

## HOW TO

# Decorate a Colonnade Arch System

*Decorating a colonnade arch system that can serve as the focal point of a wedding ceremony demands far more artistry than most wedding guests understand.*

It needs to focus attention on the bride and groom and draw attention away from the venue without attracting too much attention to itself. It provides the backdrop for the memories, wedding photos and videos that will live on for generations. And there's only one chance for success. That's why decorating it is a high visibility job that comes with high pressure, and for wedding and event planners who know how to decorate these arch systems with style and flair, their artistry can become a signature that attracts clients and drives word of mouth advertising. We talked to ace wedding planner Will Hall of Your Wedding Solutions, Baltimore, Md., about how he decorates colonnade arch systems and how you can get the same, bold effect using your own colonnade arch system for weddings and other events. Here is what we learned from Mr. Hall:

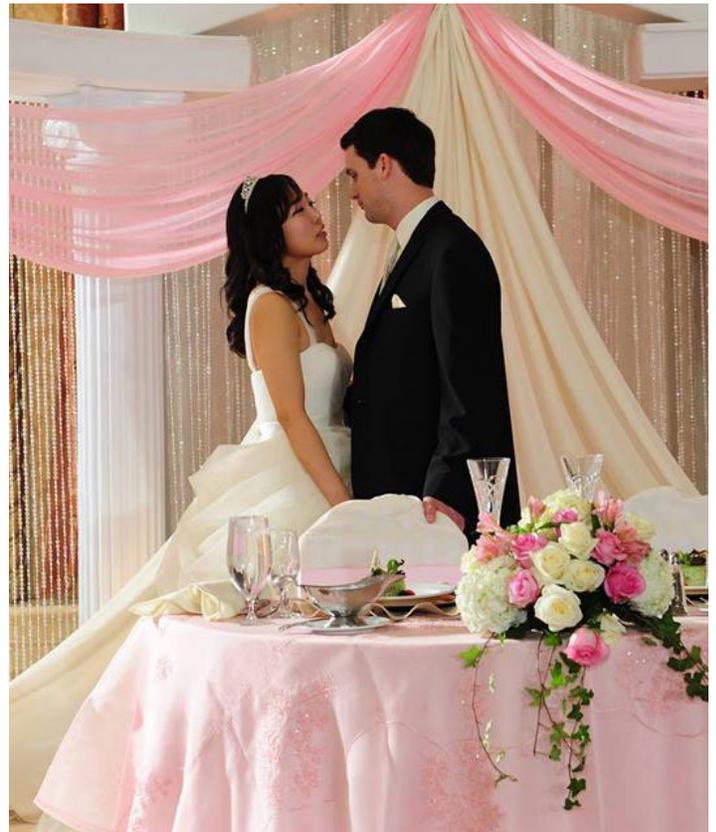
### **Location, Location, Location**

The most important factor in determining how to decorate your colonnade arch system is the venue. A cavernous church presents a different set of opportunities and challenges than a stark, hotel banquet room, tight

lodge hall or the bride's backyard, for example. The first step is to survey the event venue or site, paying careful attention to the following:

**Walls** – Some churches invite sunshine in through beautiful stained glass windows onto ornately finished, wooden walls and carvings. Some

modern churches feel more like a stadium. Hotels and catering halls often use patterned wallpaper while other facilities may offer bare, beige walls or worse – oddly colored or cluttered walls. If the walls enhance the visual experience of your guests then setup the arch system to coordinate



*This traditional colonnade arch system creates an elegant focal point for weddings, prom photos and other events. It is manufactured by Meese Orbitron Dunne Co. in La Mirada, Calif.*



*Set a backdrop behind the colonnade arch system using pipe and drape to focus attention hide any distractions from view.*

with the walls and fit into the line of sight of your guests. More likely, the walls, especially those behind the arch system, are going to be a distraction and will need to be blocked from your guests to focus attention on the bride and groom. This may be done by setting up a pipe and drape as a backdrop behind the arch system, just like the back of a trade show booth. The width of the backdrop may be as wide as the arch system or extend much farther away from either side of the arch system depending on what needs to be hidden from view.



*This colonnade arch system coordinates with the high ceilings and stone columns for a grand visual effect.*

**Ceilings** – Check the height where the ceremony is to be held, accounting for the height of any stage or platform. If the ceiling is low then the arch system may be setup using six-foot columns. If the ceiling is very high then seven-foot columns are recommended to

create a more vertical look and help fill the overhead space.

**Entrances** – Note the room layout, flow and how guests will enter the room and arrange the colonnade arch system to face the main entry. This ensures the front is seen immediately upon walking through the door for a striking first impression. It is an odd experience for a guest to enter a hall or event and see the rear of the stage instead of the grand sight of the fully decorated arch system.

**Outlets** – The number and placement of electrical outlets will affect whether and how lighting can be used to enhance the look of the decorated arch system. The closer the lights to the outlets the better, since the longer the wires the greater the potential safety issues. Cords and wires may need to be covered, taped and/or tied. White wires blend in with the white arch system and are virtually invisible from the distance of seated wedding guests. Lastly, depending on the venue, you may be competing for outlets with the entertainment company, caterer or other vendor so check with them in advance and consider bringing a variety of power strips and extension cords just in case.

**Flooring** – The bottom of the colonnade arch system is flat and smooth. When placed on carpet, it forms a nice grip that helps keep it in place. But when it is placed on some smooth tiles, dance floors or polished floors, the unit can slide if bumped. For venues with these types of flooring, common slip guards from any home improvement store placed on the bottom of the quarter circles are recommended to add extra grip and stability.

## **Arch System Configuration**

Once you've accounted for the particulars of the venue, it is time to consider how to configure the colonnade arch system. The traditional setup includes four, fluted, Graeco-Roman style columns between two quarter circles top and bottom and their ends pointing towards the guests. The central arch joins them into a single unit. For very small venues, this setup alone is entirely appropriate. But

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*Any number of pedestals, floral urns and other wedding décor props may be added for effect, to add a touch of color or to hide cords, block windows, or for a variety of other reasons.*

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don't feel wedded to this setup. As the venues get larger, the colonnade arch system needs to be expanded to draw attention, focus eyes on the bridal party and fill the space. Here are some ideas that look sharp:

**Flanking Extension** – This is done by placing fluted pedestals that coordinate with the columns symmetrically on either side of the arch system. For visual effect, the heights of these pedestals may get smaller and smaller



*Warm tones and bold colors contrast with the white colonnade arch system for stunning visual appeal.*

as they are set farther and farther away from the center. The height may also be raised by placing floral urns atop these pedestals. If a pipe and drape backdrop is being used behind the arch system then be sure the flanking pedestals are set up to the ends of the backdrop but do not extend beyond the ends.

**Runway Extension** – In addition to thinking laterally, think about visual depth by lining the runway or aisle with coordinating pedestals. They may be topped by candles, vases or floral displays and this joins the entire seating area with the bridal stage as a single unit.

**Get Creative** – The entire arch system may be reversed by rotating the traditional layout 180 degrees, two of the quarter circles may be reversed to



*Pedestals lining the aisle at this wedding coordinate with the colonnade arch system.*

create an S-shape or a third set of quarter circles may be added to extend the width of the wedding arch. Any number of pedestals, floral urns and other wedding décor props may be added for effect, to add a touch of color or to hide cords, block windows, or for a variety of other reasons. The layout is limited only by the imagination.

### **Decorating Your Arch System**

Once the configuration has been determined, you're ready to figure out how to decorate it for maximum effect. Starting with the traditional colonnade arch system in white in a traditional configuration, take this step-by-step approach:

**Color Scheme** – The first issue to consider is the wedding's color scheme. The colors selected for decorating the arch system will nearly always match, extend or otherwise complement the overall color scheme of the wedding. The key is to enhance and coordinate with the colors around the room and provide an elegant backdrop for the ceremony without overpowering the rest of the décor. Therefore, a light or neutral color is typically recommended for the drapes, if they are to be set with piping behind the arch system. Then, incorporate deeper, bolder colors such as red, brown, teal and yellow using sheer fabrics hanging in front with accent props depending on the theme. Use C-hooks or screw hooks with wire for sturdy draping

and hanging or wreath hooks to keep the arch system parts completely intact.

**Flowers** – Floral displays are available in virtually any color to extend and coordinate with the color scheme and add vibrant textures to the arch system. The central arch provides a natural location for an elaborate floral display. Match the same type of flower or plant using vases or urns atop any pedestals set throughout the venue. Fresh flowers or silk? The look and texture of fresh flowers naturally appeals to most brides and guests but if you're going to use fresh then be sure they are delivered as close to the start of the ceremony as possible. If the flowers are added too early then they may wilt so they will be the finishing touch on

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*To add some sizzle, highlight the columns and pedestals using up lighting. Mounted on the floor, the spotlights bring out the 3-D texture of the fluting*

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the arch system. Many experienced professionals know that silk flowers are far stronger and more reliable than fresh flowers, they perform consistently every time regardless of the temperature or humidity and allow a wider range of placement possibilities with less need for delicate care during setup. Today's silk appears just like fresh from the distance of seated guests and in wedding photography. Silk also doesn't need any cleanup during takedown after the wedding.

**Lighting** – To add some sizzle, highlight the columns and pedestals using up lighting. Mounted on the floor, the spotlights bring out the 3-D texture of the fluting, add warmth and create a

bright center within the venue to serve as a dramatic focal point when all eyes are on the bride and groom. A variety of filters and LED lights may be used as an alternative source of color. Use 50-watts or less to avoid heat issues. Since the arch system elements are non-reflective, creative photographers often shoot their finest work with the lighted arch system as a backdrop.

**Bling** – For extra flair, use some bling. Though the type and extent of bling will likely depend on the bride and on the overall style of wedding décor, adding a sparkle in key places can create subtle

visual appeal that enhances the overall experience. This may involve wrapping columns and pedestals in ribbons or garland, running decorative rope lights or tube lights throughout the arch system or any number of other ideas.

Decorating a colonnade arch system as described may take several hours for the first try but after a few times, it may be decorated within two hours of the start of the ceremony. After the wedding, takedown the arch system in reverse order of setup, starting with removing the bling and unplugging

the lighting then removing the flowers and drapes. After disassembling the arch and columns, a quick wipedown is recommended with a common cleaning agent or orange-infused vinegar for the chemically sensitive to prevent any dust from accumulating and remove any floral debris. ■

*Decorated colonnade arch system photos provided courtesy Will Hall, Your Wedding Solution. Reach him at [www.YourWeddingSolution.com](http://www.YourWeddingSolution.com). For more, see the photo gallery at [PropDecor.com](http://PropDecor.com). For free brochure, call 888.724.1228*



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