



## allison and ben 11.13.10 charleston, sc

Ben Johnston met Allison Hill in the spring of 2008 at the beach on Sullivan's Island in South Carolina, just north of Charleston proper. She was visiting friends in Charleston before traveling to Nashville the next week to see her sister Katie and attend the annual steeplechase. Her friends turned out to also be Ben's friends, which led to their introduction. Anxious to see her again, Ben asked their mutual friends to get Allison back to Charleston again... soon. Two months later, Allison invited Ben to join her family on a cruise to the Caribbean. She was "head over heels," adds Katie, who also reports that the Hill family welcomed him "with open arms" and jokingly says that Ben "survived a week on a cruise ship and never felt the need to jump overboard." When the cruise ship docked back at home, Allison and Ben were inseparable. Allison packed her bags, left Charlotte and moved to Charleston.

Two years later, Ben was searching for the right thing to say to Allison for his proposal. He was on a men's hike with his church when the hike leader gave him two Bible scriptures that he encouraged Ben to "wear... like a ring on your finger." Ben eventually found his inspiration in those words: "There it was all along," Ben says, "staring me right in the face." Ben took Allison to dinner at The Ocean Room at The Sanctuary on Kiawah Island and arranged for their reservations to be "not quite ready" when they arrived. They went upstairs to a room with a private balcony overlooking the ocean for a glass of Champagne. During a heartfelt conversation, Ben proposed. He shared both the verses of scripture with Allison and explained what each meant to him. He gave her written versions to put on as rings on her fingers. "I told her I had one more to share with her," says Ben. "Of course she thought I was going to share a third scripture, but I pulled out her engagement ring. I told her I would love her for the rest of our lives and I asked her to marry me. I thank God with all my heart that she said yes."

Inspired by the beauty and history of Charleston, Allison and Ben were drawn to Lowndes Grove Plantation, built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Recently and lovingly restored, the main house of the National Historic Landmark boasts two piazzas, spectacular views of the Ashley River and a landscape of live oaks, rolling green lawns and expansive terraces made of bluestone, brick and oyster tabby. The problem was that Allison and Ben wanted to marry before the end of the year and the only available date that worked for everyone was just six months away. Undeterred, Allison set to work. They booked Lowndes Grove for their November date and she started planning.

Allison works as a graphic designer for Studio R, a custom wedding stationery company. She had the paper goods handled, but she needed a talented team to design their wedding and reception. She knew Ellen Robinson with WED in Charleston and trusted her to create a spectacular event. "From the day we met, she insisted that she would be the person to help plan my future wedding," Allison laughs. "While I had a vision for my wedding, Ellen effortlessly pulled off all the details and I never broke a sweat."

Allison went to Madison Row in Charleston to look for a dress, knowing that time was short. "Considering the length of our engagement, I knew I had to act quickly," she says. She bought a dress while she was there, but "realized after a few sleepless nights that it wasn't the one." She saw Vera Wang's Diana gown online and Madison Row had it shipped in for her to try on. "Instinct told me it was the perfect dress," she says, "and it was!" The strapless gown was made with a drop-waist bodice and undulating, asymmetrically draped layers of frothy ivory tulle organza and English net. "Not only did it exude high fashion," says Allison, "but the way it made me feel when I first put it on was indescribable."

"I immediately enlisted my long-time friend Kristin Morris to create custom, one-of-a-kind jewelry," says Allison. Kristin created a necklace and matching earrings made with pearls, vintage pieces and heavy rhinestone chain. Allison added a vintage fur stole and stunning blue suede platform heels by Christian Louboutin. Carol Hannah Whitfield designed one-shouldered bridesmaid dresses in complementary light gray and peacock blue with empire waists and layers of chiffon. Allison's bouquet was made in a delicate combination of white anemones, ranunculus, draping lilac and velvety dusty miller, while her bridesmaids carried bouquets of white anemones, lisianthus, blown-open roses and silver dusty miller wrapped in pewter silk dupioni ribbon.

Allison and Ben exchanged traditional vows during a late-afternoon ceremony on the front lawn of Lowndes Grove with just over 300 guests in attendance. The two verses Ben used in his proposal were incorporated into the ceremony and the minister's words "were a powerful testimony to love and relationship with each other and with God," he says. Allison and Ben kissed at the end of the ceremony and walked down the aisle arm-in-arm as their guests cheered. "Ben turned me around to face the river and said, 'Look at this! We might not have another opportunity all



night to stop and cherish this moment," says Allison. Ben agrees, "It was a moment I'll never forget."

Cocktails were served as the sun set, saturating the party with brilliant golden-orange afternoon light. Dinner followed, served beneath clear tents draped from the ceiling with wide swaths of chartreuse taffeta. The same material formed a border of brilliant drapery at the tent perimeters, secured by tailored belts of burlap. A combination of vintage and modern design elements gave the event the eclectic look and feel that Allison hoped for. Square tables were dressed in a mixture of textured ruffe and natural linen, while rectangular Copenhagen tables in dark stained wood were left uncovered. Centerpieces were made using a mixture of white and green flowers accented by vine, Manzanita branches and brown scabiosa pods in a variety of silver, aged mercury glass, aluminum and tall glass vessels. Small floral arrangements were gathered and displayed on vintage silver and mirrored trays and lounge areas were created using groups of vintage tufted settees, chairs and coffee tables. Clear lights were strung on a tent frame over the cocktail area by the river, while votives, pillar candles in glass cylinders and lanterns hung from the trees cast the warm glow of candlelight. The evening's menu was written in calligraphy onto aged window frames and the buffet was housed in a row of three tailored white canopies.





Desserts were displayed on dramatic square wooden pedestals, including almond and chocolate ganache cupcakes and a four-tier Key lime-flavored wedding cake decorated with sugar anemones and delicate green piped stems. Ben and Allison danced their first dance to *Benny and the Jets* by Elton John and she danced with her dad to *Hold Back the Night* by The Embers. "We grew up listening to beach music," says Allison. "The melody and lyrics were a perfect fit." Ben and Allison made their getaway in Ben's grandfather's classic 1970s Ford Bronco as their guests waved clusters of sparklers and shouted congratulations and well wishes. "My mom said it was a storybook wedding," says Allison. "Guess that's all a girl ever really dreams of." JLG

Wedding Consultant, Party Rentals and Linens: Ellen Robinson with WED. Ceremony Location and Reception Venue: Lowndes Grove Plantation. Florist: Sarah York Gilmshaw. Baker: Wedding Cakes by Jim Smeal. Catering: Fsh. Invitations, Stationery and Wedding Papers: Studio R. Ceremony Music: Dwight Huthwaite and Jessica Smith. Reception Entertainment: Atlanta Rhythm and Groove. Bridal Gown: Vera Wang purchased of Madison Row. Bridesmaid Dress: Carol Hannah. Groom and Groomsman Attire: Brooks Brothers. Transportation: Charleston Black Cab.

Photography: Juliet Elizabeth Photography, [www.julietelizabeth.com](http://www.julietelizabeth.com).

