


Extraordinary Occasions

Your wedding your way with Rain or Shine Tent and Events

By Katherine P. Cox | Photos by Jack Rowell & Janet Miller



A 2016 wedding at the Woodstock Inn featured a fully floored large tent, tent liner, crystal chandeliers, tables, chairs, and table settings all provided by Rain or Shine.



The wedding industry has come a long way since 1987, when Perry Armstrong first began renting out tents to couples who wanted an outdoor wedding. Today, the average cost of a wedding is almost \$27,000, with the reception costing an average \$13,000 according to *The Wedding Report*.

But when Perry first launched his fledgling business in Randolph, Rain or Shine Tents, with 14 of what he calls junky, old auctioneer's tents and a hundred folding metal chairs, outdoor weddings in Vermont weren't on his radar, and weddings cost considerably less than they do today. When he started, he rented his 30-by-60-foot tents for around \$300. The popular sailcloth tents of similar size that the company rents today can cost up to \$1,900.





Above and center: Tablescape for a 2016 Billings Farm wedding; seen at night, a sailcloth tent with full wood floor.



WHITE TENTS FOR WEDDINGS

With his limited inventory of old, striped auctioneer's tents and uncertain of who would want to rent them, Perry advertised in the yellow pages of the telephone directory for general events. But when he began getting calls for tent rentals for weddings, "I discovered there was a need for white tents. Everyone wanted a white tent, and no one had them," he recounts. "My tents weren't for weddings, and I felt I was missing some of that business."

So he bought a new tent and had 12 rentals lined up the following summer. He soon began attending the annual rental trade show and met people in the event business and

learned about the latest trends. He ordered tents with windows, tables, and white folding chairs. He went to area inns and bed and breakfasts, touting his wares, and before long the business was growing. He added glassware and china to his menu of offerings, then flooring. "We were off and running. No one could compete with us. We were perceived as an upscale rental company."

RUSTIC BUT ELEGANT

That status continues today as Rain or Shine Tent and Events Company has grown, and the company continues to keep ahead of the trends and cement its reputation with innovative products that keep them ahead of the



Top: Tent crew installs a 50-foot-wide structure tent on a fully decked floor, which makes uneven ground level.

Above: The installed clear-topped tent (from above) with full wood floor and Vermont country chairs.

Below: Company officers are Perry Armstrong, Pete Martel, Lynn Armstrong, and Tina Welch.

Below left: Elegant table setting features crystal stemware provided by Rain or Shine Tent.





Top: Fruitwood garden chairs await a ceremony.
Above: Dish-room staff maintain the company's high standards.

Center: Interior of a sailcloth tent with custom lighting fixtures and a full wood floor.

Below: 2016 staff outside the warehouse in Randolph.

Below right: Large crystal chandelier.





competition. For example, Perry and his crew offer custom-built flooring from real wood and have a full metal shop where they can create lighting fixtures in-house.

Their latest product is what they call a Timber Tent that “looks like the inside of a barn, with exposed beams,” Perry says, “providing a post-and-beam ambience.” It appeals to those who want something different and unique. For sites that are sloped and uneven, they now offer an elevated platform engineered for safety that integrates with the Timber Tent. “Country-themed weddings are big in Vermont,” Perry says, and Rain or Shine Tents can provide that rustic feel with an elegant touch.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED

During the high season from May to October, Rain or Shine does around 300 events, with September the busiest month for weddings, says Peter Martel, vice president of sales and marketing. The company provides everything people need to host a wedding, whether on their property or at an area inn.

In addition to a wide array of tents from the budget-friendly pole tents to the more upscale sailcloth variety and larger frame tents, they offer natural wood farm tables that they custom built themselves; chairs, which include a custom commissioned set; and tableware, flooring, bars, and lighting, from string lights to chandeliers to their custom fixtures.

Above: As evening falls, the glow of candles adds ambience to a beautiful scene.

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"We can build an entire venue in the middle of a field, which includes electricity, pressurized water, and kitchen equipment so we can build an entirely separate kitchen for the catering staff," Peter says. "We help the client determine the rentals they need," he adds. "We don't just rent stuff. We're detail oriented."

Weddings are very emotional purchases, he says, and "we try to provide the best customer experience." He likes to talk to the client personally to determine needs, wants, tastes, style, budget, and how many guests are expected. Each wedding is personal and everyone's different, he says. "Some people want a nice party; others want to build a ballroom."

"Pretty much everything we have in our rental fleet is based on our clients' wants and wishes," Peter says. "So if there's demand for particular items, or if that's the way we foresee the industry going, we'll move in that direction."

Their three different varieties of farm tables are a case in point. "We found that people who wanted the sailcloth tents with the natural wood center poles and side poles were attracted to the wood furniture," Peter says. People from out of state, a large part of their clientele, like the natural environment, "so we try to emulate that in the things we provide to go under a tent."

Custom lighting installations are another feature that sets them apart, Peter says, based on their large inventory of festive lighting options and their ability to create custom fixtures in their shop.

"A lot of what we do goes back to the client and the guest experience, and we want to honor that," Peter says. "At the end of the day, I want to be sure clients are happy. If you have happy clients, they'll tell their friends." 

Rain or Shine Tent & Events Company

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