

# Tips For Selecting The Perfect Wedding Gown

by Beth Chapman of The White Dress by the shore

Selecting a wedding gown is often one of the first steps that a bride takes as she embarks on the journey of her engagement. Finding the perfect gown is an exciting, but often daunting task. Following are tips that will help to make the experience memorable, enjoyable and lead to the gown of your dreams.

## 1. Secure your wedding date and venue

Before beginning to shop for your gown, you should have your wedding date and venue secured. Your decision will be much easier to make if you can envision yourself wearing your gown in the setting of your wedding.

## 2. Set a budget

In creating your wedding budget, be sure to include a realistic budget for your wedding attire. Your budget should include an allocation for not only the gown, but accessories (bra, veil, jewelry and shoes), alterations and gown cleaning and preservation after the wedding.

It is very important to articulate your budget to the sales associate when shopping for your gown. You do not want to fall in love with something that does not fit your budget.

## 3. Do your research

Prior to beginning to shop, research salons that carry designers that meet your taste level and budget.

Evaluate the stores in which you like to shop for your everyday clothes and be sure that you select the correct shopping environment for you. If you are a department store shopper, a larger bridal salon with a large selection of gowns may be the right fit for you. If you prefer to shop in small boutiques, then a smaller, more intimate bridal store would most likely be best for you.

Visit the salon's website before calling to set an appointment to ensure that the selection and price range meets your needs. It is also helpful to read the bridal blogs to find out what other brides-to-be have to say about the stores that you plan to visit.

## 4. Plan ahead

Call to schedule an appointment a *minimum* of one week in advance. By scheduling an appointment, it allows the salon to provide you with their undivided attention and have a sales associate dedicated specifically to you.

Keep in mind that it takes approximately 4-6 months to produce a wedding gown. You should begin shopping for your gown a minimum of 8 months in advance of the wedding to allow enough time for alterations once the gown arrives.

## **5. Limit opinions**

This is a momentous and joyous time in your life, so naturally you want to share it with your family and friends. Be careful however of bringing a large group with you to shop for your gown. Too many opinions can be detrimental to making a decision.

If you have bridesmaids or family members who insist on being part of the process, a suggestion might be to shop with 1-2 very close family members or friends who understand and respect your personal style. Once you have finalized your decision, then you can bring back other people to show them the gown that you have decided on.

The key is to remember to take opinions into consideration, but ultimately you know yourself best. Your opinion is truly the only one that matters. It is your day and you are the one wearing the gown.

## **6. Communicate**

Bring photographs of styles that interest you and articulate your vision and budget to the sales associate with whom you are working.

Don't be afraid to speak up if you don't like something. Who knows-- perhaps there is something that can be done to the gown to make it perfect for you!

Before making the final decision on your gown, be sure that you understand the policies of the salon at which you are purchasing it. Ask about their policies for gown deposit and alterations.

## **7. Reflect your personal style**

Don't use your wedding day as the day to make a fashion statement! Your gown should flatter your best physical assets, reflect the formality and overall aesthetic of your venue, and most importantly, reflects your own personal style.

## **8. Have an open mind**

Trust the sales associate with whom you are working. If they are good at what they do, they will listen to your vision and make suggestions of gowns for you to try on. Even if you do not like the way that a gown looks on the hanger, TRY IT ON!!! It could be the gown of your dreams!

## **9. Don't be alarmed by the size**

Bridal sizing is different from ready-to-wear sizing. In some cases, a bridal gown is 2 sizes larger than what you would wear in your every day clothes. Once you have selected your gown, the bridal salon will take your measurements. Those measurements will be compared to the designer's size chart and the appropriate size will be selected for you. Keep in mind that a gown can be altered up to two sizes. Even if you are planning on losing weight, it best to go with the size that you are measuring at the time of purchase and alter the gown once it arrives. Never order a size based on the size that you *plan* to be!

## **10. A beautiful gown starts with the perfect foundation**

Undergarments are called foundations for a reason! The proper undergarments truly make all of the difference in the fit of the gown. After your gown is purchased, take time to select the perfect undergarments. It is best to shop in a location that specializes in foundations so that you are sized correctly.

While selecting your undergarments it is important to take into consideration several factors~

Select a bra or bustier that has a lower back than that of the gown so that the bra cannot be seen.

Ensure that if your bra has lace, texture or boning, that they are not visible through the gown.

If your gown is a column silhouette or made of a light weight fabric ensure that your undergarments provide you with enough support and that there are no noticeable seams or panty lines.

## **11. Understand the alterations process**

Alterations are truly a process. It will take time to sculpt the gown to fit your body perfectly. When purchasing your gown you should factor in a minimum of 2 months for alterations.

There are generally a minimum of 3 alterations involved in perfecting the fit of the gown. When purchasing your gown, you should inquire about the salon's policies on alterations and their fee structure.

It is imperative that you have your shoes and undergarments selected when the alterations process begins. It is impossible to ensure a proper fit without those elements.

If you are planning on losing weight, you should not begin the alterations process until your weight is stable.

## **12. Creating the look**

Selecting the perfect accessories to complement your gown is almost as important as selecting the gown itself. The accessories can make or break your wedding day look! You should take time in this process and schedule a separate appointment to choose your accessories.

When selecting your wedding day garnish, ask yourself if you want the accessories themselves to be the statement or if you want them to simply complement the gown. Either way, ensure that they reflect your personal style and the overall aesthetic of the wedding.

## **13. Protect your investment**

Although your gown is something you will wear only once, it is a precious garment that holds many memories and it should be properly cleaned and protected after the wedding. Research companies that specialize in gown cleaning and preservation-- don't simply rely on your local dry cleaner. Be sure to use a company that provides an anti-sugar treatment while cleaning and uses acid free materials in their preservation box. These processes will allow for maximum longevity of the fabric and ensure that it will not discolor or deteriorate over time.

## **14. Enjoy the experience**

The most important tip is to HAVE FUN!! How often in life will you be able to try on beautiful gowns and be treated like a princess? Enjoy every minute of it!

The key is to make sure that you are working with a salon that maximizes your bridal shopping experience and allows you to feel comfortable in your buying decision.

## **HAPPY SHOPPING!!!!**

*Beth Chapman is founder and owner of The White Dress by the shore, a couture bridal boutique situated in an antique home in historic Clinton, Connecticut. The boutique features couture bridal gowns, accessories and chic attire for mothers and maids. For more information, visit [www.thewhitedressbytheshore.com](http://www.thewhitedressbytheshore.com).*