

Weddings Get New Personalized Twist

Fifty years ago, brides wore white, dad paid for the wedding, and the groom waited at the altar to get his first glimpse of the bride in her dress.

While these traditions have not gone away, they have given way to weddings that come in a variety of sizes and flavors. Today's weddings include a variety of bridal attire, couples paying for the entire event themselves, and pre-wedding photo shoots. Old wedding traditions may still set the framework for weddings, but modern ideas are taking center stage.

Many aspects of weddings have changed, including the roles of clergy and bride's maids and groomsmen, reception styles, locations, and wedding attire. Thematic weddings have become popular.

Not only have wedding ceremonies and receptions changed, but so to have honeymoons. Couples now are choosing exotic and off-the-grid destinations. In some cases, they are honeymooning with other couples or friends to take advantage of group travel deals. Even elopements have undergone transformations – elaborate ceremonies that include many of the details of a regular wedding minus the guests.

All of this begs the question: have weddings become more extravagant? Personalized and creative maybe, but not necessarily extravagant, says Sharon Dexmier, owner of Napa Valley Linens and 2012 president of the Wedding Industry Professionals Association (WIPA).

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Wedding costs run the gamut depending on whether the couple chooses a mostly do-it-yourself (DIY) approach or an over-the-top extravaganza.

"The biggest change in the cost of weddings is because of design. Today, there are a myriad of choices available in every category," Dexmier says.

Years ago, couples had few design options beyond flowers, she adds. They used the venue's linens, selected their invitations from a black stationery binder, and the cake was from a local bakery. Now, the offerings are vast and can be made to fit the couple's tastes and themes.

Robert Curtis, Business program director at South University, Columbia, says there are many reasons weddings have changed in the past few decades.

"Weddings today are vastly different than 20 years ago," he says. "Many couples are co-habiting before they get married, and people are marrying older than previous generations. These trends can somewhat be reflected in weddings."

Since they are waiting until their late 20s or early 30s to get married, many people have the disposable income to spend any way they like.

"We are seeing more couples pay for their entire wedding because they can afford to," Dexmier says. "They have embraced the responsibility in order to have the freedom to design the wedding they want. No longer dependent on mom and dad's financial cushion, they are not afraid to break with their parent's traditions."

"People have the money, time, romantic inclination, and motivation to celebrate marriages as if they were extravagant events," Curtis says.

Wedding websites and social media have also had a major impact on weddings. The internet is filled with information and inspiration to help couples plan for their weddings.

Brides have always collected magazine images of dresses and bouquets, Dexmier says, but now they have more resources for inspiration.

“The biggest impact on weddings has been the rise of social media and sites like Pinterest,” she says. “Brides are continually looking at images online and then creating a storyboard based on these images. Many of the design elements, like china, flowers, chairs, linens are influenced by what they see in social media and magazines.”

Couples who find themselves overwhelmed with wedding planning may consider hiring a wedding planner. Wedding planners keep up-to-date on the latest wedding trends and typically have the creativity and organization skills needed to help couples plan their special day.

“Good wedding planners know the best suppliers and should be able to navigate through the sea of decision making,” Dexmier says. “A good planner does add to the cost of a wedding, but it’s worth the investment to ensure a cohesive design and a stress-free experience.”

Whether they are seeking a quiet, low-key gathering or a lavish wedding that will be one for the ages, couples today have the resources to make it happen.