

Planning Your Dream Wedding

Just about every woman daydreams about her own version of the ideal wedding. Here's how a little planning can help you and your partner make those dreams a reality on your wedding day.

By Lisa Arcella

The first step in having a wonderful wedding, advises bridal expert Tony Conway, is to indulge your daydreams. It's important for you to find out, if you could have it all, what that would be.

It's really about individual tastes. "Ten years ago there was a formula," says Conway. "Today, that's definitely not the case." Some brides and grooms are looking for a "wow" factor, like a fireworks display or live entertainment; others would prefer to marry quietly in a garden, arriving in a horse-drawn carriage.

Once you've determined your individual style, you and your partner should sit down with both sets of parents and anyone else you need to consult and begin to establish a wish list. Once you have everyone's ideas down on paper, you can begin to set priorities. Being honest about what you're willing to spend will help you make smart choices. Being organized keeps costs down by keeping surprises and mistakes to a minimum.

Once you've got a plan and a pretty good idea of how many guests you'll invite, it's time to research, research, research. That guest list will allow you to realistically compare prices for reception locations, food and drink, wedding cakes and more. And knowing the size of your wedding party will give you important information, too, such as how many cars you might need and how many attendant gifts you will be giving. Here's where your wedding really begins to take shape—and where you can scale back without it being obvious, including reducing the number of guests.

If it comes, for instance, to choosing between lavish flowers or a good photographer, think of carrying a single rose or calla lily and devoting that part of your budget to great photos that

will provide memories for years to come. If you can't afford the dress of your dreams, consider hiring a hairstylist and makeup artist for your wedding day so you are guaranteed to look beautiful in any dress you choose.

Remember, on your big day, tradeoffs like those don't show. Your guests only know that you've taken care to plan a wedding that expresses your style and makes them feel welcome.

TO KEEP YOURSELF ON TRACK:

The first thing you will need to do is book the site for the ceremony. If it is a house of worship, be sure that photography is permitted. Consult your guest list. Will you be having out-of-town guests? Keep their budgets in mind by looking into special group rates often offered by hotels for weddings. Make the arrangements and send the pertinent information out with your invitations.

As you make your plans, sample wedding cakes, insist on tasting foods that you may want to serve and ask for recommendations for photographers, videographers and musicians or djs. In short, know what you're getting.

Three months before, arrange for fittings, book your honeymoon, choose and book all your vendors (florist, music, limousines). Purchase accessories, shoes, veil and attendants' gifts.

Two weeks before, draw up a seating plan, confirm the number of guests with your reception venue, finalize rehearsal



plans, confirm your arrangements with all vendors and give your photographer a list of "must have" wedding shots.

The most important element in creating the perfect day? "Harmony," says Conway. He advises that you listen to what everyone wants and save some areas for compromise. "It's important to make parents happy, too. The main thing is to plan a beautiful event that you will remember for the rest of your lives."

How to Cut Wedding Costs

These seven tips can help you save money without compromising style.

- 1 The same wedding at a different time (afternoon vs. evening) or on a different day (during the week, instead of on the weekend) can cost considerably less.
- 2 An elegant afternoon reception with champagne, hors d'oeuvres and wedding cake is a lovely alternative to a sit-down dinner.
- 3 Instead of ordering costly floral arrangements consider having floating candles in clear glass bowls as centrepieces on each table.
- 4 For invitations, thermography can replicate the look of engraved invites at only about half the price. And, making your own photo thank-you cards will save even more.
- 5 To keep wedding cake costs at bay, order a simple tiered cake and decorate it with fresh flowers instead of paying for elaborate bakery decorations.
- 6 Create your own wedding music and save the cost of musicians or a dj. If you or your partner are up to the creative challenge, burn your own CDs of your favourite tunes. Just be sure to check the sound system in your reception locale to be sure it's up to your standards.
- 7 To save on the cost of photos, hire a photographer to handle just your ceremony and other necessary family shots. Place disposable cameras on all your tables, have guests photograph one another and place all the cameras in a basket when they're done. It's inexpensive and a great icebreaker. Plus, you'll get to see what everyone was really up to as the day rushed by.

Great Ways to Say THANKS

Amidst all the planning, you'll want to find a special way to express your gratitude to friends and family members who play a role in your wedding. This list can help you decide who to thank and how best to do it.

MOTHER

Brooch, or a pin
Flowering bulbs or orchid plant in a pretty pot
Basket of foods or bath items
Champagne flutes

MAID OF HONOR

Jewellery box
Pearls
Earrings
Chain or bangle bracelet

BEST MAN

Leather billfold
Attache case with monogram
Key chain
Desk or travel clock

BRIDESMAIDS

First-initial pendants with chains
Spa gift set
Pearl pendant necklaces
Heart charm bracelets

USHERS

Basket with wine, glasses and opener
Key ring
Cuff links
Silver plate business card holder

FLOWER GIRLS

Baskets of treats (sweets, wearables)
Earrings
Pendant necklaces
Special toy or doll

RING BEARER AND YOUNG USHERS

Surprise basket (toys, sweets, hats)
Special toy

WEDDING PLANNER

Decorative bowl
Basket of desserts
...and last, but not least,

GIFTS FOR YOUR PARTNER

Good ballpoint or fountain pen
Wrist or pocket watch
An inscribed book of poems
The ultimate gadget for a favourite sport or hobby