

by Judy Foreman



Ms Foreman, a Santa Barbara freelance writer, has been covering fitness, beauty, health, fashion, new businesses and lifestyle trends for the Journal since 1998. She blogs @ judyforemanknowssantabarbara.com

## Events On Demand

**M**erryl Brown of Merryl Brown Events has served as Director of PR and Events at Saks Fifth Avenue Santa Barbara, and as a Trustee of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art; she represents nearly 20 years experience organizing parties, weddings, grand openings, corporate events, and intimate dinners.

Her credentials are impressive: Certified Master Gardener, Master's degree in International Affairs from Columbia University, Lifetime Honorary Trustee of Lotusland, fluent in Portuguese and Spanish, co-chair of the MUS Organic Garden Club and member of the school's newly formed Green Team.

A high level of professionalism, attention to detail, elegance, and environmental sustainability is her goal at each event she produces. The following conversation was held during lunch at Coral Casino:

**Q.** What prompted the founding of Merryl Brown Events?

**A.** What prompted me to start this company was that at many events I've attended, I noticed they created a huge amount of waste. I realized there was something missing in party planning, and that was the sustainability factor. People were not making choices that were in the best interest of the environment. I am not interested in telling people how to live their lives, rather, I am interested in showing them how they can entertain with elegance and grace, and be thoughtful about the waste they produce in the process.

I get so much enjoyment out of taking a raw space and turning it



Merryl Brown's motto is "Elegance with Intelligence" as she creates event while keeping impacts to the environment to a minimum (photo by Medeighnia Westwick)

into something new, whether it is a room or a stretch of beach. I'm also an organic gardener, composter, recycler and supporter of local farms and sustainability programs. Planning sustainable events is my way to merge my inner Emily Post with my inner Alice Waters.

*What are some specifics of how you produce both an elegant and sustainable event?*

I start by discussing with my client the look, style and message they want to convey. I have a comprehensive questionnaire that I go through to make sure we don't forget any pieces of the equation. This helps me know each person better and to get a clear sense of what they want to achieve. We discuss budget and create realistic expectations around that as well. Once I have a handle on what we are working towards, then I can work my magic, bringing in local floral designers, local artists, graphic designers, chefs, musicians and others who play a large



Merryl works with vendors that use local and organic produce, keep waste to a minimum, and work with reusable products (photo by Matt Walla Photography)

part in creating an event that is both inspired and sustainable.

My job is to figure out who can do it the most beautifully at the most reasonable cost, while simultaneously keeping the event as environmentally and socially conscious as possible. We work hard to create low-waste events; we donate excess food to Casa Esperanza's Community Kitchen and leftover centerpieces to local senior homes. We also have a team of sustainability advisors who focus on 'waste stream diversion.' Their job is to be stationed with the catering crew and to be sure that the waste stream is properly sorted into trash, recycling, and food-scrap composting. This in no way takes away from the beauty of the event.

*What do you feel is your signature style?*

I bring gracious style and old-world elegance merged with thoughtful, earth-friendly practices. For instance, I don't stop at using 100% recycled paper with vegetable-based inks. I take it a step further and have invitations hand-lettered so they're environmentally friendly and aesthetically beautiful.

I love working with local suppliers in all areas, including talented graphic designers, bakers, caterers, florists, and photographers. I source as much as I can locally because it is important to me to support our local businesses and our local food producers.

Regarding tableware, my preference is always for clients to use what they own or to rent versus using disposable items. Classic Party Rentals has a terrific sustainable business model. They have many beautiful items that they rent hundreds of times, with minimal waste. They recycle and reuse a large percentage of the waste from their operations. They're striving to be the most sustainable rental business in the country, and they're doing a good job.

*What are some of your other suppliers?*

I have some wonderful caterers that I love to work with because they understand the importance of sourcing food from the farmers market and from local purveyors. They always know where to find just the perfect tomato for gazpacho, or just the right apple for a beautiful tarte tatin. They understand seasonality, and the importance of pairing the best foods of the season with delicious organic or biodynamic wines.

Over the years I've found interesting and wonderful creative people to work with. One designer does stunning one-of-a-kind napkin treatments utilizing silk ribbon and vintage or recycled beads. She also makes a line of napkin treatment-party favors that are also brooches that all of the guests can then put on. It's the upscale version of having a party hat at each place setting! I work with a baker who creates organic cookies incorporating the theme and colors of each event; they are as delicious as they are beautiful. Another designer creates custom note-cards for party favors using her hand-painted designs on recycled paper. You'll never find these elsewhere; they're created exclusively for each event.

Merryl and her husband, **Monte**, moved to Montecito in 1992 from New York City and have been involved in the Santa Barbara community, both socially and philanthropically ever since. "We cherish our friendships, our children's schools and the organizations that make Santa Barbara the great place it is. It has turned out to be the perfect place to raise our children and we hope to continue to do what we can to give back and make it even more wonderful!"

For more information call Merryl at 455-3112 or visit [www.MerrylBrownEvents.com](http://www.MerrylBrownEvents.com).

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