

A night wedding reception scene featuring palm trees, guests, and a long table with many lit lanterns. The scene is illuminated by warm, golden light from the lanterns, creating a romantic and elegant atmosphere. The background shows a dark sky with a full moon and the silhouettes of palm trees. The foreground is filled with guests in formal attire, some standing and talking, others seated at a long table. The table is set with numerous lit lanterns, and the overall mood is celebratory and intimate.

A YEAR TO REMEMBER

ABBY MCGREW weds ELI MANNING 4.19.08

BY JEFFREY BAUMAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEPHEN KARLISCH

Abby and Eli after
the ceremony,
on the beach at
the One & Only
Palmilla. *Opposite
page:* Guests
finding their seats
under a full moon.



In backyards across America, young boys have for decades grown up pretending to hit the home run that wins the World Series or throw the touchdown pass that wins the Super Bowl.

Many young girls—if they aren't dreaming of hitting that home run themselves—might fantasize about marrying their high school sweetheart, the captain of the football team.

It's rare that both wishes would dovetail so neatly and in so short a time span. But such is the nature of the charmed lives currently led by Eli Manning and Abby McGrew.

Eli, as you may have heard, is the twenty-seven-year-old quarterback of the New York Giants, who happened to pull off one of the great upsets in sports history this past February: he led his team to a Super Bowl victory over the previously undefeated New England Patriots, throwing a touchdown to win the championship in the waning seconds of the game. Less than three months later, he was on a beach in Mexico, marrying his college sweetheart.

"It was a good start to 2008," Eli says, showing off his gift for understatement. "I don't think I could have drawn it up any better."

Both are children of the Deep South. Abby, now twenty-five, grew up in Nashville, and Eli, the youngest son of former NFL quarterback Archie Manning, is a New Orleans native. The couple met at the University of Mississippi, at a gathering of his fraternity and her sorority in the spring of 2002, when Eli was a junior and Abby was a freshman. They began dating that fall, and the relationship steadily grew more serious. But graduation—and the uncertainty of the NFL Draft—loomed for Eli. Abby, a fashion-merchandising major, had already lined up a summer internship in New York and was keeping her fingers crossed as the draft approached in April 2004.

"I knew there was a chance he could be drafted by New York," she recalls, referring to the Giants, who held the fourth pick that year. Instead, Eli was chosen first by the San Diego Chargers, and "my heart dropped," Abby says. (Any football fan will recall the infamous frown Eli wore upon his selection by San Diego.) "Then all of a sudden he was traded, and I went from a complete low to the highest of highs."

After that summer together, Abby went back to Ole Miss, and the couple carried on a long-distance relationship between New York and Oxford, Mississippi. Once Abby graduated and moved to Manhattan to work for the designer Pamela Roland, an engagement ring was not too far behind.

The proposal, according to Eli, is "a funny story—funny for me, but not so much for her." The couple traveled to Italy in March 2007; Eli was planning to propose there, but he "did not quite get the ring in time." The idea of having it shipped to their hotel in Florence made him nervous, so he decided to wait until they returned.

"When it didn't happen, that plane ride home was a *long* one," Abby says, good-naturedly. "What's a better place than Italy to get engaged?"

Eli intended to wait three weeks, until Easter, when he and Abby would be visiting Nashville. "But once I had that ring in my possession, it was burning a hole in my pocket," he admits. "I was worried she might find it; she was snooping around." So on a Tuesday night, on the couch in his high-rise in Hoboken, New Jersey—while they were watching a rerun of *Friends*—Eli popped the question.

"I had planned for it to be romantic, but it turned into something easy and unassuming, kind of the way I am sometimes," says Eli, who is well-known for his laid-back demeanor.

"It was *so* Eli," Abby concurs.

Both of Eli's older brothers had gone all out with big Southern weddings: Cooper in New Orleans, and Peyton, the quarterback of the Indianapolis Colts, in Memphis. So the couple opted for something smaller and more intimate, eventually settling on the One & Only Palmilla resort, in San José del Cabo, Mexico. Seventy-two people attended, just family and close friends, including two of Eli's teammates, offensive linemen David Diehl and Shaun O'Hara. The ceremony was set for an hour before sunset on April 19.

"It was an unbelievably perfect day," Abby says. "When you're little and you imagine what you want your wedding to look like—it was *that*. Getting married on the beach was always a dream of mine. I also wanted a tall husband—and I got one." (Eli is six foot four to Abby's five foot nine.)

Following the ceremony, dinner was served at one long table at the water's edge. Then the real party began, with dancing until 2 A.M. "Everyone knew the words to every single song," Abby says. "I'm not a dancer at all, but I got over my fear." The throwing of the bouquet—an event that could draw much scrutiny when you're marrying into a family of quarterbacks—came off without a hitch.

"There were no surprises; everything went as smoothly as possible," Eli says. "If I could do it over again, I'd do it the exact same way. I wouldn't change a thing."

After his whirlwind year, which included the requisite trips to the White House and Disneyland, Eli is well aware that 2008 will be a hard act to follow. "I'm just going to try to enjoy the new season and enjoy being married," he says. "A wedding is an exciting time, but being married is also exciting, and that's what we're looking forward to."

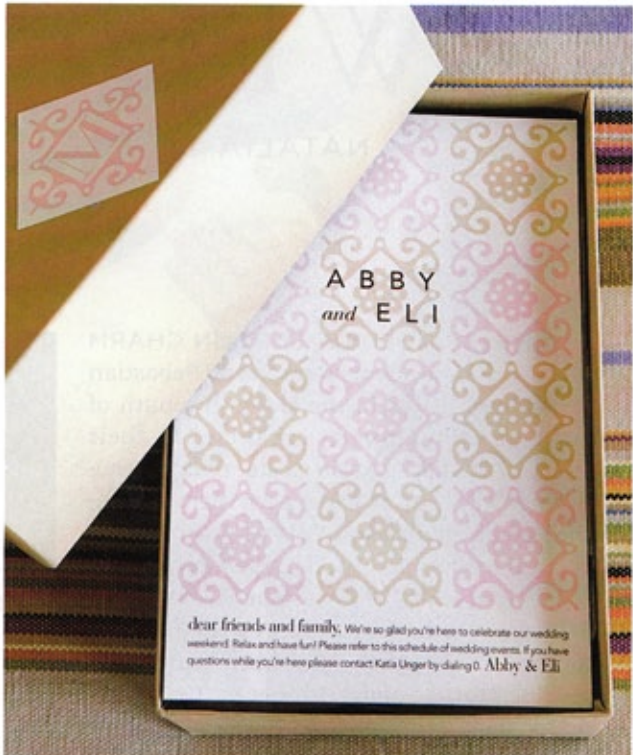
Spoken like someone who's been planning it since he was a kid.



Clockwise from top left: Eli with his brother Peyton (at left), James Montgomery (second from left) and other groomsmen; the waterside table setting; Abby walking down the aisle with her father, Tom McGrew; the Van Cleef & Arpels earrings Abby wore.



Abby and Eli under the canopy during the ceremony. *Opposite page, from left:* Eli's parents, Archie and Olivia Manning; the couple's welcome card, featuring the pattern of a Palmilla tile, a recurring motif in their stationery.



The Details

THE PARTY PLANNER

Sara Fay Egan of Dallas-based TODD EVENT DESIGN CREATIVE SERVICES (214-749-0400; toddevents.com)—her husband and Eli grew up together in New Orleans—found the location, the ONE & ONLY PALMILLA (866-829-2977; oneandonlyresorts.com), and made all the arrangements.

THE INVITATIONS

The simple cards by PARADISE DESIGN CO. (972-234-3722; paradisedesignco.com) established the color theme of champagne and pale pink.

THE JEWELRY

Abby's engagement ring, a platinum-set, emerald-cut center diamond with a smaller emerald-cut diamond on each side, is from ADLER'S (800-925-7912; adlersjewelry.com), a

renowned New Orleans jeweler where Eli's mother, Olivia, buys her jewelry. For the wedding, VAN CLEEF & ARPELS (vancleefarpels.com) loaned Abby a pair of couture 18-karat-white-gold, 4.5-carat diamond chandelier drop earrings. "I don't have them anymore, but I'm working on that," she says.

WHAT THE BRIDE WORE

Abby's mother, Susan, helped her select a strapless MONIQUE LHUILLIER gown (moniquelhuillier.com), which featured reembroidered silk Alençon lace with a champagne underlay and a white silk sash tied in back.

WHAT THE BRIDAL PARTY WORE

The six bridesmaids, including Abby's two sisters, wore BADGLEY MISCHKA dresses (badgleymischka.com) in

champagne; the seven groomsmen, Eli's brothers among them, wore khaki linen suits by ERMENEGILDO ZEGNA (zegna.com).

HAIR AND MAKEUP

Egan introduced Abby to Dallas stylist L. B. ROSSER of the Kim Dawson Agency (214-638-2414; kimdawsonagency.com), and the two hit it off right away.

THE FOOD

The Palmilla prepared the lavish five-course dinner, which included stone-crab salad with avocado, fillet of beef in a poblano-pepper sauce and a chocolate truffle alongside a *dulce de leche* bombe.

THE CAKE

"Eli likes white cake and I like chocolate cake," Abby explains. As a compromise, the resort's pastry chefs baked theirs

with four alternating layers. Also made by the chefs, as a surprise for Eli, were chocolate replicas of the Giants' Super Bowl rings, one for each guest.

THE MUSIC

PARTY ON THE MOON (770-262-1060; partyonthemoon.com), an Atlanta-based band, played everything from Elton John's "Your Song," for the couple's first dance, through "Last Dance."

THE HONEYMOON

After months of planning, Abby and Eli had one rule for their honeymoon: "We didn't want to get on another plane," she says. To that end, the couple spent six nights at LAS VENTANAS AL PARAÍSO (888-767-3966; lasventanas.com), just down the road in San José del Cabo. "It was completely relaxing."