

great estates

Private estates are Georgia's hottest wedding venue right now. But finding one of these unique spaces requires a little extra legwork. Here's what to look for. BY SIMONE HILL

1 character

The great thing about private estates is that they come with built-in style. Look for standout detail and historic references you can tie into your décor and theme. Built in a Greek-revival style overlooking the Ogeechee River, The Ford Plantation's Main House (FordPlantation.com) exudes an old-world elegance that will set just the right tone for a grand, formal affair. Give a nod to the original owner and one of the world's first billionaires, Henry Ford, by attaching miniature toy cars to your escort cards or favor tags.

2 stunning surroundings

Another selling point of these mansions turned venues is their picturesque properties, which boast acres of lawns, gardens and waterfront views. Little River Plantation (LittleRiverGA.com) offers a stunning backdrop of South Georgia's quail country, complete with a gazebo that looks out onto the lake. The estate is set on acres of lush hunting grounds, so there's plenty of space for guests to enjoy the scenery. Book the entire plantation for an intimate weekend celebration—the lodge sleeps 16 in rustic-chic comfort.

3 wow factor

Take a cue from the grand settings and arrange for an unforgettable ceremony entrance or reception exit that's just as dramatic as the venues themselves. At Gin Creek Plantation (GinCreek.com) in Hartsfield you can choose how you arrive in style—they have a horse-drawn carriage or vintage Rolls-Royce on deck. This 42-acre property has a lakeside gazebo, towering oaks and a staff that will help you pull out all the stops; they'll even make arrangements for the white dove release you've always dreamed of! >>

The Ford Plantation

At this estate, there's plenty of space for guests to spread out between the golf course and the gardens.



4 a variety of event spaces

With their multiple rooms and abundant land, grand estates can provide a range of diverse backdrops to fit every part of your day. At Hazlehurst House ([HazlehurstHouse.net](#)) in McDonough you can kick off your wedding by welcoming guests on the covered veranda, followed by an outdoor ceremony in front of the historic fireplace from the original house that stood on the property. There are also two formal ballrooms for both large and small events, so there's no need to look for another venue to hold the rehearsal dinner or postwedding brunch.

5 ample accommodations

Since many properties were once deluxe residences (and some still are), you might have the opportunity to rent out the entire venue for both your wedding and your wedding night. If you have out-of-towners who will need overnight lodging, Château Élan ([ChateauElan.com](#)) in North Georgia is a no-brainer. With 275 guest rooms at the on-site inn and plenty of activities including golf, tennis and wine tastings, it can accommodate your wedding party and your entire guest list for a fantastic wedding weekend.

6 full-service event amenities

Although private estates have plenty of pros, we'd be remiss if we didn't fill you in on a few of the drawbacks and, of course, provide you with solutions on how to get around them. To start, some residences and historic buildings may not be capable of handling a large-scale event without hauling in extra equipment. And renting fancy porta-potties and extra generators can quickly multiply your budget—and your to-do list. So find the stress-free option: Book a venue that comes wedding-ready, like Carl House ([CarlHouse.com](#)) in Auburn, which not only provides linen service, tables and chiavari chairs, but they also have their own on-site wedding director, floral designers, retro-style photo booth and chocolate fountain!



Château Élan

The vineyard here is an added perk, both for the local wine pairings and the ample photo opportunities.

7 adequate kitchen facilities

Add the kitchen to your list of things to inspect. Despite their size, some estates don't have enough space for the catering crew or the equipment necessary to serve a meal for 100-plus guests. While many caterers will provide their own equipment, understand the extra expense required before you sign on. To solve the problem, look for an estate like Little Gardens ([LittleGardens.com](#)) in Lilburn where the in-house caterers know the kitchen's capabilities well and will work hard to execute your dream menu flawlessly.

8 space for all your guests

Depending on the era when a home was built, the rooms may not be all that roomy. Once you add in tables, chairs and a stage for the band, you're not left with much space—and what about the dance floor?! That's why we love Glendalough Manor ([GlendaloughManor.com](#)) in Tyrone; the estate's formal ballroom can hold up to 450 people. So go big or go small with your list and rest assured that your guests will all feel comfy and accommodated.

9 easy access

Having tons of outdoor space is part of the draw of a private estate, but all that acreage requires, well, space, which often means an inconvenient location (read: getting there can be a challenge for your guests). Not only is Rhodes Hall ([RhodesHall.org](#)) centrally located on Peachtree Street in Atlanta's midtown neighborhood, but it's also near major thoroughfares I-75 and I-85, making it a short trip to the international airport.

10 a rain plan

Certain historic estates don't allow access to their interiors. Even if you plan on taking advantage of their grounds by hosting an outdoor event, you want to make sure there's an indoor option you love just as much. Roswell Founders Hall ([RoswellFoundersHall.com](#)) in Roswell has plenty—with a grand ballroom and covered pavilion—so you can enjoy amazing views of the gardens, rain or shine.

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