

#146 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 5, 2010

Country weddings are my specialty
By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—Columnists occasionally use their print megaphones to convey a hidden message to their spouses and children. Sometimes, these messages are so subtly worded that they are not received. In that spirit...

MOLLY! Pay no attention to Chelsea Clinton! Your father is not going to spend \$3 to \$5 million on your wedding! Practice subtracting zeros. Many zeros.

I have come to view weddings as I first came to view funerals: Too much money is spent on the wrong things for the wrong reasons. Both are among my favorite grump-and-dump-on topics.

Ms. Clinton was married on Saturday near Rhinebeck, N.Y., at Astor Courts, a 50-acre farmette with a restored 1904 Beaux Arts mansion that overlooks both the Hudson River and active CSX tracks.

The Astor money traces back 200 years to German immigrant John Jacob Astor who began trading flutes and furs, expanded into Turkish opium for China and his adopted homeland and then moved on to New York real estate. John Jacob believed in the redeeming power of monopolies and turned his hand to them wherever possible. He died in 1848, the wealthiest American.

John Jacob Astor IV built the 40,000-square-foot structure at Astor Courts as an exercise emporium for his nearby 2,800-acre estate, Ferncliff. The original indoor clay tennis court and swimming pool survive. The squash courts and indoor shooting range have not.

JJA IV was politely described as “eccentric,” though the current vernacular might be “loopier than a lasso.” He once said: “A man who has a million dollars is almost as well off as if he were wealthy.”

The main pavilion was remuddled over the years into a nursing home and convent. It still had good bones, but age had been unkind.

The current owners paid \$3.2 million for the wreck in 2004 and spent themselves silly restoring it. Soon after finishing, they listed it for \$12 million. In advance of the Clinton wedding, they tastefully took it off the market and now it's brazenly back on.

Molly--This was a dreadful spot for a wedding unless you like mixing nuptials with deer ticks and locomotive fumes.

Molly: Keep reading. We're getting to the important part.

I know that a wedding is not in your immediate plans, but I want to be as helpful in this future matter as possible.

You may not know this, Sweetie, but our estate, Seltzer Woos (Astor courts; Seltzer woos), exceeds that Yankee postage stamp of a country place on all dimensions.

The Woos is now an internationally recognized rural gymnasium as well as a destination for smart-set weddings, ranging from the simply tacky to the truly "bankruptious."

We feature free weights in many forms along with the latest gerbil-tested machines. We have cunningly disguised both as farm chores to give guests a sense of doing something more useful than sweating.

Alone among five-star-crossed resorts we've developed a regimen of lower-back straining exercises that defy conventional treatment. And we were the first to offer bikram shoveling, complete with 26 yoga postures and two breathing exercises at a constant 105 degrees F with 40-percent humidity.

Our four-legged personal trainers specialize in sprints and hurdles, which, you may recall, we laughingly refer to as "chases" and "fence-jumping." Sprints are often extended into 5Ks for the sheer joy of running. Marathons can be arranged.

Our well-cropped grounds overlook Key Run, a usually dry and always unappealing tributary of the Potomac River. Key Run teems with rock life.

Our family fortune for your information is not based on peddling pelts or dealing dope. I'm not ruling anything out, of course. And just to be honest about it, the family fortune has yet to be based on anything.

Seltzer Woos is a far more elegant place to have a high-profile wedding than Astor Courts. And, Molly, let's be frank: Old money owns; new money -- like the Clintons -- rents. People, I fear, would talk if you followed Chelsea's example.

I will also remind you that Blue Grass is far better equipped to handle the celebrities I know than Rhinebeck.

The Blue Grass Valley Bank routinely handles deposits and makes change.

Wilt's Body Shop smoothes wrinkles and dents—and also works on vehicles.

Country Convenience carries everything from nails (the hammering-in kind, not the extending-out kind) to knick-knacks. They serve authentic American take-out cuisine that ranges from hamburger to ham sandwiches, on which you can even get a slice of an undocumented alien tomato in combination with an exotic cheese like American Swiss.

Carl Hull's Tractor Repair Shop can quickly fix a guest's hydraulics or deflate his inner tube. They now specialize in straightening "crankshafts," which is our local name for out-of-town celebrity gossips.

And if the pasture above the stock pond is not thought to be sufficiently enclosed for a reception, the Blue Grass Ruritan Building is available in a pinch. Its main room, with the school stage and basketball court, can be had for \$50; the kitchen is another \$35. These are tax-deductible donations, not rent. And the Ruritans might even throw in the use of indoor bathrooms...for both sexes!

Local lodging options are truly impressive. Temporary accommodations can be set up in our cow pasture across the road where secular weddings occur 24/7. Many of our local inns offer overnight accommodations. The rest feature free parking.

A wedding at The Woos can be as thick or as thin with celebrities as you like. I'd feel obligated to invite Hemingway, and your mother will insist on Silver, Trigger and Buttermilk.

For you, Molly, I would offer a family discount, though I hope you keep this act of favoritism just between us.

I recommend our super-deluxe, low-carbon, come-as-you-are, no-calorie, un-champagned, unperformed, unlimoed, no-guest DIY package. We offer this choice only to customers your mother and I like, which includes you. With discount, the whole disagreeable mess can be done for \$30--\$50 tops, payable in cash advance.

Seltzer Woos is the choice of many crowned heads. We turned down the Clintons. We...

...I don't have a chance, do I?

My subscription to Modern Bride begins in September.

Curtis Seltzer is a land consultant who works with buyers and helps sellers with marketing plans. He is author of How To Be a DIRT-SMART Buyer of Country Property at www.curtis-seltzer.com where his weekly columns are

posted.

Contact: Curtis Seltzer, Ph.D.
Land Consultant
1467 Wimer Mountain Road
Blue Grass, VA 24413-2307
540-474-3297
curtisseltzer@htcnet.org
www.curtis-seltzer.com