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JESSICA LUDWIG & MATT NICE *October 30, 2010*

One Enchanted Evening

An elegant setting and a smattering of gothic touches made for a dark and dreamy night-before-Halloween wedding.

| *By Amalie Drury* |
| *Photography by David Wittig Photography* |

Bride Jessica Ludwig's favorite memory from her fall wedding to Matt Nice was when the couple finished saying their vows and turned to face their intimate group of guests for the first time as husband and wife. Why, you ask? Because the moment, among the lush foliage in the courtyard at The Ivy Room, was a long time in the making.

The couple initially kept their romance a secret from their families (Ludwig's from Arlington Heights, Nice's from Vernon

Hills), thinking there would be trepidation because of a seven-year age difference and some preexisting ties between their siblings. After the cat was out of the bag, however, things progressed smoothly and naturally. There was the purchase of a much beloved yellow Lab, the move into a West Loop condo together, a whirlwind proposal trip to Paris and, after four years of dating, the culmination of it all on this candlelit night. "When we were finally able to look out at the

crowd and make eye contact with our friends and family, it felt so intimate. I'll never forget how happy I was right then," says Ludwig.

For a bride who had also served as her own wedding planner, part of the thrill in that moment came from a sense of relief that the event was actually going off exactly as hoped. Not a single heat lamp was needed in the outdoor space on that almost-Halloween night, which, unlike so many October 30ths in Chicago's meteorological history, was warm and clear.

The couple had chosen their wedding date for mostly circumstantial reasons. "People asked if Halloween was special to us, and it wasn't," says Ludwig. "But we loved the idea of a fall wedding, and that happened to be the night The Ivy Room had available. Now, it turns out, Halloween is our holiday."

After initially toying with the idea of making the wedding a formal costume party, Ludwig and Nice ditched that plan ("It was too hard trying to explain to everyone that they'd need to rent a real professional costume, not just throw something together at home," the bride explains) in favor of playing off the holiday in subtler ways.

Donna Albertson, director of marketing and special events at The Ivy Room, became an essential liaison in helping bring Ludwig's vision to life. "They wanted to do a nod to Halloween, but not go too harsh and black," says Albertson, who describes Ludwig as "urban, high-style and sophisticated, but with a down-to-earth warmth." She paired the couple with Renee Price at Kehoe Designs for flowers and décor, then turned to Rachel Schwanz at Entertaining Company for a fall-themed menu that included pumpkin brittle in the salads and a dessert table (in lieu of a cake) laden with plenty of trick-or-treat-worthy candy.

And because the couple—despite both being career-oriented consultants—are strongly drawn to the visual arts (another reason The Ivy Room was a good fit: it's part of River North's historic Tree Studios, where Chicago artists have had workshops for close to a century), Albertson recommended photographer David Wittig, who eschews the cookie-cutter documentation of nuptials in favor of a more creative approach.

With its garlands of black feathers, birdcage centerpieces on the dinner tables, and a bride in deep purple nail polish, a black sash and black shoes, the boldness of the Ludwig/Nice wedding set it apart from other Ivy Room celebrations, which often veer toward a lighter, organic look. "This one was really all the bride," Albertson says. "Every single minute had her stamp on it."

Ceremony/Reception: The Ivy Room
Catering/Dessert Table: Entertaining Company
Floral/Décor/Lighting: Kehoe Designs
Rentals: Tablescapes
Bride's Dress: Lela Rose from Ultimate Bride
Bridesmaids' Dresses: Vineyard for Priscilla of Boston from Bella Bridesmaid
Groom's Suit: Joseph Abboud
Invitations: Mok Duk by Anne Benjamin
Entertainment: DJ Stolie at Cage and Aquarium
Hair/Makeup: Solo Salon
Rings: Joel Singer
Transportation: Elite Chicago Limo
Rehearsal Dinner: The Parthenon



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From the bride's perspective, that stamp was all about creating an evening that would be not just beautiful, but fun for the wedding guests. "Unlike some brides and grooms, I guess, we really wanted our wedding to be about other people. We're both firm believers in the idea that we wouldn't be who we are without our friends and family. We wanted everyone to go home feeling like they'd had a truly great time." After celebrating 'til midnight (technically Halloween!), with caramel apple favors in hand, all 165 guests did just that. ■

Above, clockwise from top: A hydrangea and berry centerpiece by Kehoe Designs. The groom wore skull cuff links by Alexander McQueen. Matt's nieces, Barrett and Avery, served as flower girls. "Ball-and-chain" motif place cards by Mok Duk. Jessica and Matt's evening ceremony outside at The Ivy Room. Center: The couple photographed in the West Loop in front of a graffiti piece by British street artist Banksy.