

Our big day

Liz O'Neill



Food *The Bean Counter* 0161 882 0700 / **Decoration** *The Whole Space* 0161 862 9983 / **Flowers** *Green Pavilion* 01298 77309

If I told you that I had a vegetarian, environmentally-friendly wedding, what would you imagine?

Photography: Joel Chester Fildes

If you're anything like most of Manchester's florists, my sister's husband or the multitude of wedding magazines that fill our newsagent's shelves, your vision of the event would include one or more of: ornamental cabbage displays, chanting at Stonehenge, or a very hungry group of wedding guests. The range of reactions, ideas, tips, and 'friendly advice' offered to a prospective bride is an industry in itself, but the one thing that Joe and I agreed straight away was that this was our day and it was going to reflect the things that are important to us. We are careful, ethical consumers, but we don't knit our own muesli.

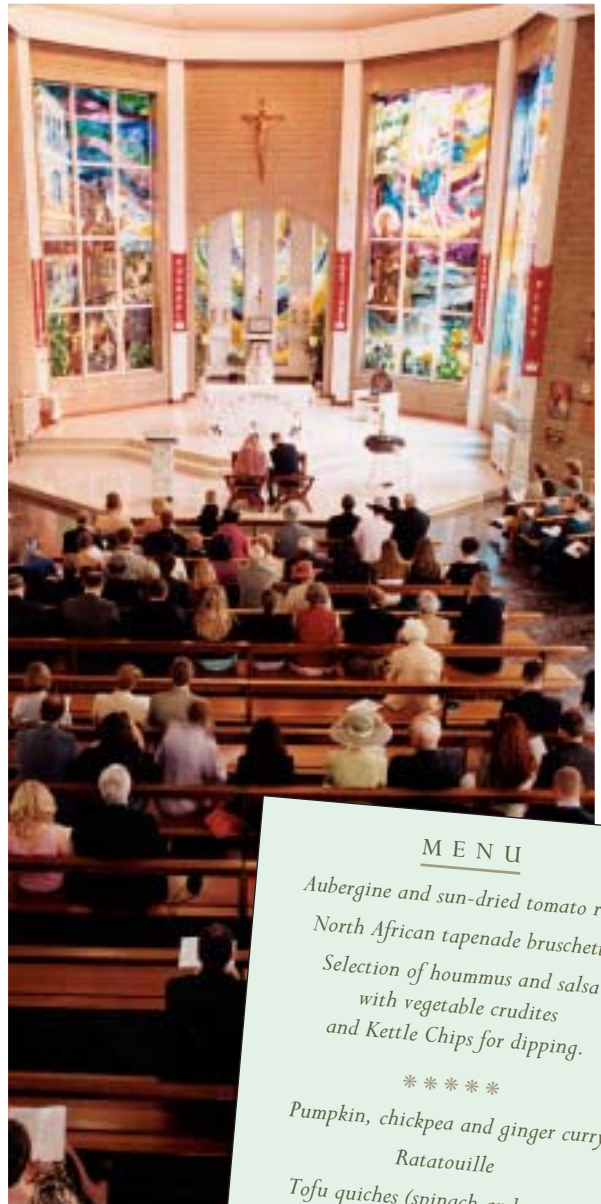
First on the list of priorities (given that we'd each found the right partner already!) was the food. We asked our favourite organic vegetarian cafe to do the honours. Joe is a vegan with a big appetite and I

didn't see why he should miss out on anything, so the whole menu was suitable for vegans (and almost all organic). Worries about the reactions of avidly carnivorous relatives were unwarranted - it was the vegan guests who couldn't cope with the menu because they weren't expecting a choice!

Vegetarianism isn't all that we're about, though, and we tried to make ethical choices in all aspects of the day. Rather than a shiny limousine, I arrived at the church in real style in the back of a pedicab. The majority of our guests came from out of town, so we arranged for them all to stay in a local hotel and share cars to the church, in an attempt to minimise the number of 'wedding miles' clocked up. The reception venue was a local community centre and it felt right that we were celebrating in the same space that hosted a



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M E N U

Aubergine and sun-dried tomato rolls
North African tapenade bruschetta
Selection of hoummus and salsa
with vegetable crudites
and Kettle Chips for dipping.

Pumpkin, chickpea and ginger curry
Ratatouille
Tofu quiches (spinach and nutmeg;
sun-dried tomato, red pepper and olive)
Selection of salads, basmati rice and
baked potatoes

Maya Gold mousse
Summer pudding

Brownies meeting the night before and a fundraising ceilidh the day after. The hall has wonderful open rafters and its workaday walls were transformed by fairy lights and fabric hangings, while 150 found, recycled and otherwise-acquired blue glass bottles made perfect table decorations.

Surprisingly, the flowers were my biggest challenge. I was genuinely shocked to discover that even in July, virtually all of the flowers sold in the UK have been grown abroad and transported – at least once – by plane. Trying to explain that I was interested in the ethics of organic, locally grown flowers (rather than the aesthetics they seemed to associate with such oddball notions - i.e. grass, herbs and some kind of display involving mutant vegetables) proved somewhat difficult. One florist actually laughed out loud at my request, saying that English flowers are

rubbish. Eventually, though, I found someone who understood and had the skills to create a stylish, contemporary bouquet that would work with my somewhat unusual pink organza dress. Sweet peas, by the way, can be purchased direct from the grower, not too many miles outside of Manchester.

One of the greatest joys of making our wedding exactly the day we wanted has been the positive response from friends and family. Some appreciated the significance of the ethical choices we had made, while others just enjoyed the great food, wine, and company without a second thought. Perhaps that's the most important message I would pass on – with a bit of determination and research you don't have to compromise your dreams or your ethics - you can have it all, without taking more than your share! ■

