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melanie and chris 03.26.10

charleston, sc

Second chances are hard to come by, especially when they involve someone special. Melanie Pelouze was the maid of honor at a friend's wedding and the bride claimed she had an "amazing guy" she wanted her to meet. As fate would have it, Chris Schmidt ended up not coming to the wedding and they missed the chance to connect. A few years later and unbeknownst to each other, both Chris and Melanie relocated to Richmond, VA for job related reasons. Another friend of Melanie's said she had run into this "amazing guy" and wanted to introduce them. Incredibly enough, the guy turned out to be Chris and years after that first missed opportunity, they finally met.

"We had two great dates, but it was our third date that left us both reeling and certain that this was something special," says Melanie. The all-day date started with brunch and moved on to an Oktoberfest party, a picnic in the park, dinner and dancing. Basically, "we ended up finding any possible excuse to make the date continue!" she says.

Chris agrees and says that's when he started thinking Melanie could be "the one". "I had given myself a rule many years back that I wouldn't marry someone until at least two years had passed," Chris explains, but just nine months later he proposed to Melanie on the back patio of the house where she grew up. "The defaulted promise is a reflection of how powerfully Melanie blew me off my feet," says Chris, a professor of counseling and psychology and certainly no stranger to talking about feelings. Taking sentimentality a giant step further, he bought a journal after that pivotal third date and collected written and tangible memories of their experiences together as they dated. He included reflections on their times together, his thoughts and feelings toward her, notes they shared, big discussions they had, ticket stubs, menus and pictures. On a gorgeous summer evening, Chris gave the journal to Melanie and on the last page, he had written his proposal.

"For the next six months we looked from France to the Grenadines and everywhere in between," says Melanie, "but nothing seemed quite right." An impromptu holiday trip to Charleston, SC for New Year's made the decision for them. Chris fell for the charming seaside city where Melanie lived for four years while in school at the College of Charleston. "All of a sudden, we had our city," says Melanie. Boone Hall Plantation, situated on a tidal creek off the Ashley River, quickly emerged as their favorite venue. Featuring weathered doors and paneling, an oyster shell floor and a soaring exposed beam ceiling, the Cotton Dock at the plantation was "an amazing blank slate to work with," explains Melanie. "From the statuesque 300+-year-old oak draped in Spanish moss to the rustic building itself and the romantic dock overlooking the tidal

creek, the entire environment was mysterious, magical and as captivating as any far-flung destination we could imagine," she says. They inquired about the property and discovered that the only available date in the near future was a mere three months away. With that, they began a whirlwind of planning for their March wedding.

Melanie claims a lifelong affinity for all things European and knew she wanted their wedding to have a rustic French feel. With the help of her mother, an interior designer, they pulled together a series of details that made the event exquisitely unique. Burlap, lavender and wrought-iron chandeliers featured prominently in the décor, in addition to natural urns of rosemary, grasses and moss.

The evening ceremony took place in front of the "simple, yet dramatic" doors of the Cotton Dock and Melanie wore a soft gown by Amsale that fit the same description. "Given the venue, I wanted something unique, non-traditional, flowy and timeless," she explains. Her lovely shoulder-baring dress was designed with a gauzy net overlay, an oversized flower at the neck, a wide silk ribbon tie and a plunging back. "I found the dress online and purchased it without ever even trying it on," she says. "Kind of like Chris - I loved it at first sight!" She added smoky cut crystal drop earrings, a funky metal bracelet from Anthropologie and a blue ribbon bustle tie taken from a favorite dress she wore as a little girl.

Chris wore a light gray, two-button J.Crew suit with a blue shirt, a skinny silver tie and a vest. His boutonniere was made of burlap and twine with a fabric flower, "so he can keep it," Melanie says. She and Chris exchanged heartfelt vows they had written themselves and listened as Chris's oldest nephew Patrick, Melanie's grandmother Maxine and Melanie's cousin Ceara read quotes. At the close of the ceremony, Melanie says that she and Chris didn't say anything and instead, "he just picked me up and kissed me!"

Inside the Cotton Dock, lanterns were suspended from trailing greenery, a fire crackled in the fireplace and candles were everywhere, providing the evening with a warm, flickering glow. A variety of herbs and plants including tarragon, basil, cilantro, oregano, thyme, rosemary, lavender, dusty miller and lamb ears dotted the tables in mixed white vases while ranunculus, garden roses, anemones, lisianthus, tulips and quail feathers worked as accents. "Several sterling silver trophies have been in our family for years that my grandparents won back in the 1920s and we used them as vases for the head table," says Melanie. "Chris and I drank from two silver goblets that were also trophies



my grandmother won in a golf tournament in the 1930s. It felt special to have those heirlooms and the history and people they represented incorporated into the evening." Tables were named after Chris and Melanie's favorite poets and seating arrangements were listed under a poem by each poet, pinned to burlap and placed in weathered picture frames hung on the Cotton Dock's doors.

The event's menu featured Lowcountry-inspired fare and a few specific Charleston favorites. During cocktail hour, servers passed demitasse cups of Charleston she-crab soup with skewered toasted cheese croutons, edible spoons with wild mushroom ragout and mini lobster tarragon ice cream cones. Dinner began with a plated first course of pickled candy beets with white truffle whipped cheese, shaved fennel and Hawaiian black lava salt paired with a shot of white gazpacho. From there, guests moved on to steak au poivre in black pepper bourbon crème sauce, a seafood display of ceviche, smoked salmon and oysters on the half-shell and panini stations serving mini paninis paired with Charleston ales. A variety of drinks were offered, including spiked sweet tea mojitos, Dark and Stormys (a favorite of their sailing friends), French wines, lavender lemonade and rosemary-infused water. "In keeping with our European theme, we chose to offer several different desserts," Melanie explains. Individual lemon cheesecakes were paired with limoncello shooters and a croque en bouche styled tree was made of French macarons in hazelnut, chocolate and mint.

When asked what he remembers most about their wedding, Chris easily replies, "Beyond seeing Melanie for the first time, my favorite part of the day was after we were officially married and walking back down the aisle together just sharing and experiencing the joy of the moment – laughing, smiling, kissing. It was perfect." JLG

Event Coordination and Florals: A Charleston Bride, Ceremony: Boone Hall Plantation, Reception Location: The Cotton Dock, Catering and Baker: Duval Catering, Invitations: Wedding Paper Divas, Ceremony Music: Joe Clark Big Band, Reception Music: Bryan Mahanes of Other Brother Entertainment, Bridal Gown: Amsale, Hair: Affair Hair by Tanesha, Groom's Attire: J.Crew, Rentals: Snyder Event Rentals, Transportation: Absolutely Charleston.

Photography: Nancy Ray Photography,
www.nancyrayphotography.com.



