arrangement added drama, texture and dimension to the space.

**JOYCE'S TIP:** "Don't feel you have to go with the ballroom color scheme. When your guests walk into the room, what they'll notice are your flowers and tabletop designs, not the color of the walls."

## TAKE FIVE: DISGUISE AND GLAMORIZE

It was a challenge, but NYC- and Charleston, SC-based event designer Tara Guérard of Tara Guérard Soirée, says this wedding is among her favorites. The venue: a private club in historic Charleston. The problem: the club's ballroom space needed a major overhaul. How to deal with the floors and dropped ceiling? Tara's solution: Cover it all up! The designer draped the walls and ceiling in generous lengths of gauzy, cream-colored fabric and covered the floor with creamy white carpeting, *above*. The result: a luxe, blank canvas with an intimate, tented feel. Tablecloths sewn from yards of off-white crushed velvet added warmth and romance. And then there was the candlelight—lots and lots of candlelight. Tara used Venetian blown-glass candleholders—each one unique in shape and size. And around the edges of the room amber uplighting cast a warm glow.

**TARA'S TIP:** "Trust your designer and never give up hope on a seemingly dull space—it's amazing what can happen with a glue gun and yards of fabric." ■

**"All ballrooms are pretty generic, so make them unique with gorgeous flowers and tabletop designs."**

—Joyce Scardina Becker, Events of Distinction

PHOTOGRAPHY: (OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) CAROLYN CHEN OF THE SPECIAL DAY; DENNIS DESILVA; STUDIO SEVEN; SHERMAN CHU; (THIS PAGE) LIZ BANFIELD PHOTOGRAPHY.