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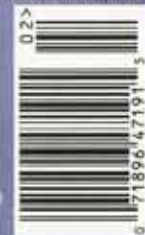
SMART LIVING IN BALTIMORE



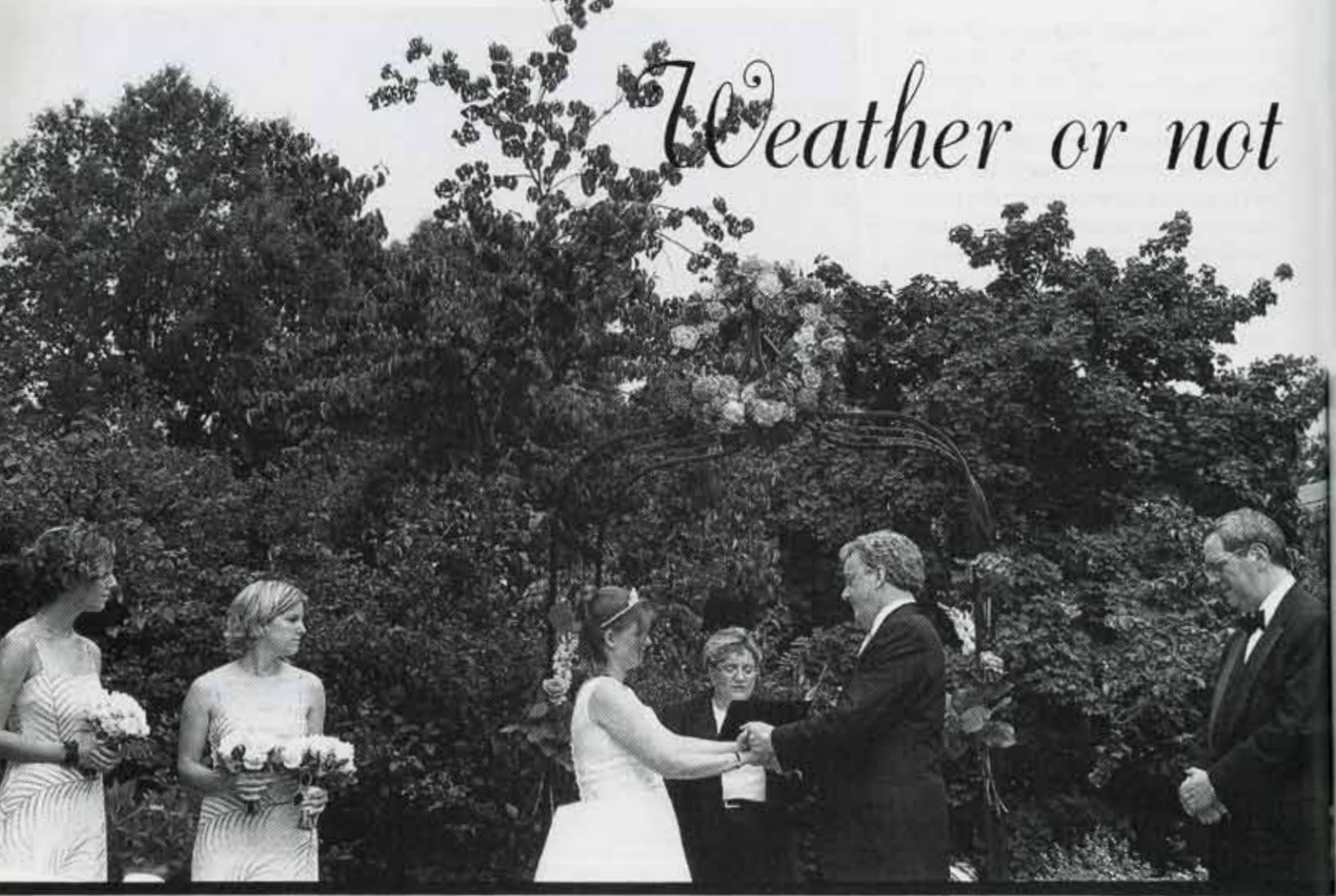
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# Weather or not



BY DARA BUNJON  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY EVE MORRA

When chef Nancy Longo was planning to wed attorney Steven Charles at a private home in Roland Park, she was adamant about one thing: there would be *no* tent. Instead, she wanted the event to take on the open, English-country feel of the gardens that Steven's longtime friends Michael Libowitz and Susan Rittenhouse had nurtured on their property. The corner garden out front and the border beds in the walled-in back yard were lushly planted with dozens of roses, deep coral azaleas, old-fashioned hydrangeas, perky daisies and countless more flowers and herbs. An avid gardener himself, the groom liked the idea of the fragrance and color of the cottage-style gardens providing a backdrop for both the wedding service and the reception. But he was willing to at least *consider* tents in case of inclement weather.

NANCY AND STEVEN'S ROMANCE HAD FIRST BLOOMED as a friendship in the spring of 1996. They had met several times, then Nancy called on Steven for legal advice on a parking issue—a zealous police officer was continually ticketing her car for being parked too close to a Fells Point corner near her popular restaurant, Pierpoint. (“I got six tickets in one week,” notes Nan-

cy, who paid the tickets but avoided a related charge of disturbing the peace.)

Figuring turnabout was fair play, Steven asked her for assistance with a costume for a “Saturday Night Fever” birthday party. He later arrived at the restaurant in his “Staying Alive” outfit—a baby blue polyester blazer, plaid bell-bottom hip-hugger pants and brown platform shoes—and asked her to go, too. But with a restaurant full of diners, Nancy had to decline.

The persistent Steven continued to visit Nancy at the restaurant. He took her to dinner and chose Pierpoint as the site of a gourmet holiday party. By February, he was being chided by a friend for being preoccupied with Pierpoint and its chef/owner. “It must mean you’re in love,” the friend teased.

“I am,” Steven replied.

On Christmas Eve, 1998, Steven presented Nancy with a large gift box. Inside was a Limoges porcelain box in the shape of a grocery cart full of food. And inside was an engagement ring.

Tropical storm be damned, chef **Nancy Longo** stayed the course with a casual garden wedding overflowing with champagne and gourmet Chesapeake fare.

Eventually, the couple decided that Nancy would get to pick the wedding date if the Ravens won the Super Bowl. On Steven's Valentine card last year, Nancy wrote her choice: Saturday, June 16th.

Little did Nancy know she had picked the meteorological day from hell. The Thursday before the ceremony, the forecast called for a tropical storm front to move through on the wedding day. Nancy had reluctantly ordered a tent to cover the band, bar and hors d'oeuvres. Now, kicking and screaming, she ordered two more. On Saturday morning, the skies opened up with the remnants of tropical storm Allison, and the National Weather Service issued flash flood warnings.

BY THE 4:30 CEREMONY, THE STORM HAD DIED DOWN, BUT THE 98 percent humidity lived on and the temperature hovered at 95 degrees. The groom flushed red in his tuxedo as some 138 guests began to gather in the front garden, women scrambling for the sidewalk to keep their heels from sinking into the drenched ground.

Nancy and Steven, both Catholic, chose nondenominational minister Kathy Sibiski for the ceremony. Michael Libowitz was the best man, and Steven's daughters, Meghan, 19, and Amanda, 22, wearing green BCBG dresses in a palm leaf motif, were the bride's attendants.

Peabody student Patrick O'Brennan played the Beatles' "Here, There and Everywhere" on guitar while vows were exchanged and lips met. Then, as the newlyweds turned to face their friends, Nancy reached into her white bouquet and pulled a pair of white pearlized cat's-eye sunglasses from among the gardenias, peonies and freesia. Steven had seen the vintage glasses in an optical store weeks before and jokingly dared Nancy, who rarely shies from dares, to wear them at the ceremony.

Guests retreated to the back garden and were greeted with bountiful champagne—six cases of Veuve Clicquot Yellow Label in the Jerobaum bottle (which is equivalent to four regular bottles). The bride and groom had an additional 110 bottles of wines from 15 wineries plus a top-shelf bar. "Who'd have thought 138 people could drink six cases of Veuve Clicquot in an hour?" Nancy quips.

Nancy and her staff had prepared and frozen most of the hors



*Opposite, minister Kathy Sibiski reads the nuptials at the nondenominational ceremony. Above, the cake topper, crafted by Pierpoint pastry chef Cydni Verger, is a whimsical allusion to the bride's profession. The groom grew the gorgeous gardenias.*

d'oeuvres two weeks prior (Thai chicken spring rolls, duck egg rolls, smoked crab balls, shrimp dumplings and wild mushroom Stilton turnovers) but were busy making crab balls the day before. They would be served alongside items prepared by Longo's friend, caterer Sascha Wolhandler, who had given 17-year-old Nancy a start in the food business more than 20 years ago.

In lieu of floral centerpieces, Nancy stacked a selection of cheeses on white enamel cake plates. Chalkboard garden stakes displayed the table numbers. The buffet, which held Italian-style flank steak with braised leeks, demi-glace and truffled mashed potatoes (and a bottle of white truffle oil for those who wished to be even more decadent); Pierpoint's roasted Chilean sea bass with Mongolian barbecue sauce with jasmine rice; lemon chicken; sugar snap peas and asparagus; eggplant layer cake and baby mozzarella with grape tomato salad.

It was relaxed gourmet fare fit for an appreciative audience of foodies that included The Wine Ltd.'s Buddy Zamoiski and his wife, Ellen, cable TV's food guy Paul Adler, food stylist Sue Simon and Bacchus Wines' Peter Van Buren. Marty Cosgrove, chef/manager of Paul Prudhomme's Magic Seasonings, came

*(continued on page 153)*



*Far left, in the receiving line, the bride, in a Barbara Allin organza gown, sports the white pearlized cat's-eye sunglasses she donned on a dare. Left, Mambo Combo provided the Latin beat for dancing at the tented reception.*

## Weather or Not

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up from Louisiana with Mardi Gras parasols. Unable to attend, Prudhomme himself sent a lovely pair of crystal candlesticks.

Nancy baked three wedding cakes: a rum cake for her Italian relatives, a chocolate cake with nonpareils the size of silver dollars to satisfy Steven's passion for chocolate, and a strawberry shortcake for Amanda and Meghan. Pierpoint pastry chef Cydni Verger crafted a miniature chef's toque to adorn the head of the plaster bride figurine atop the rum cake.

Asked to play all upbeat music and forget wedding traditions, the band Mambo Combo obliged with its liveliest Latin music. Male guests peeled off sport coats and suit jackets to hit the parquet dance floor that covered the driveway. The groom borrowed his host's short-sleeved knit shirt and shorts, but the bride, accustomed as she was to working in front of a hot stove, remained comfortable in her dress, sans hosiery.

Steven and Nancy honeymooned in California wine country, where Nancy had won a week's stay as the winner of a cooking contest. They stayed two days at Murphy's near Ironstone Vineyards, then five days in Napa Valley at the Mount View Spa and Resort in Calistoga. Their most memorable meals came in Calistoga, at their friend Jan Birnbaum's Catahoula Restaurant, and in the Napa Valley at Mustards Grill and the red-hot French Laundry. (The coveted French Laundry reservation and meal were a wedding gift from the Zamoiskis.)

To top it all off, Steven won \$250 in a quarter slot machine at an Indian reservation on the road to Sonoma. "Well," he concluded. "It looks like I married me a good luck charm."

And the weather? It was perfect. "Not one day of rain," says Nancy. "And we drove around in a convertible—with the top down." □

*Dara Bunjon, marketing and sales rep for Vanms Spices and president of Buzz, a small public relations firm for the hospitality industry, was a guest at the wedding.*

## R E S O U R C E S

**Wedding dress** Bridals by Deborah, 2400 Boston St., 410-563-8700

**Flowers** Blue Sage, 410-675-7090

**Invitations** The Pleasure of Your Company, Green Spring Station, 410-821-6369

**Music** Mambo Combo, 410-889-4228

**Cheese** Combalou, Calvert Street, 410-528-1119

**Caterers** Sascha's 527 N. Lovegrove St., 410-539-6103; Pierpoint Restaurant, 1822 Aliceanna St., 410-675-2080

**Tents, tables, chairs and linens** Loane Brothers, 410-366-8200