

DOWN BY *the sea*

Fond memories of the Gower coast brought Karen and Carl back there for their big day



THE GROOM: Carl Harding, 31, architect
THE BRIDE: Karen Thomas, 31, architect
DATE OF WEDDING: 21st June, 2008
CEREMONY VENUE: St Illtyd's Church, Gower, Swansea
RECEPTION VENUE: Marquee at the Oxwich Bay Hotel, Gower, Swansea



IN THE BEGINNING

Love blossomed for Karen and Carl when they met in 2000 while studying architecture together at Cardiff University. Six years later, Carl proposed in Costa Rica where the pair were doing some voluntary work building houses for under-privileged families. "Every night there had been a perfect sunset, but on the night I decided to propose there was a thunderstorm," says Carl. "So I ended up down on one knee in a huge puddle!"

The couple decided to have a long engagement, and they moved to Perth, Australia, for a year before the wedding. They came back to the UK at the end of 2007, giving them six months to arrange the final details of their big day.

THE SETTING

The couple chose Oxwich as the setting for their wedding, as it brought back fond memories of their early days together. "Oxwich has always been a special place to us," says Carl. "We went there for a nice weekend away when we first got together, and Karen spent many childhood holidays there."

The ceremony was held in St Illtyd's Church, which overlooks the beach. Just a short walk up a narrow lane is the Oxwich Bay Hotel, where the couple held their reception.

"We both love the beach so much," says Karen, "so we chose a marquee reception at the hotel, which brought us nearer to the coast."

THE DRESS

Karen's dress was a fitted ivory silk and chiffon design, bought from Ritva Westenius Couture, in London. It had a sweetheart neckline and a low-cut back, with pretty chiffon detailing on the straps and ruching at the waist.

"It was simple and unfussy, which suited me," says Karen. "I also had

a long veil that glided over the train of my dress and was fixed in my hair with an orchid and pearl clip. I also wore my mum's pearl earrings and a pair of ivory satin sling-backs."

THE WEDDING PARTY

Karen asked her sister Hailey to be her bridesmaid, alongside her old school friend Raheema. The bridesmaids wore dark fuchsia layered georgette gowns, bought from Samantha Wynne in Perth, and accessorised with pretty pearl headbands, matching necklaces, and a pearl bracelet bought as a thank you gift from Karen.

Carl asked his school friends Andrew, Michael and Ben to be his best men. "Michael and I used to be in a punk band together," laughs Carl, "but fortunately for our guests we didn't decide to reform especially for the wedding."

The men all wore classic black tailcoats, hired from Moss Bros, and the best men accessorised with hot pink cravats to complement the bridesmaids' dresses. Carl wore an ivory cravat to match Karen's gown.

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

As architects, the couple had very contemporary ideas for their wedding day, and they opted for a simple black and ivory colour scheme, with splashes of fuchsia that were present in the flowers and in the table decorations and favours.

"We handmade all of the menus and place settings ourselves," says Carl. "For a personal touch, I also decorated the marquee with photos of us growing up, and some pictures from our travels." As favours, the couple placed pieces of sweet rock with 'just married' printed on them in white boxes and tied them up with coordinating ribbon.

Karen held a hand-tied bouquet of ivory orchids, peonies and tea roses, with added foliage, while the bridesmaids held the same flowers but in shades of hot pink.

LOOKING BACK

"It was great to finally have the wedding after so much planning," says Carl. "One of my favourite parts of the day was when our friend Mae sang *Amazing Grace* for us in the church, she was wonderful."

"One of my favourite memories was when we said our vows; it felt like we were the only two people in the church," says Karen. "I also loved having our photos taken in Oxwich Castle's ruins, it was a fantastic location."

KAREN AND CARL'S TOP TIPS

"If you're having more than one best man, make sure you appoint a leader. That way, they can't ever pass the buck. They should each have their own responsibilities," says Carl.

"Start organising early," says Karen. "I would have liked to have had more time to arrange things; it takes longer than you might think."



GET THE *look*

Be inspired by Karen and Carl's Welsh-coast wedding

Photo finish

As well as having their photos taken at the ceremony and reception, the couple spent time having pictures on the beach and in the ruins of Oxwich Castle. Ask your photographer to take advantage of the different surroundings; remote, rustic settings such as these make a great alternative to formal gardens.

**Venue to remember**

Look for venues that offer outdoor marquees so you can extend your reception out on to the gardens and grounds as well as inside. Marquees are especially perfect for spring and summer weddings.

**USEFUL CONTACTS****Photographer**

Nic Cleave Photography
Tel: 01792 429 201
www.niccleave.com

Venue

Oxwich Bay Hotel
Tel: 01792 390 329
www.oxwichbayhotel.co.uk

Brides dress

Ritva Westenius Couture
Tel: 0207 706 0708
www.ritvawestenius.com

Groom's suit

Moss Bros Hire
Tel: 0844 847 9319
www.moss.co.uk

Bridesmaids' dresses

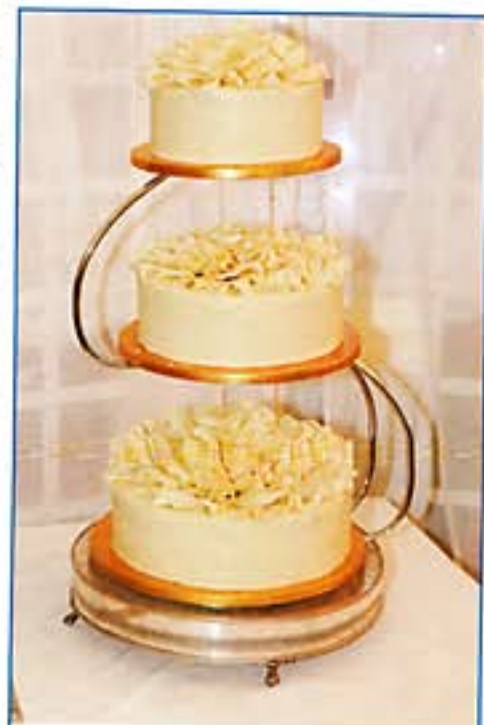
Samantha Wynne
www.samanthawynne.com

Flowers

Rolfe's
Tel: 02920 461 048
www.rolfeshellorist.co.uk

Cake

Druckers Vienna Patisserie
Tel: 0121 777 7000
www.druckers.co.uk

**Light bites**

"Rather than a traditional wedding cake, we chose three different sized chocolate cakes from Druckers' Special Occasion range," says Carl. "This worked out much less expensive, but still looked great."