

The Dallas Post Fall Bridal Showcase

Smart ways to trim the cost of an 'average' wedding

In today's economy, with couples facing potential layoffs and prohibitive housing costs, the traditional wedding with all the trimmings is becoming more and more of a luxury.

Many are wondering whether the \$16,000 *Bride's* magazine reports as the average wedding cost wouldn't be better spent elsewhere — on the down payment of a house or car, on education, furniture or bills. The good news is that significance now is taking precedence over appearance.

"The first thing couples must do is set a budget and then prioritize which parts of the wedding are most important to them: the dress, the ceremony, reception, honeymoon, rehearsal dinner," says *Bride's* merchandising editor, Beth Adamich.

More and more parents are sharing wedding expenses, traditionally the bride's parents' responsibility. In some cases the couple and their parents split the cost three ways. (Brides should never ask the groom's parents for help, though. "That's tacky," says Adamich. The groom should do the asking.)

Couples with little or no resources are financing the wedding with a personal loan, which also establishes credit. When parents or relatives live a distance from each other, a progressive wedding may be the answer. A movable feast with friends and family host-

ing teas, cocktail parties, dinners or barbecues surrounding the wedding ceremony could last from Thursday through the weekend.

Of the \$30 billion in retail sales generated by the marriage market, about half is spent on the wedding apparel, invitations, flowers, reception, photos and gifts. Of this figure, the reception is by far the biggest expense, averaging \$5,900.

In planning a wedding, couples can save a bundle by planning a noon wedding followed by a light lunch. Even better, an early afternoon ceremony ensures they don't have to serve a meal at the reception. Punch or champagne and hors d'oeuvres or a high tea followed by a cake are perfectly acceptable. But if the ceremony is at 5 or 6 p.m., guests will be hungry and dinner is in order.

Often a couple's favorite restaurant will provide catering at considerably less than established caterers. If using a restaurant for the reception, look for one that doesn't insist on supplying the alcoholic beverages. You can save a substantial sum by buying them at wholesale or discount prices. Costs can be cut by serving beer and wine rather than offering an open bar.

"But definitely don't ask guests to pay for their own drinks. You don't want people to think you are skimping," Adamich says.

Choosing creative locations can cut down on expenses, too. Instead

of a candlelight church wedding with hotel ballroom reception, how about an evening ceremony on the beach, in a park or at a friend's or relative's home?

Marriage consultant Dante Angelos offers a list of 20 to 95 locations adapted specifically to the bride's budget and wedding theme.

"We are sort of the Ralph Naders of the wedding industry," says Angelos. "Many brides are not aware that just one hour with a bridal consultant (for an average of \$35) can save them thousands of dollars by setting up a budget that is realistic. It is a fallacy that consultants will take control. We already have done the research and have lists of re-

sources for every kind of wedding."

She emphasized that brides should allow themselves plenty of lead time so they don't feel pressured into making hasty decisions.

"We try to take the emotion out of planning a wedding but maintain the joy. Every bride really deserves to be a princess," Angelos says.

Consultants often work with busy working women or out-of-town brides and their mothers, faxing them duplicates of suggestions or information. They also can help read and clarify catering contracts to avoid surprises later.

Some couples are cutting costs by using ethnic themes, from

South Seas luau with bongo drums and hula dancers at the beach to a Celtic-Catholic wedding featuring a candlelit procession through a forest, accompa-

nied by church bells and Celtic hymns.

For an informal wedding, invitations needn't be engraved.

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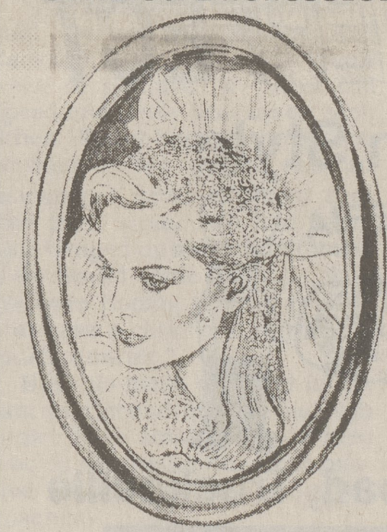
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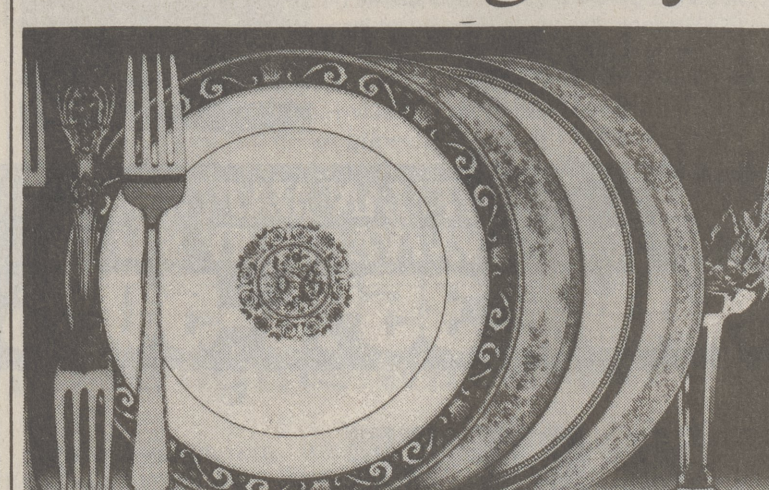
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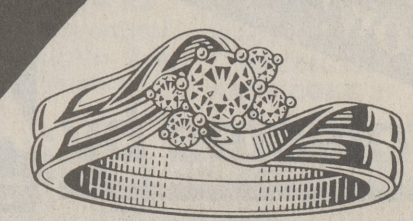
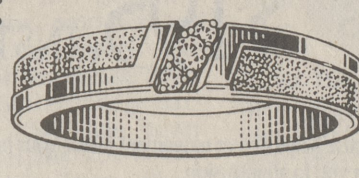
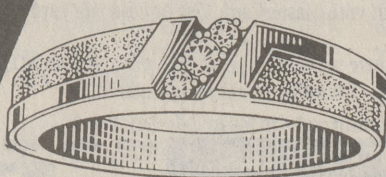


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