

'I do' goes intercontinental

More than one wedding unites same people in different countries

By JENNY BARCHFIELD
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PARIS

Karim Nour's marriage got off to a rocky start after he rolled his eyes and yawned during the wedding ceremony. Luckily, the self-described "worst groom ever" had a second chance to get it right. And a third, and all with the same bride.

With family and friends scattered across the globe, international couples are increasingly taking their weddings on the road, staging multiple ceremonies in their respective countries, and sometimes additional countries, too.

The past decade has seen a big increase in cross-cultural marriages. The globalization of business and the cross-continental movement of workers, the Internet and Europe's open borders have all contributed.

More than 10 percent of marriages performed last year in Spain united a Spaniard and a foreigner, according to the country's Institute of Family Policy. In France, nearly 2 out of 10 marriages are between a French national and a foreigner, according to the National Demographics Institute.

Andrea and Karim Nour married three times in as many years, on three different continents: first in California, where they lived at the time, then in Andrea's native Australia and finally in Cairo, where Karim's family is from.

The Nours' first wedding was purely practical. Andrea needed papers to be able to work in the United States, so they went to city hall in Redwood City, Calif., to sign on the dotted line.

"We agreed to distinguish this administrative wedding from our real one by keeping it as casual as possible," said Karim, who wore jeans and a T-shirt for the civil ceremony.

Andrea was casual in a white



Kimberley Petyt of the United States and her husband, Sebastien Petyt of France, dine at a Paris restaurant in November. The couple wed in France

blouse and brown corduroys.

Not everything went as planned.

Draped in white fabric and decorated with fake flowers, the office at city hall looked less like a bureaucrat's lair than like a Las Vegas-style chapel. And the other people involved — the officiant and the witness, a colleague of Andrea's — were treating the matter as, well, a wedding.

"In my mind, it was going to be like paying taxes," said Karim, an Egyptian-American who also holds French citizenship. "But the next thing I knew there were flowers and pictures and people trying to turn this into a solemn experience."

He decided to lighten the mood by yawning, checking his watch and rolling his eyes — which shocked the officiant and enraged his new wife.

"I was the most rotten groom of the year," he said. "All I did was follow through with our plan to keep the real wedding special."

Wedding planner Lisa Mimoun said it is not uncommon for couples who have multiple ceremonies to designate one as the "real wedding."

"Problems start when the bride and groom have different ideas

about which the real one is," said Mimoun, president of Chateau Chic, a California-based planner that specializes in weddings in France.

That was the case for Kimberley Petyt, an American who married a Frenchman in 2000.

For the groom, Sebastien, the civil ceremony in the city hall of his hometown of Dunkerque, in northern France, was the real marriage.

For Petyt, it was the reception in Chicago a month later.

"We have two anniversaries, mine and his," said Petyt, who parlayed her experience into a wedding-planning business, Paris Events. She said she did not feel really married without her grandmother, who was in her mid-70s and unable to travel to France for the ceremony.

Missing guests are a sad staple of international weddings, said Mimoun, citing restrictive visa requirements and expensive airline tickets as a couple of causes.

They often cause a marked imbalance between the number of guests on the bride's side and on the groom's, she said.

At the Petyts' wedding in France, the groom's guests out-

numbered the bride's by more than 75 to 15. At the Nours' Canberra ceremony, Andrea's Australian contingent numbered 71 while Karim's overseas guests were a modest four.

An extra dose of nuptial good humor can go a long way toward breaking down cultural and language barriers.

"When people are shaking it on the dance floor, it doesn't matter that they don't speak the same language," Mimoun said.

For the bride, the most difficult part of multiple weddings can be deciding whether to break out the wedding dress again. While some relish the chance to get maximum use out of their gown, others balk at recycling what they think of as a one-wear-only garment.

Regional bridal wear is often a good solution, said Mimoun, adding that some of her international clients have opted for saris, salwar kameezes or ornate Middle Eastern wedding garb for their second or third ceremonies.

"People still want everything to be perfect on their wedding day," Mimoun said. "Even if there's going to be a Part Two — or Three."

PET OF THE WEEK



Setta

Setta is a 9-month-old Basenji mix. At about knee high, she is nearly full grown.

Setta and other animals in need of a home will be at Tractor Supply on U.S. 31 in Franklin from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, when the Humane Society of Johnson County conducts a weekly adoption event.

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• Aging

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1)

siblings and refocus on what's best for Mom or Dad.

Such services still are rare, though, leaving most families to cope on their own.

Unburied hatchets

Old family dynamics come back like a boomerang during anxiety-producing conversations about aging or ailing parents, said Brian Carpenter of Washington University in St. Louis who has studied sibling issues.

"One person takes charge, the other is more submissive; one sibling is the joker, smoothing over disagreements with humor, while another sibling is the serious one, all efficiency and business," Carpenter said.

Sometimes the roles help, because the family originally may have developed them to take advantage of individual strengths, he said.

"In other cases, however, when those roles have never been really helpful, they get in the way of making parent-care decisions, just as they probably got in the way of lots of family decisions throughout life," Carpenter said.

Dr. Gail Gazelle of Palliative Care Associates in Brookline, Mass., advises siblings to stay focused on what their parents would want, and to remember that their relationships with siblings will endure long after their parents' deaths.

"That is what is going to live on and that relationship is very important," she said.

CARING FOR MOM AND DAD

Tips for harmony during decision-making process

Brian Carpenter of Washington University in St. Louis offers these tips for families as they discuss aging and end-of-life issues:

- Do it now. Don't delay talking about caregiving issues.
- Schedule a family conversation, but don't try to solve every problem in one meeting.
- Take responsibility. Don't assume someone else in the family will bring it up.
- Forgive one another for past conflicts that may get in the way of having good family relationships and good decisions.
- If necessary, bring in a neutral third party to mediate, such as a social worker, lawyer, doctor or psychologist.

Teamwork works

After the tension died down, Aylward and his sisters successfully refocused on their mother's needs and agreed on a plan to share responsibilities.

"It's really turned out better than we could have ever imagined. We have a happy ending," Aylward said.

Although Aylward's family worked out their differences on their own, some families need outside help to defuse old time bombs.

Some turn to professional mediators, a specialty that's still in its infancy.

A network of elder mediators formed last year to address training and policy issues, said Penny Hommel, co-director of the Center for Social Gerontology in

Ann Arbor, Mich., who knows of several hundred mediators trained in issues of the elderly.

Outside opinions

One company, Elder Decisions in Lexington, Mass., has offered such mediation for four years. This year, they worked with about 25 families involved in decisions about aging parents, charging \$350 an hour.

Among the company's clients were Sarah Burrows and her five siblings.

Two years ago, the siblings couldn't agree on whether their octogenarian parents, both suffering from dementia, should continue living at home or move to an assisted-living facility. Some of the siblings also felt unappreciated, which clouded their decision-making.

Burrows sometimes felt she didn't get enough credit for sorting out her parents' chaotic finances or looking at 20 different care facilities, she said. One of her sisters felt stranded with the household responsibilities, including the bathing and personal care of her parents.

The siblings met for mediation and found common ground.

"We really wanted to keep my parents together," Burrows said.

The family decided to hire caregivers so their parents could remain in their home. And the siblings listened more carefully, increasing their understanding, in Burrows' case, of how she didn't feel up to helping with her parents' physical needs because she had just finished getting her own children out of diapers.

"The act of coming together was a kind of a bonding experience," Burrows said. "We realized we really could work through a lot of decisions and challenges."



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