



ELIZABETH MCDOWELL & BLAKE CLEVELAND  
JUNE 21, 2008 SONOMA VALLEY, CALIFORNIA  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY TODD RAFALOVICH

## *The great outdoors*

A unique wedding in the open air was a natural match for Elizabeth McDowell and Blake Cleveland. “We both wanted an outdoor wedding in the wine country to provide a complete sense of elegant relaxation,” Blake shares. “We enjoy great food and wine, and wanted to choose a destination that would entertain guests for the weekend,” Elizabeth adds. However, a wine-country backdrop wasn’t the only

detail that was important to the couple. “I wanted to have the reception in a barn because my family’s heritage is deeply rooted in peach farming and agriculture,” Blake says. The pair found everything they were looking for at a beautiful ranch in Sonoma County, and Elizabeth embraced the location as well as Blake’s background with a “California Poppy Meets Georgia Peach” theme.



**Beauty**  
Leticia Ontiveros for the Beehive Sonoma, hair

**Bridal Designer**  
Lazaro

**Bridesmaids**  
Lynn Lugo

**Consultant**  
Julie Atwood Events

**Photographer**  
Todd Rafalovich Photography



“My father – who is literally a ‘computer guru’ – was amazing, and actually designed and printed our wedding program himself. It turned out to be really special that it was homemade. It’s one of my most favorite details from the day.”  
– Elizabeth





When guests arrived at the ranch for the wedding, they were shuttled to a lawn overlooking the vineyards where they were welcomed with peach-flavored iced tea served in Mason jars. The flowers for the ceremony were coordinated to reflect a fresh color scheme that included red roses and bi-colored tulips for the bridesmaids; blossoms in shades of peach and watermelon for the groomsmen's boutonnieres; and a textured bouquet of vibrant wildflowers for the bride. The ring bearer got off to a shaky start, but with the help of a few M&Ms eaten valiantly for courage, he made it most of the way down the aisle with a beautiful wooden box decorated with greenery and berries.

The ceremony itself was a warm collaboration of friends and family members who generously contributed to the event. A cousin of Elizabeth read the poem "Blessing of the Hands," and another sang a distinctive rendition of the song "Stand By Me." A family friend of the Clevelands officiated, and the bride and groom exchanged vows they had written themselves. A breezy garden party complete with cocktails, wine tasting, and a selection of hors d'oeuvres followed the conclusion of

the ceremony, then guests enjoyed a scenic stroll through the vineyards to a beautiful barn where the reception was held. Vintage canisters filled with wildflowers dotted the landscape outside the two-story wooden structure, and crates filled with vintage packets of California poppy seeds offered table assignments attached with twill. Inside, lanterns in shades of peach, green, and watermelon added color to the rustic scene, and centerpieces were arranged to create a natural effect. "Each table had a different centerpiece with free-flowing, wildflower-like arrangements using theme colors," describes the bride. A Mason jar filled with homemade peach jam from the town where Blake's family ran a peach-farming business was placed at each place setting. Peaches were also incorporated into the evening's dinner menu, including grilled peaches served over the salad course, and homemade peach ice cream scooped from a wooden churn in lieu of a wedding cake. "We are both ice cream lovers, and we love to make homemade ice cream," Blake confides. "It took our caterer about five different batches and my family's recipe before we were satisfied!"





The couple later wowed the crowd with a dazzling foxtrot danced to a live 10-piece band playing “L-O-V-E” by Natalie Cole. “Beth and I worked countless hours to get our choreography down for that dance, and it came off without a hitch!” boasts the groom. The newlyweds also teamed up for a distinctive twist on the traditional bouquet toss. “Blake and I each threw a bouquet of California lavender to a group of co-ed singles,” says the bride, “and had lottery tickets attached to wish the recipients lots of ‘luck in love.’”

Having fun and taking risks with their wedding style were two outstanding goals that the couple unquestionably accomplished. “Make your wedding celebration personal,” advises the bride. “Take chances with your décor and theme, and if something isn’t finished when the big day arrives, simply throw it out the window and enjoy every moment.”

MARILYN OLIVEIRA



