



Real life story

Stars for the day

by David Boyles and Darrell Chart

Everything went according to plan for this civil partnership

Photography: David Morphew Photography

THE MEETING . We met online in 2000 and despite our first date not being a great success, we kept in touch. We spent New Years Eve that year together in Cardiff where Darrell was a student, so New Year's Day 2001 became our dating anniversary.

THE PROPOSAL . . . Until Darrell finished university we had to settle for a long distance relationship, but on our fifth anniversary – New Year's Day 2006 – Darrell proposed while we were away with friends in Pembrokeshire.

We got matching engagement rings chosen by Darrell – a simple, silver design – and set a rough date for summer 2008. We wanted 08.08.08, but 2½ years in advance it was already taken so we settled for 22 August instead!

THE PLANNING . The first thing we did was send out 'Save the Date' cards in our 2007 Christmas cards. We had an incredibly detailed spreadsheet which I prepared including everything from pictures of the flowers to the seating plan, guest list, timetable of the day, outfits and lighting scheme for the evening disco. We worked together on all the planning and spent about a year putting everything together.

We chose Ettington Park, near Stratford-upon-Avon for our civil partnership ceremony and reception. I first came across the house on a childhood holiday and eventually took Darrell there as a surprise birthday treat. We just fell in love with its architecture, location and history.

THE DETAILS . . . We hired suits in a Victorian frock coat style to match the setting. Darrell's in dark brown while mine was dark grey. We wore matching waistcoats and Darrell wore a light blue tie while mine was a matching design, but in dark purple.



We opted for a white, blue and purple colour scheme with the flowers, cake colours and evening reception lighting matching our ties. We chose calla lily buttonholes, our mothers wore Singapore orchids and our flowers contained blue echinops thistle, white delphinium, light blue agapanthus and purple veronicas.

For our reception, we had six tables and chose to theme them with Girls Aloud songs! Our table ('Call The Shots') had us, our witnesses, Darrell's brother and two close friends Darrell met at university. Our other table names were 'Whole Lotta History', 'Love Machine', 'Biology' and 'Something Kinda Ooh'.

We opted for 50 small individual cakes, half which were lemon and half were chocolate and they were iced in the same tie colours that we wore.

We hired sound and lighting equipment and connected this to our laptop. We'd asked everyone for three song choices with their RSVPs and had downloaded and mixed this music together on the laptop. We therefore know that everyone would hear something they wanted to dance to. We chose 'Footloose' for our first dance because we wanted something everyone would get up and dance to that was totally our traditional and upbeat

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THE DAY... It was important to us that the day was as relaxed and enjoyable for everyone as possible while the setting, design and look of the day made it stylish, fresh and unique. Many of our guests had never attended a civil partnership before so it was also a great opportunity to inform.

We wanted to make good use of the latest technology, for example using HD camcorders and an online MobileMe gallery for guests to share their photos. Darrell is a media teacher and used various computer programmes to mix the evening reception music playlists and to edit the DVD of the day.

Darrell gave the only speech of the day, our guests said it was the best 'wedding' speech they had ever heard, but unfortunately our camcorders only caught the toast due to low batteries!

It was a wonderful day without an ounce of nerves as we spent it together in the company of our friends and family and we had full confidence in the hotel and our suppliers. We had time to reflect the day on honeymoon in Jersey. We wanted somewhere that involved only a short flight as I had never been on a plane before! The hotel we stayed in was in the same chain as Ettington Park which made it a special choice too.

THE ICING ON THE CAKE... Our big day had no hiccups at all and everything went according to the plan we had designed for the day. Even the weather was on our side - the finest day of the summer - it rained in the weeks both before and after... ■



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