

Bridal Guide

Spring 2023

Photography Tips

Page 2

Build a wedding budget

Page 10

**Find the right wedding
reception venue**

Page 16

\$1



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Star Journal

Preserving wedding memories

Local photographer offers tips for the big day

By Meliyah Venerable

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Wedding photographs are one of the longest-lasting memories of a wedding day. That is why it is important to book the right photographer, ensuring the photos from your big day are perfect, the day runs smoothly and you have something to look back on in the future.

Warrensburg photographer Jennifer McCall of Jennifer Tru Photography has been doing wedding photography since 2012.

When it comes to hiring a wedding photographer, McCall recommends starting with the credibility of the photographer. She said to ask the hard questions. Ask to see other weddings they have photographed.

“Credibility, that is a definite must,” McCall said. “They need to look through an

entire wedding day... Ask the hard questions. Ask the questions even if you don't really know the answers to them. Like what kind of gear they are using. How are they going to make sure certain moments are captured? There's so much to look for and ask about.”

She emphasized the importance of knowing your photographer and building a friendship before the wedding day.

“Communication is a good key,” McCall said. “My honest opinion, I think your photographer needs to be your friend. It needs to be somebody you're comfortable with and you start that relationship by booking them and getting to know them and hopefully, they're open to that... I need to know what you like, I need to know what you're into.”

McCall said booking a photographer should be the second thing done when plan-

ning a wedding. First should be securing the venue so a date is set in stone. That will ensure a photographer can save the date.

Some wedding photographers, like McCall, will help to make the day a little smoother by reaching out to the other vendors that will be at the wedding, such as the DJ, caterers and possible hairstylist and makeup artists. McCall said she likes to reach out to everyone and set a schedule, so everyone will know who is where at certain times throughout the day.

“I think as a photographer, you have to be able to create a timeline because there are certain shots that you want for your portfolio,” McCall said. “Not only to give a couple what they want, but you want to be able to have a little creativity time too. You know, try a new shot out, try a new pose out, try a new lighting or technique. And so you need a timeline that's going to allow

you the time to do that because it's a timeline and you can get the shots you want.”

McCall also recommends having a trial run for makeup and hair at least a month before the wedding. Take a few photos of everything, so there will be reference pictures on the wedding day.

When planning a schedule, be sure to allow 50% of the day to be dedicated to hair and makeup because it tends to take the longest. McCall suggests wearing more makeup than the bride usually wears and be sure to wear waterproof mascara because there will be tears.

McCall said she thinks traditional portraits are a must. They are the pictures that will be hung around the house or displayed for grandchildren and great-grandchildren to see in the future.

The photos of the dress and accessories are some of McCall's favorites to take.



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This photo by Jennifer Tru Photography features the ring set from the bride and groom. PHOTO COURTESY OF JENNIFER MCCALL

Often photographers are booked for a certain period of time. McCall said a 10-hour time slot would ensure you get your day photographed from start to finish, so there will be photos of more than just the ceremony. Pictures of the bridal party getting ready can be as memorable as traditional portraits.

Photos from the entire day will hold a special place, so it is essential to capture those moments.

“Have that Christmas card photo where they’re both looking at the camera smiling,” McCall said. “You know they’re happy. Personally, I think every couple must absolutely have all the traditional shots. Because those are the shots that are going to last a lifetime. Kids are going to see their parents smiling in their wedding photos. So it’s I think it’s highly important to get all your essential shots. Like the couple, looking at all the details, the flowers, the rings, the cake.”

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A bride and groom kiss as wedding attendees light the way with sparklers. PHOTO COURTESY OF JENNIFER MCCALL

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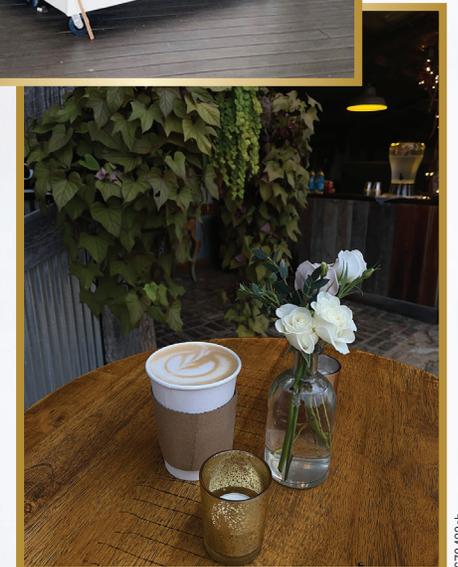
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Growing popularity of alternative stone engagement rings

By Skye Melcher
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Over the last few years, a new engagement trend has made its way to the mainstream and has influenced young couples worldwide.

The continuous rise in prices and the desire to find an alternative to diamond engagement rings have led people to seek new options.

Ryan Reed, an owner of Reed & Sons Jewelers in Sedalia, said the store has seen an increase in couples requesting alternatives to diamond rings since about 2015.

“We’ve made several that have had alternative stones in it and we’ve also just pieced them together,” Reed said. “We’ve just taken a bridal mounting and put in a colored stone as opposed to putting in a diamond.”

Reed said the popularity of wanting colored stones is a trend and in the jew-

eler business, there are a lot of trends; either they disappear quickly or last for a long time.

“For instance, there was a really quick micro-trend that was troublesome with opals in an engagement ring,” Reed added. “That was a real struggle for people to get past that because an opal is not really a good stone to put in an engagement ring. They’re not hard, they’re not stable and they break.”

People typically wear engagement rings daily, so customers should speak with a jeweler about what type of alternative stones would be suitable for an engagement ring.

“There is a world of gemstones out there that would look beautiful, but they may not be practical,” he said.

Jewelers are seeing customers wanting to get away from natural diamonds because they tend to be more costly or they want to mix things up.

“A lab-grown diamond is very huge. We

look at it as an alternative to diamonds just because it’s not the traditional natural diamond,” Reed added. “They’re far less expensive and I think their value will continue to decline. They were much more expensive a couple of years ago and now they’ve really come down.”

Natural diamonds hold their value much better than lab-grown diamonds, but lab-grown can come in different colors.

“But sapphire is going to be your number one (alternative),” he said. “Well, sapphire should be your number one next to diamonds just because it’s the next hardest and the most stable and it comes in every color of the rainbow.”

Gemstones are judged on the Mohs Scale of Hardness; a stone will rank from one to 10. To be put into perspective, a fingernail is 2.5 and a diamond is 10.

“A 10 is deceptive because a 10 is much, much harder than a nine and, of course, a diamond, being the hardest substance on Earth, has that. A sapphire is about a nine, nine and a half; so would be moissanite. Another popular one would be morganite and it’s a light pink stone and I believe those are about an eight and a half on the Mohs scale.”

A moissanite stone has risen in popu-

larity in the past few years because it is the most cost-effective colorless stone.

“It’s a really good option,” Reed added.

The store’s employees have had a lot of off-the-wall requests for alternative stones, especially when customers are only looking at Pinterest. So, they have to explain that customers really need to think about it if they shop outside of diamonds.

“Not all stones are worthy of jewelry and, certainly, not all stones are worthy of being an engagement ring,” he continued. “There are so many beautiful stones that are out there that never make it to jewelry because they’re not stable.”

Another trend the store sees is people looking for colored diamonds like salt-and-pepper diamonds.

Even with a large number of trends, Reed sees diamonds remaining popular. He said he enjoys seeing the new trends that pop up throughout the years but continued to say that diamonds will still be the best.

“It’s timeless, it’s what everybody associates with engagement rings,” Reed said. “In what form they may be in, I don’t know.”

Skye Melcher can be reach at 660-530-0144.

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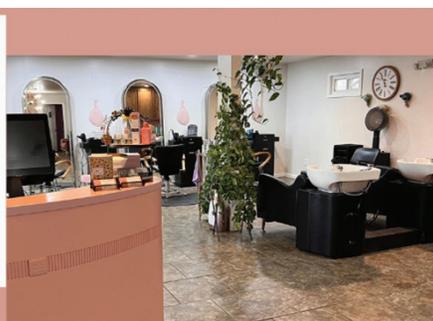
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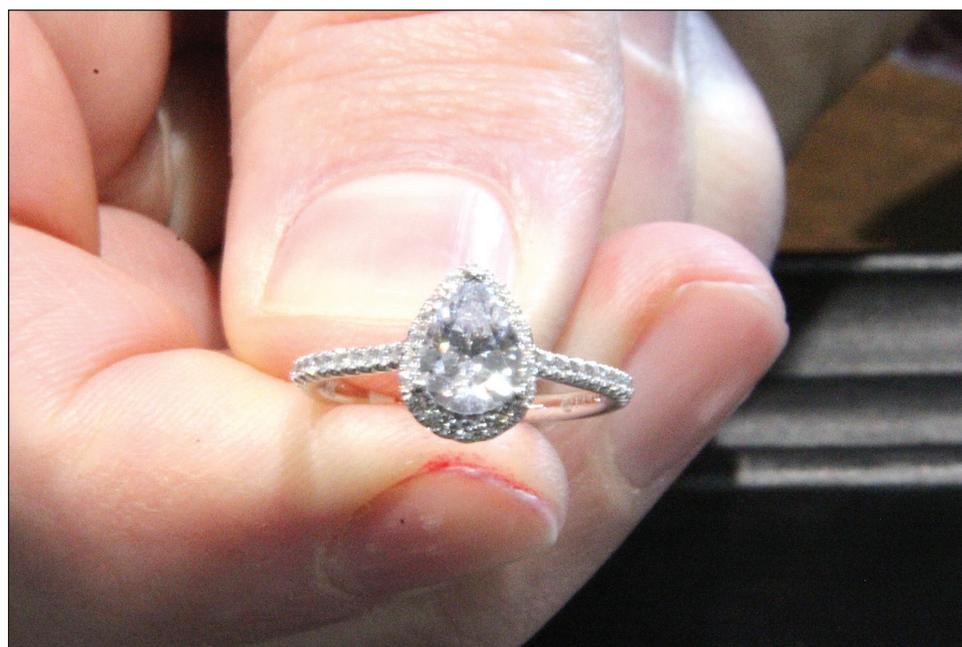
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In this ring, smaller diamonds surround the pear-shaped diamond in a silver setting.
PHOTO BY SKYE MELCHER | DEMOCRAT



This large oval blue sapphire ring, available at Reed & Sons Jewelers in Sedalia, features a halo of diamonds in a gold setting. PHOTO BY SKYE MELCHER | DEMOCRAT



Shoppers considering alternative jewelry options might select a piece from this trio of engagement rings available at Reed & Sons Jewelers in Sedalia. Two have colored gemstones and one features a diamond. PHOTO BY SKYE MELCHER | DEMOCRAT

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How to tame wedding-related jitters

Nerves are to be expected when getting married. It is exciting to be engaged and realize you have met that special someone with whom you want to share the rest of your life. But anxiety may creep in as the big day draws closer.

A lot of planning goes into a wedding, and often the pressure that comes with trying to create the perfect day can overshadow feelings of love and excitement. That is when wedding jitters may crop up. Couples must recognize they're not alone if they feel a little uneasy as their wedding day draws closer. However, there are ways you can address and tame jitters both before and during the wedding.

Step away from wedding-related tasks



Chances are you have spent months with the wedding on your brain. In fact, it likely has consumed your daily life. Take a day or two to do something unrelated to the wedding, whether you're alone, with friends or with your future spouse. Attend a fun event, go out to dinner, queue up several movies for a night in, or take a

small trip. Keep wedding details out of the picture while you're enjoying yourself.

Forget about being perfect

Wedding jitters often stem from being nervous about everything going to plan. You may put undue pressure on yourself to ensure everything is perfect. But perfec-

tion is impossible, and the sooner you accept that a thing or two will likely not work out, the less stressed you may feel. You'll be surrounded by family and friends who will help you roll with the punches, whether that's a torn hemline or a missing buffet item. Guests are here to celebrate you, not pass judgment.

Discuss large changes to come

Some couples feel jittery because they haven't spoken about all of the changes ahead. These can include relocation, merging of finances and whether or not children are in your future, among other things. Stress can be tamed if you take a break from wedding planning and discuss these important topics.

Learn relaxation techniques

Learning to relax is important when dealing with anxiety. There are many different relaxation techniques to explore. Some include meditation, yoga, deep-tissue massage, exercise, or immersing yourself in a peaceful spot outdoors. Some people turn to reading or other hobbies to relax. Do not look to alcohol or medication as an outlet to alleviate stress.

Talk to someone

If anxiety about the wedding is eating you up, consider speaking with a professional therapist or even a close friend or family member. Sometimes a new perspective is all you need to calm the jitters.

Nervousness when planning a wedding is understandable. However, couples can take steps to tame jitters so they enjoy all that goes into tying the knot.

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Teacher makes plans for October wedding

Family helps with perfect advice

By Chris Howell

chrish@sedaliademocrat.com

School teacher Morgann Gregory is set to marry Austin Fine on Oct. 21, 2023.

"He's a captain in the army stationed at Fort Hood, Texas," Gregory said. "We're doing long distance right now and then as it gets closer to the wedding, I'll start moving my stuff to Texas to take on wherever the military sends us next."

After Fine proposed, Gregory suddenly had to make a lengthy to-do list.

"Once we got engaged, the list was the big things first," she said. "The venue, the reception, DJ or band, caterer, photographer, all of the big stuff. So that was easy, pretty easy, to get because it's bigger stuff and then it was the little stuff afterwards."

Gregory wasn't employing a wedding planner, as her siblings had her back on

this one.

"I'm one of four girls and the last sister to get married," Gregory said. "So I have lots of advice from my sisters and my mom."

It's sometimes hard to manage the guest list, especially when considering your fiancée's wishes as well.

"It started as a smaller wedding, and then my fiancé had a lot of military friends he wanted to include," Gregory laughed, "so then the wedding party got a little bit larger."

That's when Gregory remembered her family's number one bit of advice when planning her wedding.

"Stick to what you want. It's your special day, don't get sucked into all of the details," Gregory said. "At the end of the day, it is about you two and your love."

Gregory was with her parents in Columbia when she easily found the perfect wedding dress at Bree's Bridal.

"I stopped one afternoon with both my parents," Gregory said. "I'd had a doctor's appointment and we went in just to look and kind of figure out what I liked and what I didn't like. It was the first dress I put on."

With the gown picked out, the Gregory family moved on to the floral arrangements for the October nuptials.

"Flowers, we are starting to focus and work on," Gregory said. "Since it's in the fall, we're going to do a lot of fall flowers. A lot of mums and pumpkins and so kind of starting to nail down exactly what we want with that. A lot of rust, pumpkin, some gold, hunter green, just those rich fall colors."

The event will be held at the First United Methodist Church Celebration Center in Sedalia, where Gregory attends church. The couple will then have a reception on the Missouri State Fairgrounds at the Co-op building.

Gregory offers this bit of personal advice to brides feeling the pressure of that impending date.

"Make a running list and then have somebody who truly understands your vision and what you want," Gregory said. "That way, they can bring you back into focus when you start getting overwhelmed."

Getting many of the bigger details off her checklist early has freed up Gregory to concentrate on her job, the smaller items, and preparing for her adventure traveling the world with Capt. Fine.

"It's a great feeling," Gregory sighed. "As a teacher, stuff can be really overwhelming, especially trying to plan a wedding and teach right now. So, as I get stuff marked off, it's one less thing to worry about and it means we're also getting closer to that day, which is really exciting."

Chris Howell can be reached at 660-530-0146.



Morgann Gregory had help from her mom and sisters in planning her October wedding. Sticking to your family, friends and what you want as a couple is key to a wonderful wedding, according to Gregory. PHOTO BY CHRIS HOWELL | DEMOCRAT

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Responsibilities of various members of a wedding party

Participating in a wedding party is an honor. Couples invite many people to their weddings, and the select few asked to be in the party are typically those individuals with whom the couples share a strong and special bond.

The role of the wedding party is not merely symbolic. Though it's up to the happy couple to determine how involved they want their wedding party to be, individuals asked to be in the party should know that their acceptance of these roles carries with it a certain level of responsibility.

Maid of Honor

The maid of honor may bear the most responsibility of any wedding party member. Maids of honor typically help with the planning of the wedding, offering advice and opinions on everything from the bride's gown to the bridesmaid dresses and anything

else a couple might need help with. If the bride asks, the maid of honor may be asked to organize dress fittings and attend them as well. A maid of honor typically plays an active, and often the lead, role in planning the bachelorette party. Come the day of the wedding, the maid of honor helps the bride prepare and may organize the bridesmaids to ensure everyone stays on schedule. A maid of honor typically toasts the happy couple during the reception as well.

Best Man

Like the maid of honor, the best man has some extra responsibilities before the wedding and during the festivities. A best man may organize tux fittings, plan the bachelor party, help make arrangements if the groom requests help, and be asked to hold the rings on the day of the ceremony. A best man

toast is common during the reception, and some grooms ask their best men to distribute tips to vendors at the end of the night.

Bridesmaids

Bridesmaids often help the maid of honor plan the bachelorette party, and they also help to organize the bridal shower if the bride chooses to have one. Bridesmaids can offer input on wedding planning, particularly if they're already married, though that is not necessarily required. Bridesmaids also can help relieve stress on the bride by being as agreeable as possible when scheduling dress fittings.

Groomsmen

Groomsmen help to plan the bachelor party and may be asked to provide some support prior to the ceremony. For example, on the day of the wedding, groomsmen may be asked to show guests, particularly elderly friends and family of the couple, to their seats. Like their bridesmaid counterparts, groomsmen can be especially helpful by doing what's asked of them without resistance. Arriving on time to tuxedo fittings and offering insight when they think it might help are some simple ways groomsmen can pitch in.

Flower Girl/Ring Bearer

Often reserved for children, the roles of flower girls and ring bearers only require some simple participation during the ceremony. Flower girls drop petals as they precede down the aisle ahead of the wedding party, while the ring bearer carries the ring down the aisle. If these roles will be filled by especially young children, couples may choose to have them walk down the aisle together.

Parents of the couple

Parents of the bride and groom typically play supportive roles but may be asked to give speeches during the rehearsal dinner or the reception. The father of the bride typically walks her down the aisle, while the mother will likely spend the day of the ceremony at the bride's side as they get ready. Parents of the groom do not have any traditional responsibilities, though the groom and his mother customarily share a mother/son dance during the reception.

Couples need not feel compelled to assign bridal party members these duties if they don't feel comfortable doing so. However, sharing some of the responsibilities of wedding planning can help couples enjoy the process more and keep party members engaged.

Did you know?

Getting engaged is an exciting moment in the lives of a couple. One might think that excitement would lead to couples hurrying their way down the aisle to tie the knot, but studies have shown that couples spend a significant amount of time between getting engaged and saying, "I do."

According to The Knot 2021 Real Weddings Study, the average engagement length among couples in the United States is 16 months. Though those figures are likely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which undoubtedly contributed to longer engagements as couples waited to get married until large gatherings were deemed safe, it's worth noting that lengthy engagements are not specifically a COVID-related phenomenon. In fact, The Knot reports that the average length of engagement in 2019 was 14 months.

Taking more time to get to know one another also seems to be a popular approach among modern couples, as The Knot Jewelry and Engagement Study found that three-quarters of all couples who wed in 2021 had dated for two or more years prior to getting engaged.



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How to build a wedding budget without breaking the bank

Wedding planning is a unique experience unlike any endeavor most couples will ever encounter. Much effort goes into planning a wedding, and that includes building a budget that ensures the big day will be fun without breaking the bank.

Most couples planning a wedding have never tied the knot before, so it can be difficult to determine a reasonable amount to spend. It's easy to go overboard when planning a wedding, and couples may find their list of wants and, consequently, their expenses, growing as they get into the weeds of wedding planning. Though it might require some difficult decisions, couples can keep these tips in mind so they can build a wedding budget that won't land them in debt after saying, "I do."

- Determine funding. The days when a bride's parents would finance the wedding entirely on their own are largely a thing of the past. According



to a recent WeddingWire Newlywed Report, parents now pay for 52% of wedding expenses. As couples begin

establishing a wedding budget, it's imperative that they first determine who, if anyone, will be helping them finance the big day. Fifty-two percent of wedding expenses is a significant amount of money, but in that scenario, couples will still need to come up with roughly half of the money needed to fund their weddings. Couples without substantial savings may be forced to cut back in order to avoid beginning their life as a married couple in debt.

- Make a list of potential expenses. Location will be a significant factor when determining potential expenses. For example, a 2022 ValuePenguin analysis of data from The Wedding Report found that the average wedding in Massachusetts cost roughly \$30,500 in 2020, while couples tying the knot in Arkansas spent around \$12,500 on their weddings. With such wild fluctuations, it's important that couples get an accurate estimate of how much it may cost them to get married in a given city. Couples who met in a city and still live in a city but grew up in a suburb might save a considerable sum by getting married in their hometowns. Compare and contrast prices in locales you're considering, and then build your budget accordingly. This can help you avoid sticker shock and going over

budget. Notable expenses to budget include the venue, attire (i.e., wedding dress and tuxedo rental), hairstyle and makeup, entertainment, photography, and transportation, among others.

- Make a list of what's most important. Most couples will have to compromise in order to avoid taking on debt to finance their weddings. An earnest discussion about what's most important to each person can ensure you both get what you want. Each person can make a list of their priorities, ranking them from most important to least important. Once lists are shared, couples can see where their priorities converge and where they diverge. Any items that rank low on each person's list of priorities can be afforded less funding, while those that are high on each list can take up more of the budget, if necessary.

- Commit to a limit before spending a dime. Committing to a limit before spending a dime can help couples keep wedding costs more manageable. Once that number is defined, couples can then work within its parameters, which can make potentially difficult decisions a little easier by narrowing options at a time when options can seem endless.

A well-planned budget can be just what couples need to begin married life on strong financial footing.

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How to curate your reception playlist

After a formal wedding ceremony, complete with processional and "I dos," comes the part of a wedding that enables the happy couple to brush off the last vestiges of jitters and celebrate. A wedding reception marks the culmination of months or even years of planning. Oftentimes a hundred guests or more gather to dine, dance and toast to the prosperity of the newlyweds.

Certain components of a reception will prove more memorable than others. Food is one such element. The other component that tends to make a lasting impression is the music, which means couples curating reception playlists should do so with care and consideration.

Deejays and live bands can help couples choose music that fits the mood. But couples also can consider these tips when curating their reception playlists.

- Calculate your needs. Couples may wonder just how many songs they need for a standard reception. Unless you're working with extra-long songs, like "Paradise by the Dashboard Light" or "Bohemian Rhapsody," most songs are around three minutes long. That means for a four-hour reception, you'll need roughly 80 songs. However, plan for moments such as speeches/toasts and other breaks.

- Pair songs with key elements. Traditional weddings have certain mini-events within the receptions. Music enhances these moments. Jot down ideas for the following components:

- Bridal party entrance
- Couples' entrance
- First dance (wedding song)
- Mother/son, father/daughter dances
- Cake-cutting song
- Garter/bouquet toss songs
- Spotlight dance
- Any other special element

- Select calm dinner music. After a day of rushing around, most guests are looking forward to sitting down, conversing and, of course, eating. Cocktail hour and dinner music should be at a low volume and not too fast-paced. It certainly



shouldn't drown out conversation. Musician Peter Lee Johnson performs violin covers of popular Top 40 songs, and his music may be an option when choosing songs to accompany food service. Post-modern Jukebox is a group of musicians who take modern songs and give them a bygone flair. Their tunes also can be fitting.

- Tie the music to the theme. Weddings that follow a specific theme, such as a beach wedding, can be enhanced by music that coordinates with that theme. Think steel drum bands, Hawaiian stylings or even Beach Boys surfing songs.

- Be mindful of older guests. Some seniors may appreciate modern music, but they also may want to hear songs from the era when they were growing up. Pepper the song list with options across various decades to keep as many people on the dance floor as possible.

- Select a classic first dance song. Some couples opt to go trendy when selecting their wedding songs. However, certain songs have withstood the test of time. Such options include "Have I Told You Lately That I Love You," "Here and Now," "Stand by Me," "Amazed," or "Just the Way You Are."

These tips can help any couples put together a wedding reception playlist that will help to create a memorable celebration.

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Popular and lasting wedding traditions

Weddings are steeped in tradition. Some of those traditions may be exclusive to particular families, but many others are embraced by families of various backgrounds.

Couples needn't feel beholden to popular wedding traditions, but some may feel that these customs make their weddings more fun and serve as a great way to connect their ceremonies with those of their parents, grandparents and possibly even their ancestors.

Old, new, borrowed, blue

The rhyme "something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue" is likely familiar to people about to get married. This traditional rhyme has existed for centuries and refers to items a bride

should wear and keep with her on her wedding day. The old alludes to a bride's past, the new refers to her future, the borrowed is intended to be something borrowed from a married couple or bride, and the blue is a symbol of purity, love and fidelity. These items are traditionally given to the bride-to-be by family members or female friends who are already married.

Bridal veil

It's now up to brides if they want to wear a veil on their wedding day, but it was once a tradition all brides adhered to. Some trace the tradition back to ancient Greece, while others suggest the tradition began in the days of the Roman Empire. Veils were believed to shield

brides from evil spirits on her wedding day, thus paving the way for a healthy and happy future. Many brides still wear veils today, though likely due more to their aesthetic appeal than out of a belief that the veil will ward off evil spirits. Some brides still use veils to cover their faces as they walk up the aisle, while others flip the veil over their heads.

Gifting knives

Perhaps one of the lesser-known superstitions surrounding weddings, giving knives as a wedding gift is a no-no for some people. The origins of this superstition are uncertain, but people who abide by this tradition feel that knives are symbolic of a broken relationship. That would likely

come as a surprise to the many engaged couples who have a set of knives on their wedding registries.

Carrying the bride over the threshold

Historians trace this tradition, which Hollywood has undoubtedly helped to keep alive, all the way back to medieval Europe. Also inspired by a bride's perceived vulnerability to evil spirits, the tradition of a groom carrying his bride over the threshold into their new home was believed to keep the spirits from entering the home through the soles of the bride's feet.

Breaking glass

Couples break glass for different reasons on their wedding

days. Within the Jewish faith, one member of the couple will stomp on a carefully wrapped glass to serve as a reminder of the destruction of the Jewish temples and to inspire reflection among those in attendance. Italian newlyweds also may smash glass, but they'll do it with a little more gusto. Local tradition in Italy dictated that, at the end of the wedding, the newly married couple would smash a wine glass. Folklore suggests that the number of pieces the glass breaks into indicates how many years the couple will stay together.

Tradition is part and parcel of many weddings. Some traditions are more solemn than others, but all can add something meaningful, dramatic and even a little fun to the ceremony.

Balloons aren't just for kids' parties anymore

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How to pick the perfect wedding dress

Planning a wedding requires making many different decisions. The choice of wedding attire is among the most crucial decisions that couples must make. Whether the wedding is traditional or customized to suit couples' personalities, brides and grooms want to look their best when they say, "I do."

Many brides-to-be spend a significant amount of time looking for their ideal wedding dresses. What defines the right gown depends on personal preference and is unique to the person doing the search. For example, a dress that sets a fairy tale scene for one bride may not necessarily align with the tastes of another. According to Bridal Atelier, the average bride-to-be tries on try three to seven dresses before finding the right one. The following tips can help those shopping for dresses find a look that makes their big day even more special.

1. Don't get hung up on perfection

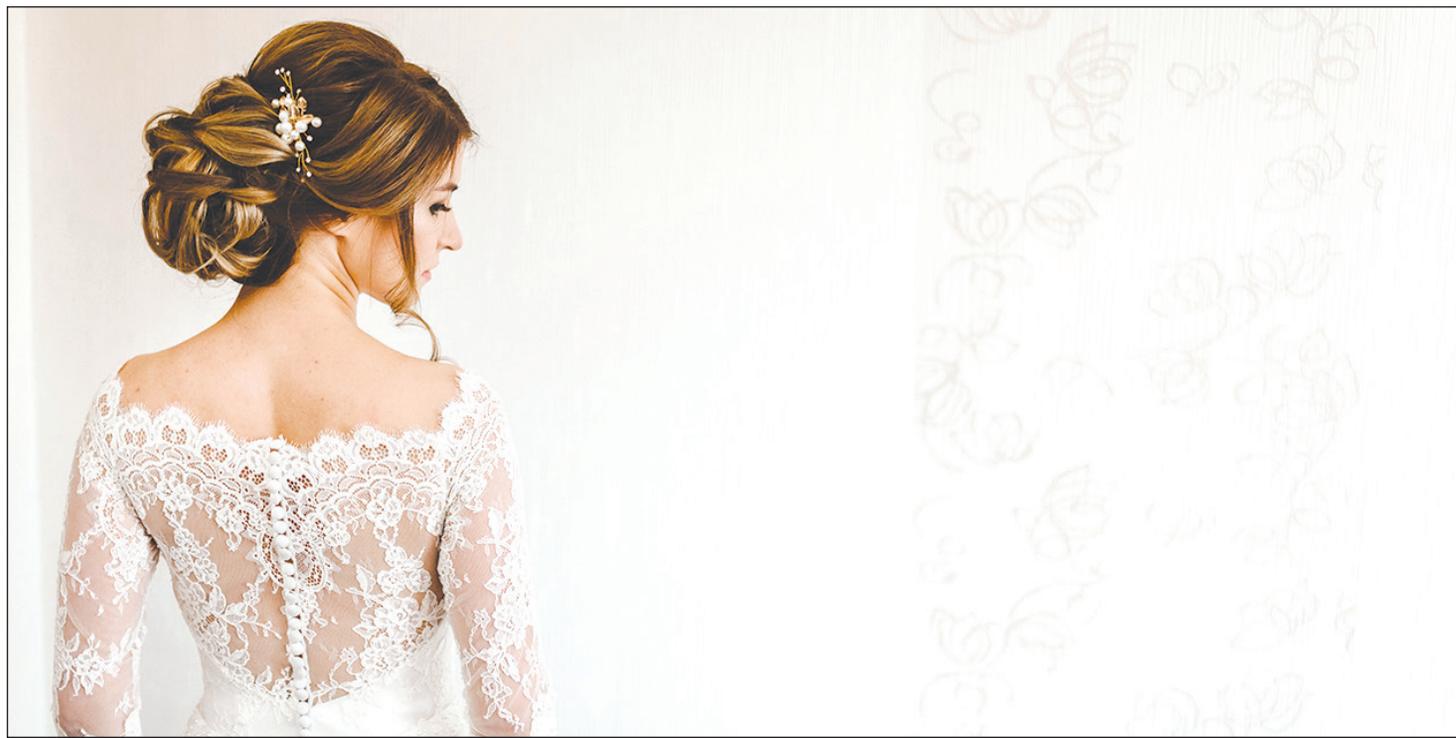
Many brides get caught up as they search for the one dress they consider perfect. No dress is likely to check every box. Getting hung up on a desire to find a dress that has it all may make it hard to see the beauty in other dresses. Remember, with the talents of an experienced tailor or seamstress, most dresses can be tweaked to suit your vision of the ideal gown.

2. Consider the season

Getting married during the hazy and humid days of summer is an entirely different experience than tying the knot during the heart of winter. The fabric of the wedding dress should complement the season, whether it's lightweight and breezy for a warm day, or more substantial and cozy when darting to the ceremony in snowfall.

3. Flatter your figure

Chances are brides-to-be know which cuts and styles are most flattering. Mimic those style choices in the wedding dress. If you want to take focus off of full hips, choose a basque or asymmetrical waistline. Gowns with substantial straps or higher necklines may be better if you have a larger chest. Sheath and mermaid-style



gowns are options if you are confident with your figure and want to show off your curves.

4. Try a bit of this and that

Don't go into a wedding dress appointment with firm parameters. Although you may have a ball gown style in mind, after trying on other options something with a less voluminous silhouette may actually catch your eye. Many brides also automatically defer to strapless gowns, when various straps and sleeves can be very appealing.

5. Arrive with a firm budget

Weddings can be costly. It's important to set a budget for the wedding dress just as you will with other expenses. There are plenty of dress designers across a wide spectrum of price points. A willingness to consider and ultimately purchase a less costly dress can help you stay on budget.

Browsing through magazines and looking online can provide wedding dress inspiration as well. Also, when in doubt, defer to the experts at bridal shops who have experience choosing dresses that brides are inclined to love.

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Tips when toasting the happy couple

Many special moments unfold during a couple's wedding day. A bride's walk down the aisle, a married couple's first dance together and, of course, the moment couples say "I do" are just a few of the many memorable moments to take place during a wedding.

Another memorable moment, and one that couples have little to no control over, is the wedding toast. Toasting is a tradition that some historians trace to ancient Greece, which should give nervous toasters-to-be a little more confidence as the wedding day approaches. After all, given the lengthy history of toasting, it's likely that millions of people have toasted happy

couples over the years. If millions of others can do it, then so can this year's crop of best men, maids of honor and proud parents who will be asked to raise a glass to happy couples. As a couple's big day draws near, those trusted with toasting the newlyweds can consider these tips.

- Introduce yourself. Unless it's a very intimate affair with only a handful of well-acquainted guests, introduce yourself before beginning your toast. This not only ensures everyone recognizes who you are, but also provides a simple way to begin your comments without feeling a need to impress.

- Keep things lightheart-



ed. Though it's best to avoid being too informal, a lighthearted toast with a funny anecdote and/or a joke or two can help to maintain the jovial vibe of the reception.

- Explain your relationship. Maids of honor and best men are often chosen because they have a special

relationship with the bride or groom. So it's alright to give a brief explanation of that relationship and explain how much it means to you during the toast.

- Toast the couple. Even though most people toasting at a wedding have a special connection with just one half of the newly married couple, it's normal to toast the new couple and their

happiness before closing your remarks. If you want to toast each person when delivering your remarks, speak to your counterpart (i.e., a maid of honor if you're the best man, or vice versa) for some special insight.

- Keep your toast short. Toasts need not be lengthy. In fact, toasts should be on the shorter side so everyone tasked with delivering a toast can do so in a reasonable amount of time.

- Avoid winging it. Plan your remarks ahead of time, even writing down your toast or at least organizing your ideas before you're handed the microphone. Winging it might seem like an option, but if you speak off-the-cuff you'll likely find yourself

rambling and going off course. Planning also allows time to practice your remarks before the big day, which also can help to calm your nerves.

- Remember you're among friends. If need be, remind yourself before your toast that you're among friends. Speaking to a room full of people you know or are at least familiar with should help you avoid the nervousness that can come with speaking to a room filled with strangers.

Toasts are a beloved wedding tradition. People tasked with toasting the happy couple can follow some simple strategies to stay calm and deliver remarks couples will remember forever.

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Tips to help master your wedding guest list

Weddings are such momentous occasions that it's no wonder couples want to share their big days with as many people as possible. Though a wedding where all friends, family members and acquaintances are in attendance may be a dream scenario, reality often calls for a more carefully curated guest list.

Data from The Wedding Report indicates that the average cost of a wedding is slightly more than \$20,000, though that figure could be substantially higher, or even lower, depending on where couples tie the knot. Both The Wedding Report and The Knot report that a wedding venue and catering make up a significant percentage of the overall cost of a wedding, with some figures indicating that these expenses account for around 65 percent of the final price tag. The number of guests

couples will host on their wedding day will affect which venue they book and how much food and beverages they'll need to satisfy guests. Couples who hope to stay within budget can consider these tips as they try to build a guest list that won't break the bank.

- Accept input. Parents may no longer foot the entire bill for their children's weddings, but couples who are accepting some financial help from parents must also accept Mom's and Dad's input regarding the guest list. Even if parents' desired guests do not ultimately make the cut, it's best to respect their wishes and consider who they want to invite. Couples who are financing their own weddings without outside help need not feel beholden to invite anyone who does not meet their invitation criteria.

Novel gifts for bridesmaids

Brides- and grooms-to-be select people who are near and dear to their hearts to be special parts of their momentous days. So the chance to participate in a friend's or family member's wedding is a great honor.

A wedding party plays a key role in both the ceremony and reception. Participants do everything from helping couples make decisions to addressing invitations to providing emotional support. As so much is asked of the wedding party — particularly the maid/matron of honor and bridesmaids — it's customary to bestow gifts on those people who devoted so much time and effort to the wedding. These po-

tential bridesmaid gifts can serve as a thoughtful and unique way to thank bridesmaids for all that they've done.

- **Photo books:** Gift the bridesmaids with photo books of carefully curated photographs taken throughout the wedding planning experience. Pepper the books with other photos, such as images of you with the bridesmaids at fun moments throughout your lives together.

- **Portrait wine or champagne glasses:** Beverage glasses customized with the bridesmaids' likenesses painted or printed onto them make for great gifts. Bridesmaids will enjoy sipping their favorite drinks in special glasses for years

to come.

- **Personalized phone cases:** Who doesn't rely on their mobile phones these days? Treat your bridesmaids to something special with colorful phone cases with their names embossed or printed on the outsides.

- **Wellness or spa gift card:** After all of the running around for the wedding, bridesmaids may need a little extra pampering. Gift cards to a local spa can fit the bill.

- **Birthstone jewelry:** Necklaces, rings or earrings become that much more special when they're customized to the recipients. Purchase jewelry with your bridesmaids' birthstones so they'll be

as unique as each woman.

- **Friendship bracelets:** Gift each bridesmaid with beaded friendship bracelets that features all of the ladies' initials. Be sure to keep one for yourself, and you all can enjoy nights on the town showcasing your special bracelets.

- **Monogrammed robes or purses:** A customized pocketbook, robe or another item bridesmaids will use every day can make for an extra-special item that will serve as a daily reminder of how much you appreciate them.

Bridesmaid gifts are a great way for brides to thank their bridesmaids for all that they've done to make a couple's wedding day special.



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How to find the right wedding reception venue

Every decision engaged couples make in regard to their weddings is significant, but some may affect the day more than others. Perhaps no decision will help couples set the tone they hope to establish more than their choice of reception venue.

Reception venues are where couples and their guests will spend the vast majority of their time on the wedding day, which is why choice of venue bears such significance. With that in mind, couples can consider these tips as they look for the perfect place to host their receptions.

- Decide what you want out of a venue. Prospective brides and grooms may have vastly different ideas regarding how they want their weddings to go, and it's imperative that couples discuss their ideal weddings prior to looking for a venue. Do you want to get married in a place of worship? Or do you prefer a venue that can host both the ceremony and reception? Do you want an indoor, outdoor or hybrid ceremony and reception? Define what you both want before looking for a venue and make the necessary concessions if you have different ideas in mind.

- Consider picking a venue before setting a date. It can be wise to pick a reception venue first and then choose your wedding date based on the availability of the venue. This is especially important for couples who already have

an ideal venue in mind, and it also provides some flexibility as couples search for the venue. For example, couples working within a strict budget may not be able to afford a preferred venue during the height of wedding season, but that venue could be less costly during slower times of year. By waiting to pick a date until you've chosen a venue, you're increasing your options.

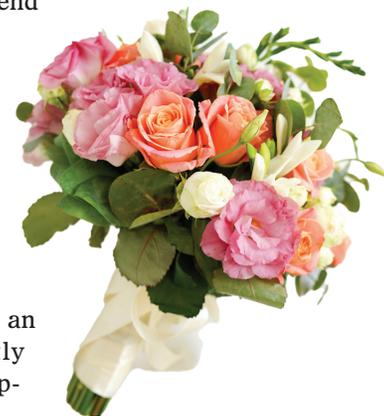
- Consider your guests. Though couples, particularly those footing the bill on their own, should prioritize their desires when choosing a reception, it's important they also consider their guests before making a final decision. A venue that's accessible and located near transit hubs like airports and train stations will increase the likelihood that more people can attend. In addition, if children will be invited, a venue that includes family restrooms, including at least one with a changing table, can make parents' nights much easier.

- Consider your budget. The Knot 2021 Real Weddings Study found that couples typically spend around 30% of their overall budget on the venue, which makes this decision the biggest one in terms of the financial commitments a couple will have to make. Couples may be tempted to choose an awe-inspiring, costly venue for their recep-

tion, but they should consider how devoting so much of their budget to the venue will affect the rest of their big day. The best reception venue might be one that won't eat up too much of your budget.

- Consider the package. Venues vary in terms of their reception packages. Some may offer catering, including beverages, with each of their packages, while food and beverage might not be part of other venues' offerings. If you find a venue you love, but it doesn't offer catering services, seek estimates from area caterers to determine how much it will cost to feed and serve your guests. Many couples find it more convenient and less stressful to pick a venue that offers on-site catering, though plenty of others have had no trouble after choosing a venue and separate caterer.

The bulk of a couple's wedding day and night will be spent at the reception, making choice of venue one of the more fun and important decisions they'll have to make.



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