

Dynamic Duo

The ladies behind Lucky You Productions are shaking up the St. Louis social event scene through their combined, ultra-creative forces.

By Kristin Stefek Brashares | Photo by Brian Fagnani

► If you've attended Saint Louis Fashion Week, Wall Ball or even a green STL wedding, then you've seen the Lucky You Productions' women at work. Rachel McCalla and Amanda Hill have been shaking up the St. Louis social and bridal scenes with their dare-to-be different approach to event planning and a growing client list that includes the Missouri Botanical Garden, EarthWays Center and PrideFest. The prolific party-planning pair prides themselves on bringing fresh ideas to the table, and their inventiveness is getting big results.



Rachel + Amanda photographed at Simply Elegant Bridal

ALIVE: You guys are behind the planning of some of St. Louis' most established events. In what ways are you different from other event planners?

RACHEL MCCALLA: There are planners out there that do the standard gala, where guests come and drink, sit down, eat, someone makes a speech, a band plays, and people say they're bored. Why do that over and over again if you can do something different? I had a gala for a nonprofit. So, I did a chocolate theme. Instead of a main dessert, we had a huge chocolate fountain and got desserts donated and centerpieces made out of chocolate. They [organizers and guests] really embraced it. If you bring a little originality to an event, it sets it apart. Amanda and I always look for something different to do.

ALIVE: When did you know you had a knack for event planning?

RM: I got my start by managing my college's (University of Missouri-St. Louis) literary series. Then, I was hired by Brandt's Market and Café to do Spoken Word Sundays. I would book talents and promote and run the readings. I got good

numbers—sometimes 75 to 100 every Sunday. It was easy for me to promote, and it was something I was passionate about.

AMANDA HILL: I was trying to find a nonprofit job after college (in St. Louis), and I moved to LA and worked for a special event company. I shadowed for nonprofit fundraisers and eventually started taking on large-scale events. One of the first events was for Alzheimer's, and I have a personal connection to that, so I wanted to make it as good as I could. It was a celebrity musical, and there were 3,000 people in attendance. It was so much fun. By the time the event happened, it was so rewarding to see the outcome. I was hooked at that point.

ALIVE: Rachel, you've strongly advocated for environmentally friendly practices from the onset of Lucky You, and as a result, the company has become the go-to place for planning green weddings and events. What has made you so passionate about going green even to making your own recent wedding eco-friendly?

RM: As an environmentalist, I feel event professionals should do what

they can to incorporate some sort of sustainable aspect to their projects. At the very least, they should offset their energy with wind energy. This is very easy to do and inexpensive. As for weddings, we plan green weddings that reflect the client's personality. It doesn't have to be moss and hemp and burlap. Sustainability is really important to me, and for my own wedding, I went out of my way to do as much as I could. I had a Southern shrimp boil with brown paper on the tables, we bought local flowers and then personally donated them the next day to a retirement community. We had the wedding at the Missouri Botanical Garden's EarthWays Center, where guests could learn how to make their homes more sustainable.

ALIVE: If you had the creative freedom, what kind of unique touches would be a dream to do for a wedding?

RM: I really want to see a DIY doughnut station. At the end of the night, guests could decorate their own doughnuts, and you could serve milk to go along with it. If I suggest that to a bride, I'd probably hook one.

AH: I'd like to construct a wall for the reception, and hang old pictures of the couple's parents and grandparents on their wedding days. In the middle, I would cut out a hole and frame it, so people could get their pictures taken behind it. That way, they are a part of the family history. I'd also like to do breakfast for dinner. You could have a Pop-Tart buffet station with toasters and mimosas. It would be classy, fun and youthful.

RM: A Pop-Tart buffet sounds awesome. You could put toppings on them. I personally had a gourmet snow cone machine at my wedding.

ALIVE: You certainly log lots of hours together. How have the two of you worked well as a team?

AH: Our personalities can be very similar. We work together a lot, so

being able to get along with each other is key. Thankfully, we love each other.

RM: I think I'm more high-strung than Amanda. She takes me down a bit and says, "You need to take a breath," and I think that's good. I'll be honest; I looked around quite a bit in hiring someone, and Amanda was the strongest applicant for the job. She definitely "gets" events.

For more information on Lucky You Productions, visit luckyyoustl.com, or call 314.210.7764.

3 Wedding Day "Do's" from Rachel McCalla

1. Establish a budget, timeline and rough guest list. This is the foundation for every wedding. Take a deep breath and begin to work on a budget. From there, setting a realistic timeline will help you outline what needs to be done and when.

2. Keep it simple. Often in planning, brides look at magazines and see many amazing weddings and breathtaking examples. Although beautiful, what you see may be unrealistic for your timeframe and budget. After drafting a budget, sit down with your fiancé and brainstorm about how you see your wedding—literally. When you close your eyes, how does your wedding really look? Then stay true to your vision.

3. Hire a day-of coordinator. Not everyone can hire a wedding planner and in some cases, the bride and her family want to plan the wedding. So when it comes to the big day, do you really want to be the go-to person answering questions and keeping everyone on time and in line? No way! A day-of coordinator will act as your buffer for the day and more importantly, they will be there if anything happens to go wrong.