

simchahs



# Chuppah Fairies

Once called "chuppah fairies," Mona and Jay Freedman of Charm City Chuppahs create fairytale weddings for couples.



Below, a Charm City Chuppah at the Hedinger Wedding



### Jennifer Hale

Special to the Jewish Times  
Once called "chuppah fairies" by one of their clients, Mona and Jay Freedman of Charm City Chuppahs have liberated florists from the chuppah call of duty and have provided local Jewish and non-Jewish couples with stunning and original canopies for their wedding ceremonies. "Charm City Chuppahs is the only dedicated company where you can choose from a variety of designs and styles," says Mrs. Freedman. Mrs. Freedman long envisioned opening a company that specializes in chuppahs and only chuppahs. In January 2008, she and Mr. Freedman worked on crafting their first chuppah, which required a great deal of experimentation. As a dedicated entrepreneur, she designed the style of the canopy but had to buy bolts of fabric, find the right glue, fittings, pole covers, and string to ensure that the chuppah would not fall apart during the ceremony.

By the spring of 2008, she and her husband were successful in creating their first chuppah with dimensions of eight and a half feet by seven and a half feet, which could easily accommodate the entire wedding party as opposed to only the couple. "The chuppah we built is very elaborate and welcoming," she says.

After setting up her one-of-a-kind chuppah at a few local Jewish wedding expos, her company caught on like wildfire. Typically, they do two to three weddings per month and have been known to manage two weddings in one day. "People call me either months in advance or just three weeks. We can always pull it off," says Mrs. Freedman.

When brides consult Charm City Chuppahs, they think they know what they want but they tend to "immediately fall in love" with one of the styles. When Mrs. Freedman thinks of an idea for a new chuppah design she works out the measurements and details with a drapery designer who also specializes in sewing chuppahs. Since one chuppah can take several weeks to produce, the Freedmans currently have five to six styles that clients can choose from for their weddings, which is "way more than what other places have to offer."

According to Mrs. Freedman, the style of the chuppah depends solely on a bride's personal style. Typically, Orthodox clients choose the traditional, soft chuppah in white or ivory but other clients prefer modern canopies made with elegant, glittery white sheer fabric sprinkled with rhinestones. "We are still in the development process. We plan on making one or two more chuppahs with Israeli Hebrew lettering and with a Star of David," says Mrs. Freedman.

The Freedmans work as a team and arrive long before the wedding begins to set up the chuppah. "I am a perfectionist. I have to make sure that everything is

tied and puddled evenly. It's my baby. I am too excited to give it to a staff," she says. They spend a great deal of time positioning it, so that it is exactly in the center of the room. "We look at it and play with the angles, but most of all we make sure it looks gorgeous," she says. Unlike a florist who leaves after the flowers are set up, the Freedmans wait for the ceremony to end.

Mrs. Freedman has received nothing but positive feedback from her clients and finds her work with Charm City Chuppahs very rewarding. "I receive great satisfaction when the bride's family comes in to see the chuppah for the first time and they are thrilled to death with the result," says Mrs. Freedman. "It is an overall pleasant experience for us and for the families."

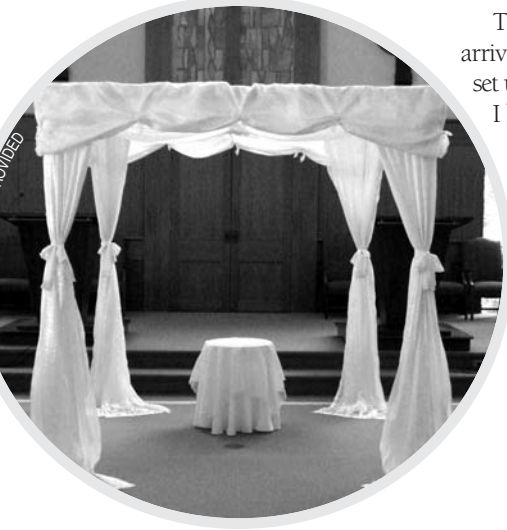
For information on Charm City Chuppahs, visit [bnaimitzvahguide.com/chuppah.htm](http://bnaimitzvahguide.com/chuppah.htm).

Jennifer Hale is the Events and Custom Media Coordinator at Alter Communications.



"I am a perfectionist. I have to make sure everything is tied and puddled evenly. It's my baby."

— Mona Freedman



Clockwise - A selection of Charm City Chuppahs

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# Orthodox Prenups

New laws protect brides-to-be.

### Gail Naron Chalew

Special to the Jewish Times  
When Rabbi Alan Yuter recommended that Leia Rosenberg and Joel Neft sign an Orthodox prenuptial agreement before their marriage this past August, Leia's initial reaction was negative.

"I didn't want to sign a document which in its first line talked about the marriage breaking up," recalls Leia, a pediatric speech pathologist.

"But Leia and I talked it over," says Joel, an English teacher at Shoshana S. Cardin School. "And we agreed that this document takes an archaic concept and allows it to function in the modern world."

"We signed it to make a stand, to help reduce the problem of *agunot*, chained women, who are unable to remarry because their husbands refuse to grant them a *get*," adds Leia.

For a divorce to be valid according to *halakha* (Jewish law), a husband must place a *get* (writ of divorce) in his wife's hands. If he refuses to do so the wife cannot remarry within Jewish law.

There have been many horror stories of vindictive husbands who have extorted large sums of money from their wives in return for the *get* or just plain refused to give one — forcing women either to remarry outside of the bounds of Jewish law or remain in limbo for the rest of their lives.

In response, Orthodox prenuptial agreements have been crafted to prevent *get-refusal* by imposing monetary penalties on the husband who refuses to grant his wife a Jewish divorce.

The recently revised prenuptial agreement of the Beth Din of America contains this language: "I hereby now obligate myself to support my Wife-to-Be from the date that our domestic residence together shall cease for whatever reasons, at the rate of \$150 per day . . . in lieu of my Jewish law obligation of support so long

as the two of us remain married according to Jewish law."

Rabbi Weissmann, director of the Beth Din of America, located in New York but which handles cases nationwide, notes that this prenuptial agreement, once notarized, becomes a legal document and is enforceable not only in rabbinic court but also in civil court.

"Although I don't have statistics, the anecdotal evidence is that the prenuptial agreements are very effective in reducing the number of *agunot*," explains Rabbi Weissmann.

"The process is going much smoother, as husbands are granting *gittin* [plural of *get*], rather than paying the substantial financial penalties. Once their lawyers read this agreement, which has been carefully crafted as a legal document, most recommend that the husbands grant the *get* rather than take it to court."

Rabbi Alan Yuter, of B'nai Israel Congregation, in downtown Baltimore, likens the prenuptial agreement to an insurance policy.

"It is a mechanism that works and, like insurance, it protects against worst-case scenarios," notes Rabbi Yuter. "I recommend that every couple I marry sign this agreement, get it notarized, and put it in their safety-deposit box."

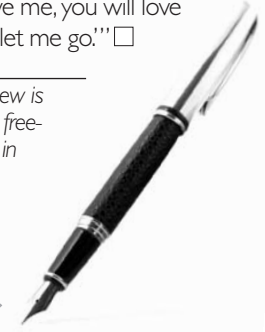
"I tell every young couple, who are all so very much in love, that signing this document is an expression of that love.

Adds Rabbi Yuter, "When couples sign this document, they are saying to each other, 'If you love me, you will love me enough to let me go.'" □

Gail Naron Chalew is a Baltimore-born freelance writer living in New Orleans.



Leia and Joel Neft in their engagement photo.



sign here

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