



jennifer & ward JANUARY 17, 2004, DAYTONA BEACH

photography by John Unrue

Jennifer France, a 28-year-old banking executive, and Edward “Ward” Bates, a 31-year-old advertising agency owner, met on Valentine’s Day in 1999 after the Daytona 500. At a big after-race dinner attended by family and friends, the two ended up sitting next to each other. “He was so easy to talk to,” Jennifer remembers. “I felt so comfortable around him.” Ward adds, “I clearly remember thinking that she was so beautiful.” Although the romance wouldn’t begin until years later, sparks flew. “After that first meeting, I always looked forward to seeing him at more races,” says Jennifer. Their friendship turned into a courtship, culminating in a casual yet meaningful proposal on the couch.

“One of the first things that we did was settle on our wedding date,” says Jennifer. “But from there, we spent a couple of months just enjoying the engagement before doing any other planning.” Choosing a location was easy—Jennifer’s cousin, who owns a beautiful house in Daytona Beach on the Halifax River and with a backyard just made for entertaining, warmly offered her home for hosting the festivities. Soon afterward, Jennifer and Ward went to event coordinator Heather L. Snively

for guidance and expertise. Heather’s wedding concept included having a stage built for the ceremony, on which Jennifer and Ward exchanged vows under a wrought-iron gazebo that was ornamented with hydrangeas and magnolias. For the reception, the resident tennis courts were transformed into what the couple calls a “midnight garden,” created from trellises hung with lights and flowers. “We wanted to keep the look natural but add a sparkle from linens and lighting elements,” says Jennifer.

As guests entered the reception area, they found taupe and gold trees adorned with orchids and hanging candles. Tables were dressed with white chiffon overlays embroidered with crystals; there were ornately-adorned silver chaivari chairs; and place settings included sparkly china and chargers to match. Over each grouping of tables was a suspended garden trellis embellished with orchids, amaranthus, and candle cups hanging at varying heights. Each reception table also featured a collection of pots filled with lisianthus, berries, hydrangeas, and crackle-glass votives. Even the dance floor seemed to glow: It was covered in white vinyl to reflect all the colors illuminating the tent. —/S. >>

