



# The Big Reveal

by Debra Kennedy

# Kennedy Style

## *Mother of the Groom Rules*

“I now pronounce you Man and Wife!” Magic words that are timeless and eternal. As the Mother of the Groom, there is no greater joy than knowing your son is marrying someone he loves with all his heart and someone that is a little like his MaMa. Austin was always a Mommy’s boy and when he was little, we would glide through the house

dancing to the song “Mustang Sally.” Fast forward to present day as I reflect on my Mother of the Groom duties and share all of my tips, reminders and words of wisdom.

Rule #1 is there are no real rules a MOG must follow. Just as each bride and groom writes their own love story, the same happens for the parents of the Groom. Become friends with the bride and her family fast and happily, accept that the Bride is always in charge and remember that

the Rehearsal Dinner sets the tone for the entire weekend and everything else will fall into place. My only job was to interpret Austin's vision (telepathically because Austin is a male, need I say more), and make it exactly as he wanted on his last night as a single man. Mission Accomplished with only a few obstacles along the way.

## *The Venue*

We selected the venue well ahead of schedule, a year in fact. After visiting many contenders, 5Church Charlotte Restaurant checked every box we were looking for. It was Austin and Katie's favorite restaurant (check), Perfect Location as all of the wedding event festivities were in the uptown area (check), Coolest and Best Chef in the city (check), amazing food, service and atmosphere (check). Yes, we were on point. That was until the final details meeting with Alexa Anderson, Sales and Event Director took place.

I could see a look of panic (just a glimpse) as I whipped out my 5 page agenda on final details such as: where will the guests gather as speeches were given, where would the guests gather to transition from dinner to the after party? Where does the photographer set up and what about the videographer? Alexa in her very professional and savvy manner (such a class act) suggested an option that she encouraged would be a grand solution as she smiled with great enthusiasm. She certainly deals with pressure well as I am sure she is presented with alternatives like this weekly. I am the first to admit, I can be a bit of a Diva at times. Some call it Diva and others call it perfection-



ist. I started to question my skills as a MOG! How did I overlook these details? Yes, the rehearsal dinner is not the wedding but this is the last party that we will host for my Sweet Baby Boy, Austin! Our last chance to show him how much I love him and how proud I am of the man he has become. Yes, we did give him a budget and he wanted us to fund the honeymoon to St. Lucia! Somehow my Mommy Superpower skills kicked in and I wanted to make everything perfect and I was in full "get it done right" event mode! I was open to whatever the option was to make the night flow perfectly. Alexa gathered her things quickly and we followed her up the stairs at 5Church and through the glass doors into The Ivey Hotel and entered a fabulous and private room called The Tulip Room. This room is named after J.B. Ivey's Department Store's popular Tulip Terrace restaurant that was iconic in the Charlotte Scene many years ago. She suggested we have dinner in

The Tulip Room and then the after party could be at the bar in 5Church. I only had to ponder the idea for a few seconds as I tossed the thought that truly it would be the best of both worlds. A private setting for dinner/ speeches and what was very important to Austin, the after party that included open-bar (and short ribs). There was only one obstacle (this is where the budget is blown) which was transforming the room as it came equipped with a beautiful landscape but we would need rentals, florals and a magic wand. Alexa Anderson truly was our fairy godmother and "bibbide-bobbidi-boo" our obstacle was fixed. She



created magic from the very beginning and ran the event like a Royal Gala. This Diva MaMa was impressed and in Awe-struck by how amazing the food, service, and atmosphere were. I did not lift a finger the night of the event as Alexa and her magic wand were in full action.

*Tip:* Be ready to adapt and be flexible and most importantly, make sure you LOVE the Sales and Event Director as you will depend on them for advice and a happy ending.

### *CE Rentals*

Each venue has a recommended list of vendors and CE Rentals is the rental company of choice for The Ivey Hotel and 5Church Charlotte Restaurant. Was it the exquisite Chameleon fanfare gold-toned w/black cap chairs, the black cirque sheer w/sheer linens, the gold hammered chargers with Sahara Dinner Plates, the Martinique black salad plates, the Arezzo gold flatware and gold stemware that made me realize how important rentals are? I have attended many corporate parties where CE Rentals were used and they truly are game changers in the event business. Kristie Smith of CE Rentals is quite amazing at instantly understanding your vision and making each table look like a statement piece and capturing the very essence of the moment! For Austin and Katie it was Love at first glance when they entered the room. Yes, The Tulip Room was transformed into all Austin and Alexis had wished for.

*Tip:* Make a statement with certain pieces like the Chameleon Chairs – they are all the rage

### *The Flower Diva*

Florals are the most important “focus” at any event and essential at anything wedding related. Upon finding out I needed florals, I reached out to my friend and most talented floral designer in the world, Carrie Cassidy-Struble aka The Flower Diva as she pushes the boundaries of perfection. She has been part of our family for high school graduations, proms, engagement parties and weddings. I knew she would ease my mind and create a magical floral wonder at the Rehearsal dinner. Her play book on illuminating beauty from the head table to each individual round was sheer artistic genius at it’s very best. Carrie somehow captured the art of making the room both masculine yet feminine at the same time beautifully. Yes, the Flower Diva is indeed a mastermind of creating uniqueness for every event she take on big and small. She captured the title of “Queen of Everything” and is one of the most sought after wedding florists in the industry. Glad she loves the Kennedy Family and she created all of the floral designs at the wedding as well.

*Tip:* Suggest your floral designer reuse florals from the rehearsal dinner for the wedding reception. Sharing is Caring.

## *The Bestie Club*

My best advice is to allow your friends to help if they ask. My Bestie Barbara is an interior designer and pulled pieces of art off her walls to get my house “out of town” guest ready. My Bestie Neighbor Maria is gifted at making her yard look like it is out of Southern Living and spruced up our entryway. My Bestie Katherine spent 30+ hours creating 60 bows. One for each “swag gift” box. She went way beyond friend duties here by about 25 hours. Bestie Kara started getting me ready 9 months prior to the big event with injections, fillers and lasers. This is not for everyone but it certainly is my cup of tea. I only wish I had listened to her advice and also had a tummy tuck! Kara is every girls secret weapon and a great bestie to me! And last but certainly not least, my dear friend and Mother of the Bride Sherri who offered the use of her kitchen the day of the rehearsal dinner as my daughter Alexis (sister of the groom) wanted to bake Austin’s groom’s cake. She is a better woman than I as the stress would have been too much for this MaMa but she was and is amazing! she is probably still finding icing in hiding spaces. Yes, it takes a village of besties to create a special event and I have quite the club with my circle of besties including those who traveled from LA, San Francisco, Virginia and West Virginia as well as my locals.

*Tip: Allow your friends to help*

## *Moments*

As the guests entered the Rehearsal Dinner, Memories started pouring out. Many of the guests have been friends with Austin since childhood. Austin has many great friends but Nick Barnhorst was a favorite of mine as Austin and Nick had been best friends forever. Nick was one of those kids you just loved, He was respectful, considerate and simply always a joy to be around. He was the friend you wanted your child to “hang” with. He had recently married himself and has a beautiful daughter with his wife Jessica. It seemed like just yesterday Austin and Nick were playing sports and being boys. Yes, I was torn with emotions of joy and gratitude as Austin was all grown up and leaping into adulthood.

*Tip: Capture the Moments and take time to reflect during the speeches*

## *Happy Endings and New Beginnings*

The goal was to show Austin our love and appreciation and this was our last moment to honor him and welcome our new daughter and her family. Having all of our family and friends together to celebrate Austin and Katie’s new life on this night was beyond emotional. Did all of the pieces come together? Yes they did. Were there a few obstacles along the way? Yes, indeed. Was it all worth it? Absolutely! Austin is now a married man but he will always be my sweet baby boy dancing to “Mustang Sally” with his little feet nestled on top of mine, his contagious smile lighting up the room as we glide room to room. Yes indeed, a happy ending and a new beginning for Mr. and Mrs. Austin Nathaniel Kennedy.

