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*Stephanie Campbell advises
Jenny Roch & Curtis Bell
photo by Chris Fritchie*



Planning a Wedding, Preparing a Future

By Debbie Vallejo

GO ONLINE AND GOOGLE “planning wedding” and one is instantly bombarded with over 7,570,000 sites from which to choose. Select a site from the massive list and couples can become buried in information such as accessories that are a ‘must’ on the wedding day, accommodations that are the perfect honeymoon locations, beauty and cosmetics tips, how to throw the perfect bridal shower, bridal shows to attend, consultants to consult and on and on and on. The ‘must have’ list for the perfect wedding is incredibly long, pulling at couples to succumb to the pressure of adding more and more to their wedding, lest they rob themselves of the ideal day to remember. After all, your wedding day “only happens once,” right? Now how many times has that phrase been

thrown around?

There are ways to narrow the options, keep things relatively simple and yet have the dream wedding that is unique to an individual couple. There are also a staggering number of options for couples looking to add, not subtract, from the number of details and vendors involved in their special day. Decisions made during the planning stages are all dependent on the tastes and preferences of the couple. The trick is to plan without causing conflict in the relationship or have the day produce more stress than celebration.

WHERE TO BEGIN

The beginning stages of planning a wedding can become fairly overwhelming when a couple first gets a look at all

the decision-making looming over the horizon. Julie Giacobbe and her husband were married last September at the Hotel Crescent Court in Dallas. The initial few days after the engagement were a little stressful because of all the questions family and friends were asking about details of the wedding. To combat the anxiety and the feeling of being overwhelmed, Julie and her fiancé sat down one night and each wrote the top five things they wanted for their wedding. “I listed my top five things and Rob listed his,” says Ms. Giacobbe. “My top five were almost the same as his, except his number one was to make me happy. At that point I realized this wedding was about the two of us, not just me. It was a good reality check in the beginning phase of planning a wedding.” From that moment on, Julie and Rob planned the event together, making decisions based on mutual likes and dislikes.

Stephanie Campbell, owner of the wedding consultant business Exquisite Weddings in Frisco, follows a series of steps when first sitting down with a couple in the beginning planning stages. “The first step is to determine the kind of wedding the couple wants,” explains Ms. Campbell. “Selecting a date is the second step, however, dates often change based on availability of the ceremony venue. The third most crucial step is establishing a budget.” According to Ms. Campbell, creating the budget is usually the most frustrating part of the process, as most couples don’t know the typical costs of wedding related services.

Once those first three steps are complete, Ms. Campbell then discovers as many details as possible about the couple and any specific preferences they have in mind. “Once the needs of the wedding are explained I begin to lay out the process,” says Ms. Campbell. “Starting with ceremony and reception location selection, we have an entire list we go through.” She suggests a couple keep in mind this is their day and not fall



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into the trap of trying to fulfill outside expectations.

Many couples decide to hire a wedding planner to help coordinate the large number of people involved in the wedding. "The right wedding planner provides a certain level of expertise," explains Ms. Campbell. A wedding professional knows the business and has established relationships with vendors, hotels, limo services and so on. A proper planner will assist a couple in handling the details that cause stress during planning.

What if a couple cannot afford a wedding planner or simply wants to handle all the details themselves? Ms. Campbell recommends utilizing online tools, magazines, other brides, family, friends and available research to make important decisions. The biggest tool however is communication. "Open communication helps couples out immensely," says Ms. Campbell. "Work together and understand that the common goal is the wedding and the decisions being made are for both of you."

WITH THIS RING

Few decisions are as important as the choice of wedding and engagement rings. After all, the rings last long after the wedding day has passed. Carlos Arcos represents Robbins Brothers, a store considered to hold the largest selection of engagement rings in the world. Located in Dallas, the store also provides customers with honeymoon package options and works with other vendors to provide wedding invitations, photographers, reception sites and wedding cakes. Mr. Arcos considers several factors when assisting customers selecting engagement and wedding rings. First, he considers the type of jewelry the bride-to-be usually wears. "Getting to know what the bride feels comfortable with on a daily basis will help narrow down the ring options," says Mr. Arcos. "We ask customers to consider the



metal they would like and the style of the current jewelry she wears. Is it simple, ornate or classic?" Customers should also consider personality and lifestyle. "If she is an accountant and wears a suit everyday, a traditional engagement ring with a center diamond and a few side diamonds could be an option," explains Mr. Arcos. "If she tends to favor things that are funky, a contemporary engagement ring such as a floating diamond style may be perfect."

What should a groom expect to pay for an engagement ring? Previous rule of thumb said two months salary should do the trick but, according to Mr. Arcos, that isn't necessary. "We like to remind customers that the engagement ring is a symbol of your love for her," says Mr. Arcos. "Whether that is a simple ring that costs \$100 or a five-carat diamond set in platinum that sets you back \$60,000, the meaning is the same." The average cost of an engagement ring in the North Dallas area is \$4,000.

DRESSING THE PART

Dressing everyone in the bridal party, from bride to bridesmaid, groom to

groomsman, is an integral part of the ceremony and large part of the budget. Cordell Couture is a design studio located in Frisco that creates high-end couture evening gowns and bridal wear. Cordell Couture is not a traditional bridal shop but an actual designer of dresses, selling their gowns to bridal shops and evening wear stores all over the country. They also have a retail operation in Frisco servicing both brides and retail outlets.

Darius Cordell is owner and dress designer of Cordell Couture and recommends a bride look at pictures and the dress itself to make sure it fits all of her personal requirements. The bride should ask herself, "Does the dress hide what I want it to hide? Does it show what I want it to show?" explains Mr. Cordell. "If it does those things then a bride may be assured the dress will look good, if it is made according to their personal measurements." A mistake Mr. Cordell often sees is waiting until the last minute to order the dress because the bride wants it a size smaller than what fits at the time of her engagement. While it is understandable wanting to lose weight for the big day, Mr. Cordell recommends

ordering the dress early and then having it altered. "Ordering early reduces stress for all involved," explains Mr. Cordell. "And in most cases the bride is going to lose a few pounds right before the big day anyway, so alterations will still have to be made."

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Another mistake he sees couples make is not creating a realistic budget. The national average for a wedding gown is approximately \$2,500. Most brides of Cordell Couture in Frisco fall into the \$900 - \$2000 range.

When dressing the rest of the wedding party, Mr. Cordell recommends selecting the wedding dress first followed by the



Darius Cordell at Jenny Roch's Fitting
photo by Chris Fritchie

ning timelines. Timelines, budgets and wedding calendars are available online. Most wedding planners provide organizational tools on their websites to help couples keep everything together and organized.

For brides not using a wedding coordinator, Julie Giacobbe recommends creating a folder for vendor contracts, contacts and wedding party information. "Create an agenda for the

pieces, invitations, floral arrangements, bridesmaid gifts and much more. It is important for the couple to make a budget together, keeping in mind what is most important. "If having a huge cake and lots of flowers is important, then something else may have to be reduced or eliminated," says Ms. Campbell. "Each couple has different needs and a different sense of what will be the focal point of their wedding." The national cost for a wedding currently averages \$25,000. According to Ms. Campbell, the typical wedding in Frisco costs about \$35,000 with approximately \$10,000 of that cost allocated to the ceremony and reception, \$2,000 for the dress, \$800 for flowers and cake and \$1,500 for the photographer/videographer. Getting married during the week can also cut costs for venues and vendors, since weekends are more the norm.

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Another part of planning that may impact budget concerns is the guest list. Shelby Pena was married in March at the Westin Stonebriar Resort in Frisco. The hardest decision the couple had to make was exactly who to invite to the wedding. "Taking our budget into consideration, we were not able to invite all of our friends and family. Narrowing the list was not easy to do, but was something that had to be done," explains Ms. Pena. "The risk of offending uninvited guests weighed heavy on my mind." Ms. Pena recommends talking things through as a couple when deciding which issues are

colors and theme of the event. Allow at least six months for the whole process, keeping in mind the more time available, the less stress on everyone involved.

DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

There is so much to do and keep track of in preparation for a wedding. The wedding location, date, time, reception, food, flowers, cake, rings; the list goes on and on. What can a couple do to help lessen the burden and alleviate feelings of being overwhelmed? "The biggest mistake I see couples make is trying to sit down and make all the arrangements in a day or weekend," says Ms. Campbell. "This is a process that takes time and patience." Ms. Campbell recommends creating realistic and appropriate plan-

wedding day, starting from the time you wake up until the end of the wedding," says Ms. Giacobbe. "Also, make sure you describe to your vendors exactly what you want for the wedding and include those details in your contract. Meet with the vendors a week before the wedding to reconfirm everything you talked about."

COMPROMISE AND ECONOMIZE

Couples are constantly looking for the best ways to cut costs, while still making their day unique and special. A do-it-yourself attitude will go a long way in making items less expensive while still unique. Television programs like *Martha Stewart* and *The Knot* help brides create their own bouquets, center

really important. It's also a good idea to talk with someone who has an objective opinion. A wedding coordinator fits that roll well if a couple decides to employ one.

ENJOY THE WEDDING, PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

There is absolute joy in coordinating an event that marks such a special time in the life of a couple. The decisions that are made can help solidify a relationship, but can also pick one apart. Dr. John Henderson is a Licensed Professional Counselor and works with couples on a variety of issues and situations. "The single biggest pitfall is approaching a marriage like a legal contract or business arrangement," explains Dr. Henderson. Instead of thinking of all the expectations you want your future spouse to meet, he recommends learning how to serve and give to each other. "Learn to be happy not getting your way," says Dr. Henderson. "Find joy in yielding and giving, rather than receiving and winning."

Dr. Henderson says couples should prepare to no longer label things "mine"



Julie & Rob Giacobbe photo provided by Julie Giacobbe

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or "yours" but instead "ours." "A couple will need to learn to function as a team," explains Dr. Henderson. "Think of it as the old adage, 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.'" Ms. Giacobbe explains how the wedding planning process actually helped them prepare for their marriage. "Rob and I went to every vendor meeting together," says Ms. Giacobbe. "We had a lot of fun sharing our ideas for the wedding. We learned a lot about each others' different styles and preferences."

The experts agree that creating an event to remember is often an overwhelming process but it can also help build a relationship. Take the time to enjoy the decision making and getting to know each other better. "This is one of the most exciting times of your lives," says Ms. Giacobbe. "My best advice is to enjoy every moment because it goes by so fast." Plan the wedding, enjoy the day, but remember you are together for a lifetime.

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