



◆ **WE FILLED** our welcome boxes with notepads, pens, and brochures, plus Italian-themed items like pocket Italian-English dictionaries, samples of olive oil and balsamic vinegar, and airplane-size liqueur bottles filled with limoncello and amaretto.

◆ **THE VILLA SUPPLIED** green umbrellas because of the bad weather on our wedding day — it actually started hailing while I was getting ready. Everyone told me rain on your wedding day is good luck, so I figured hail was extra good luck!



◆ **I FELL IN LOVE** with this Badgley Mischka dress right away; the Chantilly lace was absolutely beautiful. I was never a princess-ballgown-type bride. This photo was taken inside the villa dining room, where we held both the ceremony and reception.

◆ **MY SHOES** were Desire by Colorifics. I wanted something simple with a heel but also comfortable. I brought another pair to Italy, but on the day of, comfort won out. This picture was taken with the shoes set in tree branches outside.



i do, i do

## tuscany, italy

Shannon O'Connor weds Michael Ranella on April 29, 2009

Shannon and Mike's wedding experience in Italy was a far cry from the typical do in their hometown of Detroit, Michigan. But after meeting through their jobs in the medical field and courting for 3½ years, they chose the Tuscan countryside, where the groom's grandparents were born, for their intimate affair. "I didn't want to spend the entire evening greeting guests," admits Shannon. "Marrying in Monticiano would also allow us and our guests to see a new place that we might not otherwise travel to."

They hired Italy-based planner Gaia Poli and opted for a villa instead of a hotel so guests could more easily get to know each other. And thankfully, a booking snag turned out to be a blessing. "We'd initially reserved another villa, but six months before the wedding, we were told it had been double-booked," says the bride. "After a mad scramble, we found Villa Ferraia, which ended up being far more beautiful than the first one we'd found." In addition to a gorgeous setting, the villa offered guests hot tubs, easy access to hiking trails and catered group meals — including a pizza party that featured pies topped with potatoes, eggs, capers and

other creative ingredients and baked fresh in the onsite brick oven by an authentic Italian pizza maker.

The day before the wedding, the 23 guests gathered for a rehearsal lunch at Trattoria Belle Donne, a local favorite. Then they embarked on a driving tour to Florence, with a stop at a local winery. "We had four 1960s Fiats to drive," says Shannon. "Our guests loved it!"

An outdoor ceremony on the terrace overlooking the villa grounds was planned for the following afternoon, but due to bad weather, it was moved to the villa's dining room, adorned with a candelabra, roses and olive branches. A string trio of local musicians played Pachelbel's "Canon in D," and the couple's parents each did a reading of their choosing.

The dining room doubled as the reception site, and the group noshed on homemade pasta, as well as beef fillets cooked in local Brunello wine. Then a dance party commenced, fueled by an iPod playlist. "The reception lasted well past 3 a.m.," says Shannon. "One of the perks of a private location is that the party can last as long as you'd like!" — EH

FOR MORE INFO, SEE THE 411 ON PAGE 116.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE SHOOTING GALLERY



◆ **THIS WAS OUR** room key at Villa Ferraia. One day I accidentally left it in the room, and we had to call the owner and have him come over to let us back inside. It was quite late at night, but fortunately he was a good sport about it!

◆ **THIS IS THE ENTRANCE** to Villa Ferraia. It was a wonderful spot for a wedding. The staff, many of whom speak English, are all about making their guests happy. It's a bit of a trek up a mountain to get to, but it's well worth braving the bumpy dirt road.



◆ **OUR WEDDING CAKE** was a traditional *weddiglie* with layers of puff pastry, Chantilly cream and fresh strawberries. The chef prepared it tableside, which was a surprise for most of our guests. It was delicious, but the presentation was the best part.

◆ **BECAUSE OF THE RAIN** on our wedding day, we got hardly any outdoor pictures. Two days later, our photographers took us on a one-hour drive to Florence to do another photo session. Here we are by *The Green David* in Piazzale Michelangelo.

