

UNDER THE *Tuscan* SUN

Jessica Bride
and Nick Mayor's
newly renovated
historic home is
the setting for a Tuscan-
themed shower.

BY LEE CUTRONE
PHOTOS BY EUGENIA UHL

Italy and Louisiana have more than a few things in common, including reverence for the past, sensational food, beautiful scenery, profound love of life and a recognizable, boot-shaped geographical footprint. So when Jessica Bride and husband Nick Mayor decided to host a Tuscan-themed bridal shower in their newly renovated Lower Garden District home, the two cultures, like the betrothed — one Italian, the other a Louisianan — seemed like a good match. Bride and Mayor's home provided the perfect backdrop.

Having met in London, where both lived and worked (Bride in the restaurant industry, Mayor in finance), the couple temporarily relocated to Bride's native New Orleans in 2006 while she applied for a new visa. A wrong turn soon proved fateful.

"We were driving Uptown from the Marigny one day. I took a wrong turn, and we saw this house for sale and said 'Wow, that's amazing,'" Bride recalls of the Greek Revival structure, built in 1847 by commission merchant Hugh Wilson.

Uncertain about what the renovation process would reveal, the couple took a chance, purchasing the house in 2007. Working with architect Danny Taylor of Koch & Wilson and Barry Seigel of Bywater Woodworks, the couple transformed the decrepit carriage house at the property's rear ("It was a biohazard," Bride says, only half-joking) into livable quarters where they could stay while renovating the main house, which needed more work than they initially thought.

During the first half of the 20th century, the

HOSTESSES PATRICIA LANDRY AND DONNA HELLMERS AND BRIDE-TO-BE LAURA LEA REID ENJOY COCKTAILS ON THE PATIO LOCATED BETWEEN THE HOUSE AND THE POOL. THE HOMEOWNERS RENOVATED THE CARRIAGE HOUSE, WHICH NOW SERVES AS GUEST QUARTERS. THE OUTDOOR FURNITURE IS FROM DESIGN WITHIN REACH.



HOMEOWNERS NICK MAYOR AND JESSICA BRIDE

property had been converted into a boarding house; in the 1970s it was re-established as a single family home; in the 1980s a partial renovation enclosed its second-floor exterior galleries. When Bride and Mayor bought it, the house had stood unoccupied for six years. Layers of red wool carpeting and linoleum tiles covered portions of the original floors; termites had eaten through some of the plaster lathes and underlying substructure, and the living room's wooden floor had sunken partially to the ground.

"When we pulled up the bowed floor in the living room, we were pleasantly surprised — it turned out to be just the rotted floor joists," Bride says. "But that was the last time we were pleasantly surprised by the construction process. Everything else came in over budget."

The couple stayed the course, and today the house is a juxtaposition of restored 19th century architecture and modern, urban interiors. Bride and Mayor reconfigured portions of the floor plan, added a new kitchen, bathrooms, air conditioning and heating systems, and new plumbing and electrical wiring. They repaired plaster and moldings, restored the exterior galleries and added a pool. Collaborating with New York-based colorist, decorator and friend Bruce McNally, the couple gave the house a fresh, relevant edge and is still in the process of collecting contemporary works of art, mostly from New Orleans and London.

"In London everything is old and protected — you can't do anything to the outside of a house," Bride says. "But it's really popular to go in and gut and modernize a home on the inside. ... I had more rustic taste, but I developed a love of the modern and the interplay of old and new. The house is definitely a mix of our two styles," Bride adds. "It's something we've come up with together as opposed



THE DINING ROOM FEATURES FLAVOR PAPER WALLPAPER, A TABLE BY TARA SHAW MAISON, CHAIRS FROM PERCH, A LARGE LUCITE MIRROR FOUND IN NEW YORK AND A CONSOLE FROM RESTORATION HARDWARE.



THE GREEK REVIVAL HOME WAS BUILT IN 1847.

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TOP RIGHT: THE LIVING ROOM BOASTS A SOFA FROM VILLA VICI, SOFA FABRIC FROM PERCH AND A ZEPPELIN CHANDELIER BY MARCEL WANDERS FROM DESIGN WITHIN REACH.

BOTTOM LEFT: PARTY FAVORS OF BOTTLED OLIVE OIL FOR GUESTS

BOTTOM RIGHT: CHEF AMY BLACKBURN PREPARES CROSTINI.



LAURA LEA'S SHOWER MENU

Bellini made with cognac, peach nectar and LaMara Provencal
 Insalata Caprese
 Farmer's market tomatoes and garden-fresh basil
 Vigneti del Sole Pinot Grigio from Veneto 2009
 Pinot Grigio from Veneto 2009
 Tuscan White Bean Salad with roasted artichokes and grilled lemon shrimp, served with ciabatta crostini
 Cusumano Italia from Sicily 2008
 Casata Manfort Semillon from Texas 2008
 Farm Fresh Strawberry Shortcake Cupcakes
 White Chocolate Draped Biscotti
 Eruzione Moscato d'Asti 2009
 Castello Venti Moscato d'Asti 2008
 Wines sourced by Amy Blackburn, Best Cakes, NYC
 Cupcakes by Christina Watts

TOP LEFT: LUNCH WAS SERVED ON THE LAWN, WHERE A SINGLE TABLE PROVIDED SEATING AND A TENT PROVIDED SHADE FOR 18 GUESTS.

TOP RIGHT: THE TABLE WAS DRESSED WITH A WHITE LINEN TABLECLOTH, A BURLAP RUNNER, TABLEWARE FROM POTTERY BARN AND CB2, AND POTTED LAVENDER FROM THE CRESCENT CITY FARMER'S MARKET.

BOTTOM LEFT: THE MAIN COURSE: GRILLED LEMON SHRIMP AND CIABATTA CROSTINI, TUSCAN WHITE BEAN SALAD WITH ROASTED ARTICHOKE

to something we would have come up with on our own."

Likewise, the bridal shower was a collaboration of creative talents. Bride put years of restaurant industry experience and more recent studies as an oenophile to work with New York-based private chef Amy Blackburn. Together, they devised a lunch menu of rustic Tuscan fare paired with seven wines selected to enhance the food and match the summer weather.

The morning of the shower, Blackburn shopped at the Crescent City Farmers Market for fresh, local ingredients like Creole and cherry tomatoes. Bride saw to the Tuscan-inspired decor, while hostess Cristina Watts made dessert: vanilla cupcakes filled with fresh Louisiana strawberries, topped with cream cheese whipped cream and drizzled with fresh strawberry sauce.

Guests were greeted with Bellini cocktails at the front gate. After an hour of mingling, they headed to the tented side lawn where a single table dressed with a white linen tablecloth, burlap runner and potted lavender plant provided seating for the three-course meal. After lunch, biscotti and sparkling dessert wines were served while the honoree opened gifts surrounded by good friends, good wishes and good cheer.

"[The shower] was an interesting feat of planning," Bride says. "The co-hosts live in New Orleans, Mississippi, Hammond and Donaldsonville, and we converged in New Orleans for a really fun party. Instead of knowing everyone prior to the shower, we became friends as a result of the shower. It was capped off by six of us jumping in the pool. ... I think the day was perfect." [C]