

FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF  
**Atlanta**  
MAGAZINE

# Atlanta weddings



*Spanx inventor*

**Sara  
Blakely**

on her  
wedding  
day

# Magical

# Devotion

Jesse Itzler *weds* Sara Blakely

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOE PHOTO / JOEPHOTO.COM





As a Marquis Jet Partners customer, Spanx inventor Sara Blakely was invited to a customer appreciation event, the Net Jet Annual Las Vegas Poker Tournament. Her sales representative for the company convinced Jesse Itzler, the company's founder, to give Sara a coveted spot at the table—despite the fact that she had never played before. While at the table, Jesse introduced himself, and Sara asked for some tips. "He didn't know that much about poker either, and we both laughed," she says. "It was a friendly exchange, and he kept checking in on me throughout the day."

The meeting resulted in a friendship and occasional e-mailing over the course of seven months. One of the events that stands out most in Sara's mind during that time is when she launched her foundation with Richard Branson at the Give a Damn party. "Jesse's company made a considerable contribution. He also flew down from New York to attend with a date," says Sara. "He has since admitted to me that although he was very eager to help women in South Africa, he had another agenda, too. I was completely unaware at the time."

Once they started dating, they did so for about a year before getting engaged. Jesse started the proposal just outside of their New York apartment. He gave Sara a gold band that had "BRING IT!!" engraved on it. "For the first several months of dating, Jesse would look at me and say, 'I could marry you'—almost as though he was working it out in his mind. Every time, I would just smile and say 'Bring It' . . . so he did." Once they got inside of the apartment, Jesse gave Sara clues about where to find seven hidden presents. Included were three more bands, also engraved with phrases special to the couple, such as "Jesse Hearts Sara."

Although wedding planning soon began, the couple could not find a suitable

venue after months of searching in New York. While boating with Sara's father in Naples, Florida, they stopped for a night on Boca Grande at The Gasparilla Inn & Club. "Jesse looked at me and said, 'I could get married here.' I said I could too, and one week later we had convinced the hotel to open one week early to host our wedding."

To share their love with their guests, The Gasparilla Inn & Club was transformed into a Sara-and-Jesse wonderland for four magical days. The 450 wedding guests were given all-access passes to everything: morning runs with Jesse, the "100 Mile Man;" yoga classes on the beach; spa treatments; golf; tennis; endless food and drink; music and more.

No detail was left unnoticed. Greeting guests from the Inn's fireplace mantle was the 30-person wedding party in the form of sugar cookies. As they checked in, guests were given room keys, flip flops, an itinerary the size of a small phone book, a fully loaded beach tote, and keys to a golf cart. Each room also had a gift basket.

The festivities got into full swing with the rehearsal dinner. The event took place behind the Inn in a Big Top Circus—reminiscent tent, which was topped with a giant Sara Hearts Jesse sign (as a nod to the ring inscribed with "Jesse Hearts Sara.") Men and women walking on stilts pointed guests to the entranceway. There were food stations located in all four corners, and long bars served as a runway to either side of the stage. The carnival-like atmosphere flowed outside

the tent, where traditional games like ring toss were being played, cotton candy was being made, and laughter could be heard in a photo booth. Dancing began with the Love-a-palooza Concert, which featured Beatlemania Now, Bjorn Again, and Metal Snake, tribute bands covering The Beatles, ABBA, and '80s metal bands. And before Sara and Jesse departed for a few hours of

### The Details

**VENUE**  
The Gasparilla Inn & Club, Boca Grande, Florida

**WEDDING GOWNS**  
Great-grandmother's dress restored by Suzanne Perron, New Orleans; Edgardo Bonilla Couture from Saks Fifth Avenue

**BRIDESMAIDS' DRESSES**  
Melissa Sweet from Impressions

**FLOWER GIRL DRESSES**  
Janna Dudley Design

**EVENT PLANNER**  
Elizabeth Allen Events, New York City

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Joe Photo, Los Angeles

**CATERING**  
The Gasparilla Inn & Club

**CAKE**  
The Gasparilla Inn & Club

**FLOWERS AND DECOR**  
Frank Alexander, New York City

**INVITATIONS**  
Sloane Madureira Design, New York City

**MUSICIANS**  
Olivia Newton-John; BAND X



sleep, both fell victim to the dunking booth. Even drenched, Sara glowed.

At the next day's ceremony, which Jesse's father officiated, a glorious sunset and a peaceful breeze enveloped family and friends on the beach. Sara floated across the sand in the dress worn by her great-grandmother in 1918. The delicate gown had been beautifully restored and redesigned by couture dressmaker Suzanne Perron in New Orleans. Sara also donned the veil worn by three preceding generations. Her 86-year-old grandfather was on hand to see his granddaughter walk down the aisle in the dress his mother married his father in almost 100 years before.

Guests were treated to poolside champagne following the ceremony. Then, under an awning of stars, they followed a saxophonist down the beach to the reception. Once they arrived, the newlyweds immediately got on the dance floor. Not being able to decide on just one song for their first dance, they selected several tunes, including Sara's favorite, "Hopelessly Devoted to You" from the movie *Grease*. Suddenly, a spotlight hit on center stage, and Olivia Newton-John appeared to serenade the couple with a live version of the song. Amid camera flashes and screaming onlookers, the Grammy winner then invited Sara and Jesse to join her on stage for a few more songs. "As a child, I danced to Olivia for about eight hours a day for years with my little brother," says Sara. "I wanted to be Olivia Newton-John. The 8-year-old in me is still flipping out that she was at my wedding!" And the music didn't stop there. Atlanta band Band X kept the party going.

Halfway through the reception, Sara changed into an Edgardo Bonilla Couture gown to preserve her great-grandmother's dress. Once the reception concluded, the celebration didn't end; two after parties followed. When guests finally made their way to the golf carts to return to the Inn, they were greeted by a concession trailer. Everything from ice cream to sodas to slices of New York pizza was provided.

It seems this couple's journey has always included wow factor. Their honeymoon may be no different . . . but time will tell. "We went to the Turks and Caicos for a few days, but we are taking a true honeymoon in February. Jesse is going to surprise me." We're sure it will be something magical. ♡