

FIELD NOTES

The Moneymooners: Registering for Cash, Not Dishes

By MARIANNE ROHRlich Published: August 26, 2011

WHILE wedding guests can scour registries and rattle their imaginations to come up with an ideal gift, what many a bride and bridegroom want most, particularly in these times, is perfectly simple — money.

Yet many couples feel squeamish or even crass about asking. Registering for dinnerware or bed linens somehow seems more refined, even if the couple already have enough pillowcases and salad forks.

Now, though, many alternative registries allow for giving or contributing toward experiences that a couple can share. They also offer ways for faint-hearted couples to sign up for cash.

James Therkalsen, 33, and Elizabeth Huber, 31, however, were not at all bashful before their June wedding in Rochester, Mich.

“We are thankful for any and all gifts, great and small,” they wrote on their Web site, which included links to a few registries. “We are also thankful that our friends and family can celebrate this day with us. We also accept checks and cold, hard cash.”

Melanca Clark, 36, and Moddie Turay, 34, of Washington, who plan to marry in Manhattan early next month, have a household complete with most of the things they need to be comfortable, so they resisted establishing an ordinary registry. They prefer money — for themselves and for others.

Most of the alternative sites give guests the opportunity to make a financial pledge toward things a couple might want. In the end, however, in many cases, the couple may spend the value of the gift any way they wish, even for rent rather than, say, a sky-diving trip. Many sites impose a user fee of 7 percent to 10 percent to either the giver or the recipient.

Being socially conscious, Ms. Clark and Mr. Turay say on their registry, which is a hybrid called myregistry.com, that 10 percent of the money they receive for their “honey fund” will be donated to a charity.

“It seemed ridiculous to ask for more things since we have a lot already,” Ms. Clark said. But for her older relatives who wanted to buy household items, they felt they should list some things like bamboo salad hands from Crate & Barrel. Myregistry.com allows for those types of more traditional gifts, which cannot be cashed out by the couple, as well as for guests to pledge money toward a honeymoon trip to India, which can be cashed out.

Ms. Clark said that her younger friends loved the idea of contributing to a trip that the couple would enjoy together.

Sara Margulis, a founder and the chief executive of honeyfund.com in San Francisco, said that her site is free, although there is a premium upgrade option of \$39 that enables registrants to personalize their page and add photos. She said the most unusual request registered on the site was for contributions for fertility treatments.

Even though the giver sends a check directly to the couple, she said: “Using honeyfund.com enables guests to print out a gift certificate to send with the check. This makes giving money seem more graceful.”

Peggy Post, the etiquette expert, said that giving money now has a wider appeal. “In a recession money is always welcome,” said Ms. Post, who writes a wedding-etiquette online advice column for The Times. However, she cautioned that couples be careful about how to request it. “Be sure to ask very graciously,” she said.

Darcy Miller, editorial director of Martha Stewart Weddings, said gift choices are generational. “Grandmothers still like giving something for the house like a serving platter, not dancing lessons,” she said. “And 10 years down the road those serving pieces that seemed useless in the beginning are nice to have. They are things you would never buy for yourself.” Her advice is a hybrid registry: some stuff, some cash.

With alternative registry sites springing up in recent years, couples can often select something that best suits them, cash or not. Foodierestry.com of Chicago, for example, offers meals in dozens of restaurants in Chicago, New York, San Francisco and Denver. Though it’s nearly as good as cash to the couple, the site is associated with the restaurants (not the couple); the giver prepays for the meal at a chosen restaurant.

At honeymoonwishes.com, couples can register for travel-related gifts. The check they receive, though, can be used for anything, not just travel. “Eighty-five percent of the couples that register with us use the money for the experiences they ask for,” said Kristin Stark, the company’s chief executive, citing company surveys. “Fifteen percent do not.”

The site newlywish.com offers direct payment for various experiences. It lists retailers as well as things like beauty treatments and fitness, all in New York City. Amanda Allen, one of the site’s owners, said that buying an experience for a couple is more popular in urban areas where people tend to marry later and set up a household before the wedding.

Lisa Kolodny, 33, and Seth Johnson, 32, of Brooklyn plan to marry in Mystic, Conn., in late October. “We basically have a lot of nice things in our Williamsburg apartment, and being in New York City we don’t have a lot of space for more dishes,” Ms. Kolodny said.

“We registered on foodierestry.com for some meals,” she added. But because they feel “very fortunate,” on the couple’s Web site they have asked friends to give money to their favorite charity, Movember, which raises money for men’s health issues, instead of to them.

While the alternative gift registries offer many possibilities, actually getting family and friends to use them is something else. Mr. Therkalsen and Ms. Huber, for instance, registered on honeyfund.com, asking for contributions — “We’re looking for deals but some rooms will be stupid expensive” — toward a trip to Bali. Although they did receive money directly from guests, Ms. Huber said they did not receive any cash gifts through the Web site.

A version of this article appeared in print on August 28, 2011, on page ST12 of the New York edition with the headline: The Moneymooners: Registering for Cash, Not Dishes.

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