

# Grand Occasion

FOR GENERATIONS, THE GRAND HOTEL HAS SERVED AS A SCENIC AND ICONIC BACKDROP FOR DESTINATION WEDDINGS.

The tradition of Southern hospitality at Point Clear goes back to the days of steamboats and hoop skirts. For more than 150 years this balmy spot on Mobile Bay's Eastern Shore has been a hotel locale. History sometimes brought a change of clientele: The facilities served as a Confederate hospital during the Civil War and Army Air Corps training base during World War II. The site's current hotel, The Grand Hotel Marriott Resort, Golf

Club & Spa, upholds tradition yet is completely up to date.

Major improvements over the past decade expanded the hotel and its amenities, earning it the AAA Four-Diamond Award and recognition as one of *Conde Nast Traveler's* Top 150 American Resorts and *Travel & Leisure's* Top 500 Hotels in the World. Anchored by the lodge-style main building, with its lofty lobby and central fireplace, The Grand

encompasses more than 400 guest rooms, seven restaurants and lounges, a 20,000-square-foot spa, indoor and outdoor pools, a tennis center with eight courts, and a marina. Clearly, The Grand is one of the region's stellar retreats—and a full-service venue for destination weddings.

In her 28 years at the hotel, director of events Debbie Weeks has organized more than 750 weddings (including her own). The 550-acre property gives her and her



PHOTOGRAPH LEFT BY KELLI • DANIEL PHOTOGRAPHY; RIGHT, COURTESY OF THE MARRIOTT GRAND



*Breathtaking views of the bay add to the picturesque setting.*

TEXT BY JEFF BOOK



RIGHT: Receptions can be held at Julep Point, a gazebo staged in a stretch of land wrapped by the bay on three sides.

BELOW: The property is host to a sizable marina for sailboats, yachts, and fishing boats.

BOTTOM: Carefully placed firepits add warmth and ambience outdoors at Bucky's Birdcage Lounge.

OPPOSITE: Three-hundred-year-old live oak trees cover the grounds of The Grand Hotel.



staff plenty to work with, from bay-front lawns to ballrooms to two 18-hole golf courses, part of Alabama's lauded Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. "We've done weddings on the golf courses," she says. "But we do most of our outside ceremonies on the Grand Lawn. We can put up a tent for an outdoor reception or stage it in one of our four ballrooms, ranging from 2,000 to 9,000 square feet, which can spill onto an outdoor terrace." Other options include more intimate rooms as well as a beach, a pier, and a pretty gazebo. The vintage Card Room and octagon-shaped Sky Lounge are favorite spaces for receptions, rehearsal



PHOTOGRAPH TOP AND AT LEFT BY KELLI + DANIEL PHOTOGRAPHY; OTHERS COURTESY OF THE MARRIOTT GRAND

dinners, and bridesmaids' lunches. "I always say, you pick the spot and we can make it work," Weeks declares.

The property's huge, ancient oaks, trimmed with Spanish moss, make a romantic backdrop. "I always love getting involved with the family," Weeks says. "They're often nervous at first but they learn that we can manage everything. If you book a wedding here, one of our wedding planners will handle the wedding, while an event manager is in charge of room reservations. People can bring in their own florist or band or whatever, or choose from our list of preferred vendors."

She's proud of The Grand's food,

which emphasizes local ingredients (some from the hotel's herb garden). "Our pastry chef makes the most unbelievable wedding cakes," she says. "And if you want to do one of your grandmother's recipes, we can do that. Or a signature drink to pass with hors d'oeuvres after the ceremony. One bride wanted everything in pink, so we made her a pink cocktail."

Spa days for the women? Golf for the men? No surprise there. But The Grand's staff strives for memorable flourishes, like having a horse and carriage take the bride and groom from the reception to their room. "We can also put on an impressive fireworks show from our pier—parents

will do that to surprise the couple," Weeks says. "For business conferences I've had a plane fly a banner overhead and done a circus show with elephants and real circus performers. I could do that for a wedding. You name it, we can probably do it."

Ultimately, what guests remember best may be simple pleasures—watching the sunset over the bay, sharing drinks and stories around the firepits outside Bucky's Birdcage Lounge. In one cherished ritual at The Grand, every day around 4 p.m. a cannon is fired. The message is clear, Debbie Weeks might say: If you want your event to go off with a bang, The Grand is the place.