

Culinary Capers Leaves Guests in the Dark at a Blackout Dinner
Trend Watch: The Irresistible Appeal of Rustic Elegance

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DIVINE DECOR

Remembrance of things past: Enjoy Events uses rough-hewn, homey pieces—such as clothespins and salvaged doors—which add emotional depth to events by evoking memories.

Natural Elements

From vintage pastoral pleasures to modern eco elements, there's universal appeal in rustic elegance.

By **Natasha Garber**

If there is a universal design reference, it is nature. A design scheme that keys on earth, water, air, flora and foliage can cross cultures and transform environments—especially when it is dreamed up by the likes of these experts in the art of rustic style.

TIMELESS TERRAIN

In the world of weddings, nature-inspired elements are a natural fit, as couples seek to create a mood that reflects both the intimacy and importance of the occasion. And nowhere is the rustic-chic aesthetic better expressed than in “vintage” treatments.

While a vintage event setting can mean anything from Victorian elegance to '50s glam, design expert Kathryn Creech of in-demand Houston event firm Enjoy Events (www.enjoyeventplanning.com) says that whatever era they're evoking, clients love how vintage themes “bring in

memories of the past and celebrate them in the present.” And no decor elements do so more magically than those simple items—rough-hewn wood, hammered tin, hand-finished natural textiles—that came before slick plastics and synthetics.

She points to the recent wedding for a Houston couple who longed both to honor their family history and express their love of early 20th century pastoral pleasures. Arriving guests sipped lavender sodas served from atop a salvaged wood door. The couple said their vows beneath a trellis—which the bride had built with her father—adorned with lush rose vines. For the reception, Creech and her team enhanced the rustic-elegant garden environment with a rich mix of silk table linens, thrift-shop vessels holding tousled flower arrangements in shades of green and white, metal birdcages and wooden picture frames.

NATURE MEETS FUTURE

Rustic chic need not mean days of yore. In fact, some of the most popular nod-to-nature design schemes combine rustic accents with contemporary components for a look that is utterly of the moment. This rustic-meets-modern aesthetic is particularly popular for corporate and media



Rustic revamped: YourBASH mixes rustic elements with high-tech lighting for Fox Television to provide a mood that is warm yet sophisticated.

events, where the message is warmth and goodwill but the need to demonstrate cutting-edge style is essential.

For Fox Television's fall launch event in Los Angeles, L.A.-based YourBASH (www.your-bash.com) employed a rustic but high-style design, contrasting shabby-chic soft seating, lanterns and a custom-built central "tree" with high-tech ambient lighting. The event also featured orchids in large wood boxes. "These orchids were able to be reused later in the week at another Fox event at the Emmy Awards," notes YourBASH principal Jaime Geffen. The repurposing of floral complied with Fox's commitment to eco-friendly event planning, and, as a bonus, saved on budget.

FROM THE GROUND UP

At Chicago-based Kehoe Designs (www.kehoedesigns.com), the directive is "whole environment design," especially when it comes to nature-inspired environments.

Noting that rustic-chic and eco-inspired elements will be big in 2012, creative director Bridget C. Johnson says, "When we produce these events"—such as the "Oregon in Chicago" event Kehoe created for Oregon-based food company Truitt Bros. at a recent restaurant trade show—"it's about the entire experience." When guests walk into a Kehoe-designed event space, they encounter an environment where every single element works in concert to convey a sense of place—but not one filled with cookie-cutter props or tired thematic decor. Instead, the Kehoe team might use a sleek, laser-cut tree pattern on a cocktail-area screen divider, then repeat that motif with a



Your place is familiar: Kehoe Designs creates a rustic reception that underscores the client's brand, which keys on healthy foods and sustainability.

15-foot-tall iron tree as the focal point of a party space.

Johnson says the demand for rustic-chic decor is about "showing that you're making a conscious effort to relate to something your guests care about." She adds, "The outdoors is important to most people. If you have an event that makes people feel like they're going into a natural habitat, it feels so good to them."

NATURAL LIGHT

When it comes to rustic-elegant environments, nothing makes more of a design impact than the right light. Doc Waldrop of Atlanta-based Full Circle Lighting & Productions (www.fullcirclelighting.com) says he loves using ETC Source 4 ellipsoidal spotlights to create "branch breakup" effects, particularly at the upscale society and celebrity weddings his firm illuminates inside many an Atlanta event tent.

"They are very popular, and they always will be," Waldrop says. This type of rustic gobo is wonderfully versatile, too: "Put in sharp focus, you can tell it's a branch, but out of focus, it becomes mottled"—and intriguingly abstract. "A lot of our clients will do a rehearsal dinner in the same tent where they do their reception," he explains. "That gobo allows me to rack it out of focus for the rehearsal dinner and then, later, make it sharper so the branches clearly show." Which means Waldrop and his crew can use minimum equipment to create maximum impact. And, to the delight of guests, "It works really well for making the interior of a tent look like the outdoors." ●