

HUFF POST WEDDINGS

THE BLOG

Our 10-Year Anniversary Vow Renewal: How We Kept It Special and Affordable

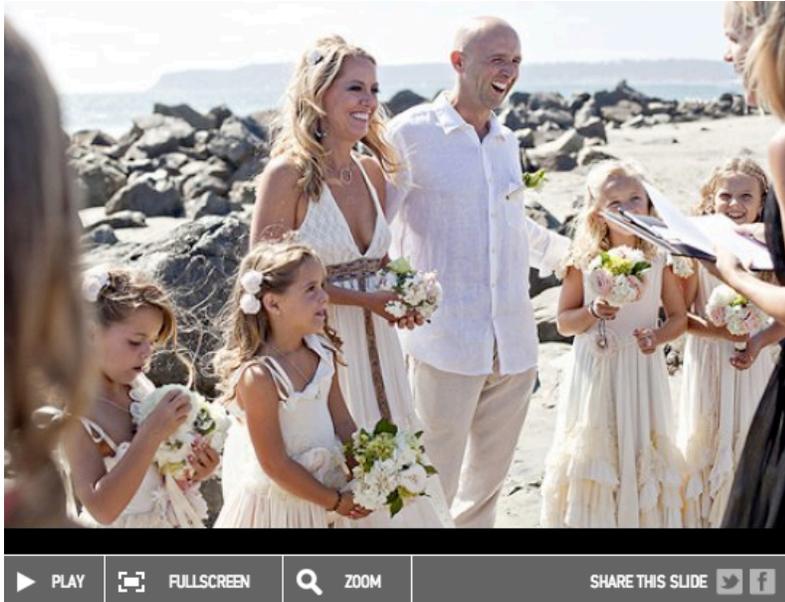
By Melisa d'Arabian

October 28, 2013



LOOK: Melissa d'Arabian's Adorable (And Affordable!) Vow Renewal

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The vow renewal was originally our daughter Charlotte's idea. When my husband lost his wedding ring in the ocean, she saw an opportunity: "You should get married again!" Shortly afterward, Philippe surprised me with a proposal in front of the girls, presenting me with my dream Edwardian-era antique ring. (I was unceremoniously washing breakfast dishes at the time.) The girls were thrilled, and immediately got into wedding-planning mode -- Valentine, 8,

and Charlotte, 7, would be junior bridesmaids and Margaux and Oceane, both 6, would be the flower girls. And we were off!

In 2003, I married Philippe in a tiny village in the South of France. This time around, though, we'd be doing it with our four daughters, and in our hometown of Coronado, Calif. I committed to skipping the wedding planning stress entirely. I wanted a special day to remember, but I didn't want the reception logistics to overtake the meaning of the vows. And, I didn't want to spend a fortune on one day (four college educations do not just pay for themselves).

We made a single decision that would shape our whole event, and save us a lot of stress and money in the process: Instead of thinking "wedding," we thought "reunion." If we could have our most cherished friends together in one place at the same time (and this time half of them would be under the age of 10!), what would we want to do together? (Answer: Karaoke. Duh.) And what would we all want to eat? (Something fun and tasty!) We had a retro food truck, a gourmet hot dog stand, and an outdoor paella station, serving dishes that had some meaning to us. And, the food all looked perfectly in theme served in paper containers, keeping cleanup super easy. Our casual reception still felt (and looked) special, with thoughtful touches.

Any time you are hosting a hundred people, though, there are details to manage. The Sunday before the vow renewal, however, I had an epiphany -- the last days leading up to the event can easily be hijacked by logistics and surface stuff (Will my hair look good? Are those new wrinkles around my eyes?). But the primary purpose for us needed to stay in our family coming together and adding a new layer of meaning to the vows we made (rather naively I must say in hindsight) ten years ago. I made a conscious decision to embrace the imperfection that is my life: Wrinkles, come if you must when I smile, because they are evidence that I have smiled much in my life. Dresses, feel free to get crumpled when the girls run around two seconds after I've steamed them, because I'm lucky to have girls who run and play in their joy. Nothing would stop our family from holding hands in front our pastor and closest friends and speaking our commitment to each other. My hope was to stay centered in that. And, I did.