

# VUE

NEW JERSEY

## THE BRIDAL ISSUE

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# An Ode *to the* Outdoors

Handcrafted by sailmakers, Sperry Tents delivers elegant and high-end sailcloth canopies to accompany upcoming nuptials.

BY WENDY LARIMER

PHOTOS: RACHEL PEARLMAN PHOTOGRAPHY  
VENUE: CONGRESS HALL, CAPE MAY  
EVENT PLANNING + DESIGN: THE STYLED BRIDE  
FLORALS: SEBESTA DESIGN  
CATERING: CAPE RESORTS WEDDINGS

There is something special about an outdoor wedding. Whether it's a sunny spring afternoon, or starry summer night, nature can provide a perfect backdrop for the start of a life together. But as any wise bride knows, you cannot depend on the weather to meet your high expectations. An ideal image of vows shared while the sound of the ocean provides background music can be blown away by a windstorm or washed out by rain.

To avoid these potential catastrophes or to just provide a bit of sun protection, Sperry Tents can supply not just a solution, but an answer that brings an added elegance and sophistication to an outdoor setting.

Sperry Tents was founded by sailmaker Steve Sperry, whose Sperry sails with the distinctive sun logo dotted waterways throughout New England for many years. His sails were popular for yachters because they were custom crafted to ensure not only longevity, but the satisfaction of knowing no two sails were exactly alike.

Sperry sails are still made today, but the entrepreneurial spirit of its founder brought a new branch to the business early on. Upon receiving an invitation to a party, Steve decided to take along a tent instead of the usual bottle of wine. The sailcloth he used would offer protection from the elements with the ability only a sail can provide to stand up to high winds.

His initial foray into tent making blossomed into a new entity, Sperry Tents, that lured customers in with its unique and custom design. While early tents featured the signature Sperry sun logo, Steve quickly discovered adding colors, stars and stripes, company logos and pennant flags on every peak made his tents stand out from others.

Steve's sons Matt and Tim eventually joined their father's business with Matt staying on to continue the work at Sperry Sails, and Tim stepping up to turn Sperry Tents into a separate rental entity. This further evolved into Sperry Fabric Architecture which now manufactures the tents. The rental business took off and Sperry Tents became well-known for finely made and beautifully designed tents.

Today, approximately 50 privately owned and licensed Sperry Tent providers span the globe while manufacturing continues from a solar powered, post-and-beam barn in Marion, Massachusetts.

Sperry Tents NJ is one of those licensed tent providers. The business was started by Eric Larkin and Tim Daugherty who were college friends at Rutgers. The two were looking to start a small business when, on a trip to Nantucket, they spotted a Sperry Tent. "These were not available for rent in NJ yet. So, that gave us an idea....," Larkin said.

The two proposed setting up a tent rental business in Belmar, New Jersey and many years later have turned an idea into a thriving business.



"Our tents have a certain geometry to them that the competition has not yet duplicated. Sperry Tents have great lines. We offer a beautiful product, with a great level of service," Larkin said.

Handmade, instead of mass produced is what brings the quality and uniqueness to each tent. The tents are custom made by craftsmen who sew, press grommets and mill the locally sourced timber poles that are varnished for maximum shine. Logos and special designs can be incorporated into the pennant flags to reflect the whims of the hosts or happy couple. Tents can be done in an oval shape or round and come in a multitude of sizes. There is even an arch available, providing the perfect setting for the bride and groom to take their vows.





The tents' beauty may be what first attracts customers, but what is perhaps more impressive is how well the tents stand up to the elements. Wind and rain can cause leaks and send guests scattering, and while this may be memorable, most brides would rather the memories be of the glamour of the event and not the disaster.

For its ability to hold up in bad weather, Sperry Tents stands behind their product as they know firsthand what they can sustain. "Tropical Storm Hanna (2008) was pretty severe. Our tents held strong. Various unnamed micro-bursts and sustained wind come to mind. We babysat a Sperry Tent all night in Cape May with winds over 55mph. The tent performed very well, and the wedding (the next day) was a huge success," Larkin said.

The company offers unique tents as well, like a dark blue tent with white stars. According to Larkin, his New Jersey customers often request the larger, antique white tents. He regularly supplies tents to accommodate 300 people but has rented ones large enough to cover 500 guests. "This means we have to be creative when we're installing around



branches, bushes, pools, decks, etc. Sometimes we can make a backyard look almost like an entirely enclosed space, because the hedges and trees are right alongside our tent. It looks great."

To help customers decide what tents are needed for their event, Sperry launched an online tent layout planner. The software provides a sample layout, scaled with the tent outline, that includes tables, dance floor, stage, bar and buffet tables. Users can easily delete, add to, and rearrange the layout to suit their desires while ensuring the tent size they choose meets their needs.

Sperry Tents NJ may be based locally, but they have installed their tents as far away as Aspen, Colorado. They also aren't just for weddings. The tents are used for seasonal outdoor seating at restaurants, galas, camps, and once even for a beautiful memorial service. If an outdoor wedding has always been the dream, Sperry Tents NJ will help ensure the sun doesn't wilt the bride and an unexpected storm doesn't turn a magical day tragic.

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