



sacred heart cathedral

This special church has long been the 'heart' of Bendigo. Paul and Heidi Mennan reflect on their long walk down the aisle of the famous hilltop spectacle.

Words > Megan Spencer / Photography > Lisa Nankervis

Getting married is nerve-racking at the best of times. So imagine getting hitched in front of your nearest and dearest at quite possibly Australia's most impressive cathedral, Sacred Heart in Bendigo. At 1200 seats and 108 years old, it's the second-tallest church in Australia. Situated on the highest of hills it towers over all of Bendigo, its spire 87 metres high and a central aisle measuring 75 metres - half a footy field... Couldn't that just be a little bit daunting on the day?

"Yep!" says Paul Mulqueen with the conviction of a man who knows. Paul and partner Heidi married there on March 28. Grabbing a wine as we settle in for a chat about their big day he grins. "I was a bit crook that day anyway from nerves. But it was a long way to walk!" "The priest spent a bit of time with him outside calming him down," jokes Heidi affectionately. "But I got halfway down the aisle too and thought 'wow, I'm not even there yet!'" In the throes of finishing off their Spring Gully home, Paul and Heidi are an instantly likeable couple who share a ready sense of humour. They chose Sacred Heart because of its ties to Bendigo and family. "A few people in my family have been married there," explains Heidi, "And being Catholic it's the only place in town!" "Where else do you get married in Bendigo?" says Paul. "It's such a grand old church, and it did make it a bit more special, especially with the organ".

Not only did Sacred Heart's organist John Hogan carefully select the soundtrack to play on their big day, but friends Jon and Annabelle - also professional singers - sang in the Cathedral while the couple

signed the registry. "The atmosphere was amazing, they sang acoustically too," says Paul, reliving the moment. "*I'm Yours* by Jason Mraz," says Heidi, recalling the songs, "Then *Angels* by Robbie Williams". "It brought tears to my eyes," says Paul, "Annabelle has such a strong voice, it went right through the building." Decorating the pews with simple tulle bows, they handed out bottles of bubbles for guests to blow at the end, instead of throwing rice. Paul and his groomsmen wore chocolate brown pin-striped suits, "We decided to wear ties at the very last minute!" says Paul, with Heidi choosing an elegant ivory dress. "You looked awesome," nods Paul.

Heidi and Paul met in December 2005 "out on the town in Bendigo one night". Twelve months later Paul popped the question, coming as a "complete surprise" to Heidi. "Paul ran off and got a ring made. When he proposed, gosh it was funny - I didn't even look at the ring I was so surprised." They both start to laugh. "And he was like 'Look at the ring, look at the ring!'" She adds, "I just wanted to know how you could hide it from me so well..."

When it came to the ceremony both were adamant it be "short and sweet", something everyone could enjoy. Guests ranged from 4-89 in age, with 140 in attendance. Paul's sister, photographer Lisa Nankervis, made the most out of the iconic church backdrop, shooting B&W and colour stills throughout the day. "The light was so amazing inside the Cathedral," says Paul.

Paul's priest from primary school was invited to conduct the 45-minute ceremony. Father Vin Walsh came out of

retirement specially, proving a Godsend in more ways than one. "After the ceremony we realised that it was going to take forever to get out of the church" laughs Paul. "Everyone wanted to hug and congratulate us, and at one point I thought we were never going to get out!" Says Heidi, "If it wasn't for Father Vin saying 'push along, push along,' we'd still be there!" Relief from the formalities came in the form of the ultimate wedding limo: a 16-seater stretch Hummer. Driven from Shepparton for its first-ever Bendigo wedding, "It was a nightclub on wheels!" grins Paul, massively enthused. "The music was pumpin', there was champagne, it had a strobe light - it was just a disco!" The wedding parties travelled via Hummer before and after the ceremony, including the post-wedding photo shoots. "Initially I thought it was a bit over the top, but when I saw it I loved it," laughs Heidi. "It was awesome." Which sums up the nice symmetry of it all: big church, big Hummer, big day... ■

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