

# *Ten Things You Need to Know to Plan Your Perfect Wedding*

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*Now, here's a hard and fast rule that will never, ever change.  
If you get a gift, you MUST write a thank you note.  
Not only that, you must do it promptly.*



You know, of course, that there are a million and one details involved in planning the perfect wedding. It all seems so confusing and overwhelming—who pays for what? What's the best time of year for a wedding? What colors should you pick—and why? And is it really important to write all of those thank-you notes?

The reasons why we do some of the things we do, when it comes to weddings, are obscure and hidden in tradition. Some of the rules are hard and unchangeable, and some are a little more flexible. But when you get right to it, there are ten major areas of stress for every bride. Here they are—with some ideas about how to navigate. Relax—and enjoy the process!

## **(10) Timing is everything.**

Choosing the wedding date is more involved than simply finding a date when the church is available. There are months that are more popular than others for weddings, and there are reasons why. If you are planning a wedding on a budget, you may be able to save money by planning for an off-peak wedding. Discounts might apply—it's the old rule of supply and demand.

The most popular months for weddings in the United States are June, September, August, May, October and July. Because of that, venues book early and can be more expensive. That perfect spot—The Lodge at Doublehead Resort, St. Florian Fiber Farm, Burritt on the Mountain, or the Robert Trent Jones Clubhouse, to name a few—might already be spoken for, or, if they are available, might command a premium price during the high-volume wedding months.

The reason these months are most popular is because they are warm weather months and part, if not all, of the ceremony can be held outdoors. If you select a totally indoor venue, you aren't limited to the warm weather months; the best months for a budget wedding are January, February and March, because demand for locations is lower and prices are, too.

If you're planning a destination wedding, weather is definitely a consideration. A beach wedding at the Alabama coast sounds great, but not during the rainy season. A wedding at a more exotic locale, such as the Caribbean, will be more expensive during peak tourist season; you might get a better deal off season. If you're considering a place like Disney World, check their season and see if an off-peak wedding will fit your schedule and your budget.

Another consideration has to do with your guests. Do you have family with school aged children? Take their school year schedule into consideration, especially if they will have to

travel. Holidays, such as Christmas, might be perfect if your family typically gathers then anyway; on the other hand, if your family tradition involves people going in totally different directions, a Christmas wedding might be an imposition. Labor Day or Memorial Day, though, might be choice dates because your guests are likely to have a three-day weekend.

Remember that some religions limit weddings during certain times of the year, such as Lent or Passover. Check with your officiant to see if any restrictions apply to the date you have in mind.

Time of day is the next consideration. Late afternoon or early evening weddings are usually more formal and more expensive than morning or early afternoon weddings. An evening wedding also carries the expectation of some sort of meal at the reception, which can add to the cost. If you're on a strict budget, an early afternoon wedding might be best, since your guests will expect some nice treats but not a full-blown meal at the reception. But don't worry—you can have an informal affair in the evening, if you'd like, or a formal affair at high noon. That's one of those flexible things.

## **(9) I have to pay for what?**

A few qualifications before this discussion: these are guidelines and are based on tradition. If you want to pay for everything, it's certain the groom's family will be happy to let you. On the other hand, it could be that you and your fiancé have decided to pay for everything yourselves, which is admirable; in that case, skip to the next rule.

Traditionally, the bride's family pays for:

- Wedding dress and accessories
- Flowers for the wedding and reception, including the bouquet, bridesmaid's flowers, and the floral arrangements for the reception. In some cases, the groom will pay for the bouquet, but that is an item for negotiation
- Music at the wedding and at the reception
- Photographer and videographer
- Groom's wedding ring
- The reception. This includes the cost of the food, cake, entertainment, venue, and everything else
- Accommodations for the bridesmaids
- Transportation for the bridesmaids to the wedding and reception
- Bridesmaid's luncheon and gifts



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Traditionally, the groom's family pays for:

- Engagement ring and bride's wedding ring
- The bridal bouquet, in some cases; this is an item for negotiation
- All costs of the rehearsal dinner
- The marriage license
- The cost of the officiant
- All costs for the honeymoon
- Gifts for the groomsmen
- Boutonnieres for the groomsmen
- Accommodations for the groomsmen

Bridesmaids traditionally pay for their dresses and transportation to the wedding. Groomsmen traditionally pay for their suit rental and transportation to the wedding. Out of town guests traditionally pay for their own travel and accommodations.

Does this make you nervous? Throw away this "traditional" list and make some traditions of your own.

## **(8) Don't invite trouble.**

Once you've decided on the date of the wedding, booked your venue, and negotiated your budgets, it's time to consider the invitations. A good quality printer, like PSI, can help you select the style and typography, but there are a few additional things to consider.

Order extra. It doesn't matter how well you plan, there will likely be someone you must invite whom you have forgotten to put on the list. At the very least, order extra envelopes, in case you make a mistake in addressing. And remember, you may want to have an extra invitation for your scrapbook.

Give your guests plenty of time. You need time to address and mail the invitations; they need time to respond, so you have an accurate head count. Consider, also, where you want to have the responses sent; is this something you have time to handle yourself, or can your mother or maid of honor help with this part of the process?

Make sure you include the proper postage. Sounds simple, but how embarrassed would you be if all of your beautiful invitations were returned—or delivered with postage due? And for goodness sake, make sure you spell your guests' names correctly!

The flexible rules have to do with how large your wedding guest list will be. Do you need to invite your third cousins-once-removed? Do you need to invite everyone in your

mother's sewing club? Those are the negotiable items that you and your fiancé get to decide. Budgets will determine much of it; family politics will dictate the rest.

Oh, and please don't include things in your wedding invitation that are just, well, tacky. Your gift registry, for one; don't tell people what to wear or whether or not there will be alcohol at the wedding. Putting "no children" on the invitation is unnecessary; the way the invitation is addressed will let the guests know whether or not kids are welcome. And whatever you do, don't address your invitations using an Avery label and a fancy typeface from your computer. Take the time to hand-address. Trust us on this one.

## **(7) Receiving gifts graciously**

Please don't be the bride who goes on a registry frenzy and registers for everything currently available anywhere, just because. Take some time to carefully consider the types of items you really need to set up a household, and make sure to include items in every price range. Some of your guests will be able to give generously; some won't but they still want to give.

Remember that local specialty shops have wonderful items that are likely to be unique and personal, and most have bridal registries. It's nice if they have websites for your out of town guests, but you might also consider registering at national chains too, for that reason. Don't register for the same thing at different stores; you don't want to encourage duplication. And don't be offended if your guests don't use the registry!

Now, here's a hard and fast rule that will never, ever change. If you get a gift, you **MUST** write a thank you note. Not only that, you must do it promptly. And please, don't be the bride who writes a formulaic thank you, as if you're stamping them out of a mold. Take a moment to reflect on what the gift means to you, or what the giver means; tell the giver how you will think of them when the gift is used, or how much it means to you that you have been thought of. The actual words are not as important as the acknowledgement that this person has taken time and gone to the expense of remembering you on your special occasion. It means a lot, and it cannot be ignored.

There is no excuse for not having your notes written and sent within three months of the wedding. And yes, ladies, it is perfectly acceptable to have the groom share in the task of thank-you note writing. Even more reason not to let this task linger!

## (6) Why do brides wear white?

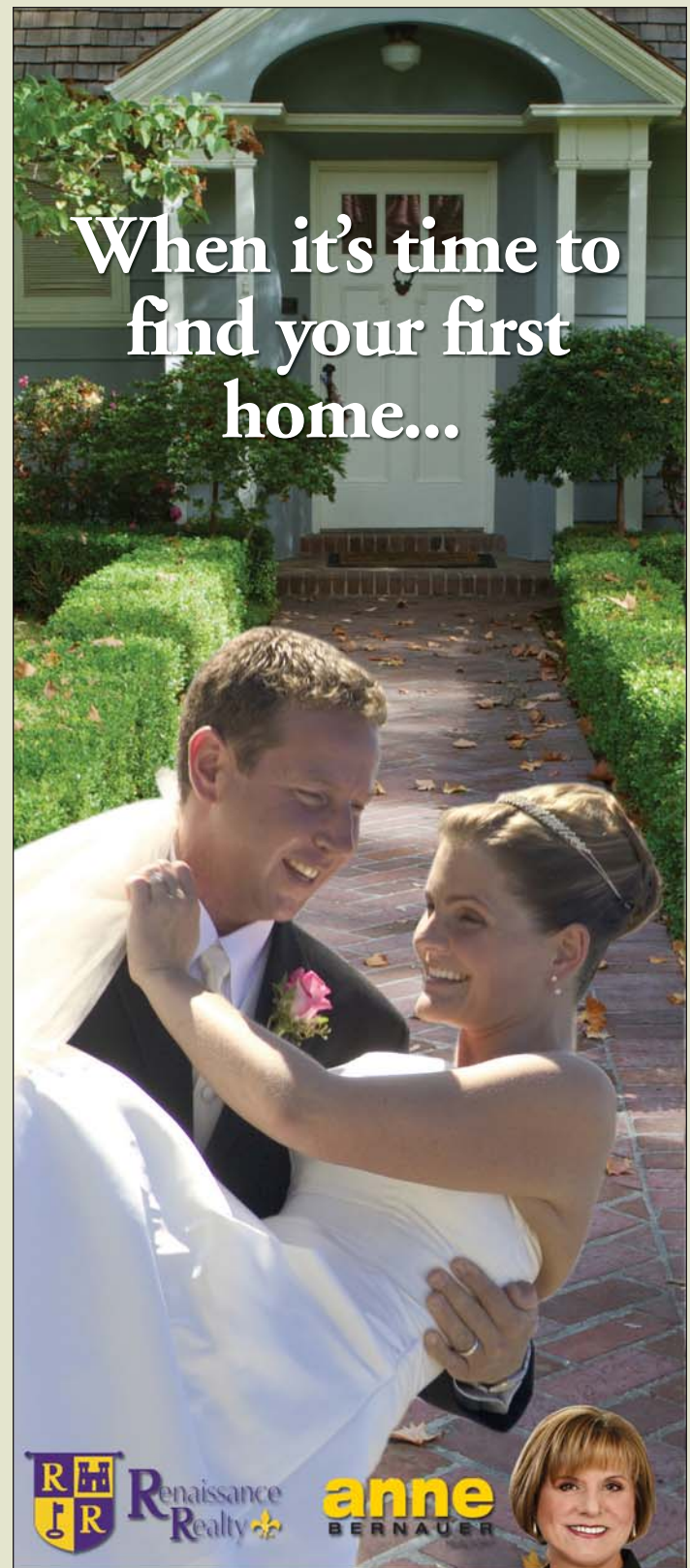
They didn't always, you know. It used to be that brides just picked out their best dress, pinned flowers on it, and that was the wedding gown. Later, colors were chosen for their symbolism: blue was chosen to symbolize faithfulness; green for youth; red was also a popular color, but yellow, which was thought to represent jealousy, was not. Brides who didn't have a lot of money would wear white robes to signify that she brought nothing to the wedding and therefore the groom would not be responsible for any of her debts. But when Queen Victoria appeared at her wedding in a white gown, the color white became the most popular color for brides, and the color white began to represent purity, rather than poverty. Today brides traditionally wear white whether it's the first, second, third, fourth wedding...or whatever.

The formality of your wedding has more to do with the style of dress than anything. For the most formal weddings, brides traditionally wear long white dresses with trains, and veils and gloves are common. Grooms and groomsmen at these affairs wear gray cutaway coats, white shirts and ascots, and gloves; bridesmaids traditionally wear long dresses in a color of the bride's choosing. For less formal weddings, grooms and groomsmen wear traditional tuxedos, and at the more informal weddings they wear dark suits. But don't be bound by these traditional rules—wear what you want and make your own tradition. This is one of those rules that isn't set in stone and offers plenty of room for the couple's personality to show.

## (5) Get me to the church on time.

The ceremony itself can be highly traditional or highly creative; this is your choice. Much of it will be dictated by how formal the affair, or by the location; as much fun as it looks on television, having your wedding party flash dance down the aisle of a solemn chapel or cathedral might not be as appropriate as having that happen on the beach. Most religious observations have certain things that *have* to be done—the repeating of the vows, the exchange of rings, and in some cases the celebration of Eucharist, “jumping the broom” or crushing a wine glass for good luck—but even then, there is opportunity for the bridal couple to express their individuality. Perhaps it's a song, or writing your own vows, or including someone special in the wedding party. This part is up to you.

The rules, here, are to make your guests comfortable. If you are having a traditional service and many of your guests are unfamiliar with the liturgy, you might consider a program so they can follow the order of service. Keep public displays of affection tasteful, of course, and even though this is your special day, remember that keeping the audience there for hours might not be as fully appreciated as you think. Whatever you do, be on time. You don't want to be late for your own wedding!



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#### **(4) To be or not to be (your own wedding planner)**

If a wedding is really nothing more than a very complicated, multi-faceted party to celebrate the union of two souls, it could be something you can do yourself, right? Or maybe not. Should you enlist the services of a wedding planner?

In large cities, wedding planners handle every detail of the event, from the venue to the caterer, musicians, wedding cake and everything in between. If you're that busy, and have that much additional money in the budget, it's definitely worth it to use someone who is experienced and known by the vendors who will be involved.

If that's a little too much, or if you really want to do much of it yourself, consider hiring a stylist, such as Jordyn Dean, to give you a cohesive direction. Others are available just to coordinate the actual ceremony; churches typically have a bridal specialist on hand to help rehearse the ceremony and then stand by during the wedding to tell people when to walk down the aisle. The bottom line depends on the bottom line. If you're highly organized, planning and executing your own wedding should be a piece of cake. If you're not, or you just don't have any extra time, investing in a professional might make the entire process more enjoyable. It's up to you!

#### **(3) What happens when the ceremony is all over?**

The responsibilities of a wedding aren't completed when the officiant pronounces you husband and wife. There are lots of things left to do!

After the reception and the honeymoon, if the bride has elected to take her husband's name, there are papers to fill out. Don't forget to inform:

- Social Security
- Credit card companies
- Motor Vehicle department
- Employer
- Credit card companies
- School alumni associations
- Doctors and dentists
- Passport agency
- Voter registration

Beginning a life together means starting a financial relationship as well. Some banks, such as First Southern Bank, or CB&S Bank are happy to discuss your options with you concerning joint or separate bank accounts; a financial advisor can

also talk to you about savings and investment strategies. Financial issues can cause stress in a relationship, so it's smart to go ahead and talk about it on the front end.

You'll be setting up housekeeping somewhere, so don't forget to let people know your new address—assuming, of course, that you aren't going to live in your existing home.

Get used to being introduced as "Mr. and Mrs.!"

And write those thank-you notes.

#### **(2) It's all about you, but not really.**

For most brides, a wedding is the opportunity to garner all of the attention. It's like being Princess for a Day, when all eyes will be upon you, and one rule always applies: every bride is beautiful.

Have you ever watched those horrible television shows about "bridezillas"? The reason we are so fascinated with them is that they are all, every last one of them, selfish beyond belief. We watch as ordinary young women morph into monsters and make impossible demands on their spouses, their wedding parties, and their families. It's narcissism run wild, and it makes great television.

It does not make for wonderful memories. Yes, this day is all about the bride, but the smart bride knows it's all about the guests, too. These are your friends and family, gathered to watch you enter into a legal and spiritual partnership, and they are here because they love you. The wise bride doesn't take advantage of this fact, and actually performs the role of hostess, making sure the guests are having a good time. Most likely, the weddings you remember most fondly are not the ones where the bride demanded attention; it's the one where the guests actually had a good time.

#### **(1) Marry your best friend.**

If you do this, the rest will take care of itself. Relax, enjoy the process... and enjoy married life! 