



Tying the Urban Knot

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When Sarah Klein and Nathan Benjamin met at the Plaza Art Fair in 2006, sparks didn't exactly fly.

"I was having a girl's night out with my friends, and he was older, more settled," Klein says. "I didn't take much notice of him."

"She was definitely with her girlfriends that night. We never even spoke," Benjamin says.

A chance meeting four months later at the Starbucks at 40th and Main was much more satisfying. Both were studying: she for an actuary exam, he for his MBA. When Klein heard him talking at the next table about the Downtown Neighborhood Association (Benjamin was the DNA board's chair), she was immediately interested.

"I had just bought a condo in the Coffee Lofts downtown, and I turned around and butted into their conversation," Klein says, laughing at the memory. "We started talking about downtown and ended up talking for quite a while."

She went home that night and joined the DNA online, then went to the association's meeting the following Wednesday, joining Benjamin for a drink afterward. At brunch in the River Market's Succotash the following Sunday, the romance finally blossomed.

"We sat there and talked for three hours," Klein says. "After that, Nathan showed me all around downtown. He took me to all the hotspots like JP Wine Bar and Nara. It was such a nice change from dating a bunch of wild, bar-hopping guys."

Their mutual love of the urban core will be celebrated along with their nuptials in October. Friends and family from Oklahoma (on Klein's side) and Iowa (on Benjamin's side) will be treated to an urban core extravaganza with guided tours, a downtown slide show, and meals at downtown restaurants. The couple also used downtown vendors for their wedding whenever they could.

Take a look at the couple's roots, and you might wonder why they are so passionate about everything urban. Benjamin is from West Point, Iowa, a small town of 1,100. After graduating from KU, his work took him to Charlotte, N.C., and then Atlanta.

"Ever since I finished college, I've gravitated to the urban core in the cities I've lived in," says Benjamin, a senior project manager at McCownGordon Construction. "There's a central energy to it; there are so many things to do. I like to participate, and there's always something going on downtown."

Klein, a consulting actuary at Lockton, grew up in Tulsa, Okla., but wanted to live in a larger city. She arrived in Kansas City in 2004, and she quickly began to make friends and get involved in the community, which she found very welcoming. But she lived in the suburbs, first north of the river, then Overland Park.

"I wanted to be closer to the art galleries and unique restaurants that I loved, so I moved downtown," she says. "It just feels more alive to me. I'm close to everything and really like the sense of community downtown."

That sense of community and love of downtown will be celebrated with friends and family, starting with the accommodations. Guests will be staying at The Aladdin Hotel, where they'll find a pamphlet in their rooms titled "Nathan and Sarah's Top Ten Things to do Downtown."

"It's an old, historic hotel that's in the middle of everything," Klein says. "And since we got engaged at JP Wine Bar, that's where the rehearsal dinner will be held. We'll have a slideshow that night of photos of us in different spots all over downtown."

The engagement ring was purchased at Goodden Jewellers (downtown, of course), the florist is 18Flowers (in Black Bamboo at 18th and Wyandotte), and the groom's cake will be shaped like the Kansas City skyline. The invitations for the rehearsal dinner also sport a photo of downtown. On the day of the wedding, Klein and her bridesmaids will get hair, nails, and makeup done at Jeanne's Haircutting at 12th and Baltimore. Guests are also welcome to take a guided tour of the Boulevard Brewing Co., arranged by Benjamin.

"They book up so far in advance, and it's such a fun thing to do," he says. "Our family and friends are coming from smaller communities, and we wanted to show them what the city has to offer. We are giving them suggestions, though, not itineraries. I'm even including my favorite downtown spots to watch a football game in case someone wants to do that before the wedding."

The only non-downtown venue is the wedding itself, which will be at Colonial Presbyterian Church at 95th and Wornall.

"We had to find a church where our pastor could perform the ceremony on the date we had chosen," Klein says. "And we couldn't find anything closer. But right after the ceremony, we head back to the urban core with a reception at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, because we both love art."

"We love being downtown; we love using local vendors and restaurants. We don't like chains," Benjamin says. "We both work and live downtown; we met downtown, got engaged here. We want to support the revitalization of downtown, and it made sense to carry that through the wedding. We're both very excited about it." 

