

## Couples are choosing the picturesque backdrops of Harford farms for their 'I dos'



### [John-John Williams IV](#)

Macy Hastings always envisioned a traditional church wedding with a hall reception. That was before she discovered The Vineyards at Mary's Meadow in Darlington.

With a massive barn that she filled with decorative barrels and opulent cascading flower displays, and a tractor that was used for group photographs, the countryside property offered a rustic, intimate setting for her and her husband, Robert Stephen Hastings, and their 125 guests last May.

"The barn was perfect for us," says the Essex resident, who wore a \$10,000 illusion front and back Berta Bridal designer dress for her black-tie wedding. "It was so convenient. The pictures were beautiful and breathtaking. There was no way I could get married anywhere outside of a barn."

With their picturesque backdrops, seemingly endless space, and blank canvas ripe for decorating, farms and country estates are a popular option for weddings. And with numerous sites, Harford has become a destination for couples throughout the region.

Alex Glasscock, a native of Dallas who splits time between Malibu and Monkton, immediately saw the potential in the 127-acre Foxfire Farm in Monkton when he purchased it a year ago. He wanted to turn the horse farm into an upscale destination.

"Since we limit the number of events on the property, we think [our events] will be fairly exclusive high-end events," he says. "It's quiet and serene but there is this elegance for entertaining throughout."

An 8,000-square-foot manor home, centrally located on a hilltop, is the crown jewel of the property. The \$2 million cosmetic makeover of the house, which has six bedrooms and six bathrooms, included redoing floors and window treatments, repainting plaster and bringing more light into the house.

The former chapel was remodeled into a two-story guest cottage. Landscaping of the grounds was also included in the project.

“Thus far the people who have come to tour the farm see the attention to detail and the care we’ve brought to the property,” he says. “People who identify with that level of detail seem to really respond to the property.”

Farm wedding venues have been popular for the past five years, but venues like Foxfire are different.

“They’re very exclusive properties really geared toward a client who wants a private estate wedding,” says wedding planner Elizabeth Bailey, who has toured Foxfire Farm and considers it a gentleman’s farm.

Farm and estate weddings are ideal for couples who want to flex their creativity and have an extremely large guest list, she added.

“These are for someone who is wants to be creative with décor. They have a favorite caterer that might not be approved at a certain venue. They don’t want a lot of rules. They want to bring in the vendor they like on the timeline they like,” says Bailey, a Fallston resident who heads Elizabeth Bailey Weddings.

Bailey estimates that tented weddings that take place on farmland or country estates account for about 40 percent of her weddings.

Marta Kastner, owner of Affairs Extraordinaire by Marta, estimates that almost half of her weddings take place on farms.

“I like doing barn weddings. They are a lot of fun,” says the Havre de Grace resident, who planned Hastings’ black-tie wedding.

She also fondly remembers another wedding for 170 guests where the couple chose to use mixed-pattern vintage dishes and table settings and Mason jars for drinking glasses.

“No person had the same set of dishes. They had a lot of fun,” she recalls. “I’ve seen a lot of unique designs.”

Farm settings allow for a natural implementation of rustic elements and activities. For example, Hastings and her bridesmaids posed in front of a farm tractor. At other weddings, games like cornhole have grown in popularity. And outdoor dessert stations like s’mores have tied the events together.

“It brings the outside in it,” Kastner explains. “It adds a little fun and flare to it.”

Pond View Farm in White Hall is a fourth-generation working farm with close to 60 acres of sprawling land, a pond and various animals such as cows, horses, sheep and a couple of peacocks. The property also went through a transition from a purely working farm to a special events venue.

“As a working farm, we wanted to continue to grow our family tradition and leave something for our next generations,” says Jackie Smithson, who co-owns the farm with her husband, Shane. “We knew in changing times that diversification was the key to expanding our family farm. This is what will allow us to continue to keep making a living and continue to expand our operations.”

They built an 84-foot-by-84-foot barn five years ago for events that can accommodate 269 people. They turned another structure into their primary bridal suite this past winter.

The cattle farm is known for raising purebred Simmental cattle, whose beef they also serve through their on-site catering company. Prices range from \$5,000 to \$7,000 per day for the venue.

Lindsey Sommer, the on-site planner on the day of events at Pond View, says that the farm attracts couples from Washington and Baltimore. The property hosted 30 weddings in 2017.

“It’s good because it is out in the middle of nowhere,” Sommer says. “The clientele that we have, that’s something they are not used to.

“It’s beautiful, to say the least,” Sommer says. “The pictures don’t do it justice.”

Glasscock opened Foxfire in November for private events and weddings after completing its renovation.

There’s a creek and a slew of 100-year-old maple trees that line a quarter-mile driveway to the main house, which can hold 50 people for a smaller ceremony.

“You get a real sense of grandeur and calm as you are entering the property,” Glasscock says.

The property has about four events per year. Rates start at \$15,000 for the day with an additional \$10,000 for an overnight stay at the manor home and an additional \$2,000 for access to the guest house.

Bailey thinks that the location is filled with endless possibilities for creativity given the space.

“It gives you a lot of flexibility,” says Bailey. “You can have a very creative wedding because you pretty much have a blank slate. Not only can you design the type of tent that you want. And you are working with a blank slate inside the tent.”

Bailey also touts the outdoor backdrop, which would be ideal for wedding photos.

“The amazing pictures that are generated from being on an estate like that. There are ponds and gardens,” she says. “It will be beautiful.”

A farm wedding can have its disadvantages, though.

First, because you’re starting with a blank slate, you need to bring everything to the site.

“You are pretty much building a venue,” Bailey explains. “The costs of a tent and everything inside of it — dining room and kitchen. It has a lot of complexity. You are basically building a shelter for your party.”

Second, the secluded nature of the property means that you won’t be near much else — including hotels for your guests.

“The closest hotel to the property was 30 minutes away,” Hastings recalls. “You aren’t going to find a barn near a hotel. It goes hand in hand.”

There are occasional bugs.

“We are on a farm, but bugs aren’t really normally too bad of an issue,” Sommer says. “They are really not a problem at all. We’ve never had complaints about it that I know of.”

And then there’s the weather.

“You always have to take in consideration the weather,” Sommer says. “We have rain plans in place. But really, people are paying to have it outside.”

During warmer months, air conditioners are available to be put in the barn for an extra cost. During the winter, heaters are available, according to Sommer.

None of those things put a damper on Hastings' May wedding at The Vineyards at Mary's Meadow. Her ceremony was held outside, with her dinner and reception inside the barn.

Lisa Boemmel, Hastings' mother, was very pleased with the experience.

"The guests loved the venue," she says. "They loved that it was all in one place. The way that the barn was built meant that there was a very nice breeze."

The venue costs \$5,000 for access to the 2,700-square-foot bottom floor of the barn, cellar and 1,200-square-foot concrete patio; tables and chairs; and the grounds, which includes a vineyard, for the weekend. The property hosted 30 weddings last year.

Hastings still gushes about the day and the photographs that she'll always have as keepsakes.

"It was a lot of their first time there. They thought it was beautiful," she says of her guests. "And oh my gosh. The photos are breathtaking. They turned out really, really well. After the ceremony, the horses came out. You could see the horses. It was beautiful."

And for Hastings, a self-proclaimed "county girl," having her dream wedding on a farm didn't dim the wow factor that she was looking for.

"Cost was not an option. My mom got whatever I wanted," she says. "The only misconception is that if you have a farm wedding, you are a country girl. We're not country. We had a plated dinner. It was all black-tie. It was amazing."



courtesy of Tammie J. Monaco / HANDOUT

An April wedding at Foxfire Farm in Monkton. Foxfire has about four events per year.