

A fairy-tale wedding fueled by family and friends



Story by Anne McCarthy Strauss

Photos by Kelley DeBettencourt

MELISSA *and* MAX

Ceremony – **Parking Lot of Abel's Hill Beach** ✂ Reception Location – **Chilmark Community Center**
Celebrant – **Justice of the Peace Merrily Fenner** ✂ Caterer – **Mediterranean Restaurant** ✂ Beer – **Offshore Ale Company**
Flowers – **Flowers on the Vineyard by Louise Sweet** ✂ Rentals – **Tilton Tents and Party Rentals**
Gown – **Tulle** ✂ Hair and Spa Services – **Wave Lengths Salon and Day Spa**



WHEN MAX HART RETURNED to his childhood home on Martha's Vineyard to pursue a job at the Vineyard Gazette, he found much more than a new addition to his résumé. He found Melissa Carelli, also a Vineyard native who had returned to her roots – and a fellow media professional at MVTV, the Island's public access station. Five years later, she would become his bride.

Although they were both raised on the Vineyard, Melissa in Vineyard Haven and Max in Chilmark, their paths didn't cross until 2004. Their courtship evolved when they moved to Brooklyn as a couple in 2006 to further their media careers. But when it came time to marry, there was only one place to do it – on their Island home surrounded by friends and loved ones.

Two themes blossomed early on in the couple's engagement – the participation of loved ones and a fairy-tale enchantment. In a preview of the expertise that would be provided by family and friends, Melissa's uncle, who's a New York jeweler, custom designed her engagement ring. The fairy-tale theme was initiated when Melissa's father, Fred Carelli, was asked to create a driftwood arch for their ceremony.

What the couple lacked in their wedding budget was made up for by the creative contributions of family and friends. Melissa and Max created a beautiful wedding in one of the most expensive destination-wedding spots in the country for \$15,000. Melissa served as her own bridal planner and saw many of the details through to completion, including the invitations, which were handmade by her sisters, Lauren and Nina – with production assistance from the bride and groom.

To commemorate their first date at Abel's Hill Beach, Max and Melissa exchanged their vows by Chilmark Pond. The







weather was perfect for the outdoor ceremony at the water's edge, surrounded by beach roses, marsh mallows, and tall beach grasses, with the crashing of the ocean surf providing an aural background from across the dunes. The setting was magical, even ethereal, with such enchanting details as the driftwood archway, and the headpieces and outfits the bride's sisters wore as her co-maids of honor.

The Chilmark Community Center, an ordinary building, would be their reception venue. This creative team transformed it into a wonderland. Melissa selected tulle for its affordability and its dreamy transparency; she and friends created a massive tulle curtain that covered the length of the stage from floor to ceiling, and strung sets of small lanterns behind it to make it glow. Bright paper lanterns and 30-inch fabric circles added splashes of color to the table settings. Melissa made all the table and place cards with materials left over from the invitations, and she and her family hand-lettered them and punched heart-shaped holes in them to make them more festive. As favors, cylinders with M&M's (for Max & Melissa) were wrapped in colored tissue paper made to look like flowers.

For added fun, they set up their own do-it-yourself photo booth for their 80 wedding guests. They bought an inexpensive old eight-megapixel digital camera from eBay that worked by remote control, hung a sheet as a backdrop, and brought in childhood dress-up clothes for all to enjoy. "Hands down the photo booth was the most fun part of the party, especially when the costumes made their way out onto the dance floor," says Max.

Music was a huge part of Max and Melissa's wedding, much of it provided by talented guests as gifts. Two friends sang their own harmonized version of "Two of Us" at the ceremony and then played an improvised rendition of "Eye of the Tiger" for Max and Melissa's exit song. Later at the reception, Melissa's father played guitar and sang "Fields of Gold" for the couple's first dance. Other musician friends performed a duet of "You've Got a Friend." Melissa danced with her father, and Max danced with Sarah Kimber, a close family friend who stepped in for Max's mother, who died in 1999. A dance party followed, replete with an hours-long play list created using iTunes.

The open bar included beer from Oak Bluffs' Offshore Ale





Company, a selection of wine, plus a small menu of signature cocktails, including gin gimlets and the Sarah Special – a vodka and lemonade concoction named for Max’s dancing partner. Leslie and Doug Hewson of Mediterranean catered the affair, re-creating some of Melissa’s mom’s dishes that the bride and groom both love – such as zucchini pancakes with cheese sauce and quinoa salad with roasted vegetables. They even replicated hors d’oeuvres inspired by the Menemsha Galley, Max and Melissa’s favorite after-beach snack spot, including appetizers of grilled eggplant sandwiches, tomato soup mini cups, and mini crab cakes. The main course menu offered grilled pork tenderloin, barbecued chicken, and grilled bluefish. A vanilla wedding cake with layers of raspberry and blackberry jam was made from scratch, courtesy of two of Melissa’s family members.

“The true benefit of having so much contributed by friends and family was that it made our wedding such a unique celebration of those dearest to us,” Melissa says. “We’re forever grateful to our loved ones for making our wedding just as magical as we imagined it would be.” 🍷

