



*the Wedding  
Planner*

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# Considering an intimate casual wedding?

Elegant, lavish weddings provide moments couples will remember for years to come. But while such storybook ceremonies and receptions remain popular, casual affairs are gaining popularity.

According to the bridal resource The Knot, more and more couples are opting for less pageantry and more laid back panache when planning their weddings. For those who prefer something more intimate and more personalized, casual weddings may be right on target.

There are many advantages to having a “luxé with less” wedding, including the ability to break molds and impart more of the couple’s personality into the event.

The average U.S. wedding, according to The Knot 2014 Real Weddings Study, costs \$31,213. In some urban areas, particularly New York City, average costs are three times that amount. Golden Girl Finance, a leader in financial digital media, has found that Canadian weddings average \$31,000 with honeymoon included. Although wedding costs have gone up, the average number of wedding guests has gone down. Transforming the festivities into a casual affair can help keep the overall budget low while still allowing for an exciting and enjoyable event. To put casual plans into motion, consider these ideas to help the wedding vision come to fruition.

## Venue

Catering halls and large reception sites do a wonderful



job of meeting the needs of their clientele. However, a favorite restaurant, inn or specialty food shop can show off your personal food and decor choices. Choosing an unconventional venue enables couples to pick unique spots that hold special meaning to them. For example, couples can choose the site of their first date or the location where their proposal took place.

## Contrast

Enjoy a casual, free-spirited wedding that incorporates some aspects of formality in an off-beat way. Think about

servicing fast food, such as fried chicken or pizza, on fine china. Those wearing tuxedos and gowns can opt for casual footwear, such as athletic shoes. Place wildflowers in crystal vases. These are just some methods to give a rich feel without removing the fun element.

## Personal touches

Menus or wedding programs printed at home in a fun font can set the casual tone couples are looking for. Look for eclectic fabrics to use as gift tags or napkin holders. Hand-painted signs or a hodge-podge of picture frames can display pertinent information, such as itineraries or seating arrangements. Encourage friends or family to contribute a favorite menu item to the food offerings. A home-baked dessert can be delicious and budget-friendly.

## Wardrobe

Clothing often indicates the formality of an occasion. Everyone from the wedding party to the guests can dress down. Sundresses can replace taffeta bridesmaids’ gowns. Guys can opt for tailored sports coats with jeans. Guests may feel comfortable in less formal attire that facilitates dancing and mingling.

Casual weddings are becoming more popular as many couples are playing down the party for various reasons.



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# Toast of the town



A toast is a drink raised in the health or honor of someone. Such salutes are typically accompanied by some heartfelt words or tokens of advice. Toasts are a common component of social gatherings, including retirement parties, milestone birthdays and weddings.

It's difficult to pinpoint who originated the practice of toasting. Several ancient societies would raise a glass in honor of deities or special guests. Ancient Greeks offered libations to the gods as a part of ritualistic practices and also as a point to drink to each other's good health. Ancient Romans at one point instituted a practice that all people must drink to Emperor Augustus at each meal.

The term "toast" has an interesting history. Dating back to the 16th century, "toast" refers to a piece of toasted bread. A piece of toast was commonly added to wine during this time because wine was quite inferior in quality then compared to modern vintages. Stale bread was placed into the jug to soak up acidity and improve the flavor. The wine also improved the palatability of the old or spiced bread. According to National Geographic magazine, by the 18th century, the term "toast" had been transferred from the floating piece of bread to the person honored by the toast. Eventually, "toast" represented the drink raised or the words offered with the gesture.

## Prepare for a toast

Toasts can be off-the-cuff remarks shared in the moment, but for many special events, they should be prepared well in advance. Nowadays, some toast-givers devote extra time to preparing toasts, particularly because they know these sentiments can live on indefinitely on social media. Giving a toast can induce anxiety, but some

nerves can be relieved simply by doing one's homework and not procrastinating.

## Writing tips

A person giving a toast is trying to gain the attention of a group of people who may not be very attentive. These tips can improve the content of the toasts and their delivery.

- Keep 'you' out of it. This toast is not about you. It's about the person you are honoring. Therefore, do not put any self-congratulatory messages in the toast. Make it all about the person - even beginning the toast with that person's name.

- Hook people in. Open the toast with a good joke or anecdote that will help introduce the person of honor. For example,

Jake is a great guy because he's the type of person who will offer to meet you at your dorm room at 2 a.m. with pizza and beer to get you through a study session. Too bad he has a horrible sense of direction and repeatedly shows up at the wrong door.

- Tell a story. Reference the person in the toast, other audience members, and even yourself if you can be painted in a self-deprecating light.

- Keep it short. This is a toast, not a monologue. Be brief so that the audience doesn't lose interest. Set a five-minute limit.

- Wrap it up. Conclude the toast by tying the story back to the introduction and making sure to include the audience once more. This will help you get the biggest laughs and applause.



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# Selecting a perfect wedding gown

Many brides-to-be visit bridal shops with specific goals in mind regarding the style of their wedding gowns. Some women come equipped with magazine tear-outs or pull up ideas on their mobile phones. Others may have an entire scrapbook filled with various ideas they've been compiling for years.

Much consideration is given to wedding gowns. The cost and silhouette of the dress may garner the bulk of that consideration, but brides might want to spend more time considering comfort.

Depending on the time of day their weddings take place, brides can spend 12 hours or more in their wedding gowns on their wedding day. However, when shopping for their gowns, brides may prioritize beauty over comfort, even though it's entirely possible to find a gown that's both stunning and comfortable. When staff and friends or family who have come along to offer advice start to blush over wedding gowns, brides-to-be may feel pressured to downplay any discomfort they feel.

To make sure brides look flawless and elegant but are still comfortable in their wedding gowns, consider the following



tips.

- Know what to highlight and what to cover up. No two body types are the same, and many women feel certain parts of their bodies are their best assets while they want to downplay others. Try on

gowns that play up your best features. If you have shapely legs, consider a dramatic gown with a slit to show them off. Certain gowns can enhance the décolleté or show off an hourglass shape. Remember, many gowns can be modified so that you feel secure and confident. Sleeves can be added or fabric placed to cover up any perceived flaws. Confidence and pride are important parts of the comfort factor.

- Get sized correctly. Bridal gown sizes do not coincide with street sizes. Depending on the manufacturer, brides may have to select gowns that are several sizes larger than they would normally wear. This should not be a cause for alarm. Brides should go by their measurements. Attempting to squeeze into a dress that is too small will only lead to discomfort on the wedding day.

- Purchase the right undergarments. Improperly fitting bras, shape-wear

and other undergarments can lead to discomfort as well. Some seamstresses can sew in supportive cups to remove the need for separate bras. Brides can explore various options to reduce the visibility of certain accouterments.

- Move around in the gown. Brides should not just stand in front of the mirror and smile when trying on gowns. Put them through their paces. Try sitting, bending and even a little dancing. Make sure the dress is comfortable to move around in.

- Try different options. The gown brides have in mind may not be the one they ultimately go home with. Explore different styles and materials. Choose cooler, breezier fabrics and lightweight gowns, like crepe, georgette or organza, for summer weddings. Heavier fabrics, such as brocade, may be more comfortable in the winter.

Wedding gowns can be both beautiful and comfortable for those who know how to shop.

## Did you know?

According to the 2015 Real Weddings Study from The Knot, the most popular month for couples to get engaged is December. The survey also found that the average length of a couple's engagement is now 14.5 months. Where June once was the most popular month of the year to tie the knot, today's couples are now heading down the aisle most often in October. Seventeen percent of weddings now occur in October, closely followed by 15 percent in September. And at what age are couples saying their "I dos"? The average marrying age for a bride is 29 and it is 31 for the groom.

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# Make it a special mother/son dance

Weddings celebrate the unions of happy couples ready to pledge their lives to each other. In theory, the wedding day spotlight should be shared equally by brides and grooms. But brides often eclipse their grooms, as guests are drawn to stunning bridal gowns.

Though grooms might play second fiddle for much of their wedding days, there is one moment when all eyes are on the groom and a special lady in his life. The mother/son dance is a tradition that many grooms embrace as their opportunity to show their mothers how much they love and appreciate them. The mother/son dance is an ideal time to create a special moment, and the following are some tips to personalize the dance.

**Precede the bride and her father.** Make your own tradition and switch up the timing of the dances. Be the first to take a spin on the dance floor and set the tone for the other traditional songs to come.

**Create a photo montage.** Work with an entertainment company or photographer to create a slideshow of images showing you and your mother together and separately. If possible, include some photos that were shot during the wedding ceremony, asking the photographer to capture the look on your mother's face during pivotal moments of the ceremony.

**Show off your dance skills.** One increasingly popular wedding trend is to choreograph dances. Here's an opportunity for grooms and their mothers



to show off their stellar dance moves.

Give mom the opportunity to express her sentiments to you, let her choose the song as mothers of the groom do not typically toast their sons during weddings or even rehearsal dinners.

**Invite other son/mother duos up.** If the idea of dancing alone with your mother is a bit intimidating, give other mothers in attendance an opportunity to share the spotlight. Celebrate all mothers in attendance, encouraging any mothers and sons who are present to dance together.

Grooms may not garner the bulk of guests' attention on their wedding days. But they can take steps to make their special dances with their mothers more memorable and unique.

# Toss aside the bouquet and reinvent the tradition

Enjoyable wedding events are full of traditions that are built into the day. Tradition lends familiarity to the proceedings and serves as unwritten cues for guests.

Certain traditions invite guest participation making great memories for both couples and their guests. However, that doesn't mean couples can't put their own unique spin on things.

In a 2015 Jezebel poll of about 4,500 readers, 19 percent supported having a bouquet toss, but 81 percent were against it, suggesting that this tradition is ready for some updating.

The bouquet toss traces its origins to Olde English times. In those days, women used to try to rip pieces of the bride's dress and flowers in order to obtain some of her good luck. To escape from the crowd, the bride would toss her bouquet and run



away. The bouquet is tossed with the idea that whoever catches it will be the next to marry. Today, however, some single women are no longer interested in finding matches at a wedding and view the bouquet toss as an archaic tradition. Others dislike the expectation that they stand on the dance floor with the hopes of finding a spouse.

For couples who want to embrace the traditional bouquet toss while giving it a more modern twist, consider the following suggestions.

**Girls-only dance:** Invite all the women out on the floor - not just the single ones - and play a female-centric empowerment song or one that mentions ladies having a good time. This puts the emphasis on having fun rather than finding a spouse.

**Attach a prize to the toss.** To encourage people to participate, explain that the bouquet- and garter-toss winners

get prizes - and that the prize has nothing to do with finding a partner.

**Anniversary countdown:** Invite all of the married couples to the center of the dance floor. The DJ or band can play a beautiful love song and count up the years as the song plays. As each year is mentioned, couples leave the dance floor after their most recent anniversary has passed. The last couple on the dance floor marks the couple who has been married the longest. That couple gets to take home the bouquet.

**A bridal piñata.** Guests can take turns hitting a bouquet-shaped piñata. It's fun and entertaining and doesn't discriminate on age or marital status.

With a little ingenuity, the traditional bouquet toss can be reborn into something more fun and memorable.

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# Six reasons to dine out this Valentine's day

Valentine's Day is celebrated in various ways throughout the world. One of the more popular methods of spending time with a romantic partner is over a delicious meal at a nice restaurant.

Statistics Brain says that 34.6 percent of Valentine's Day celebrants in the United States dine outside of the home, making this day dedicated to couples one of the most popular days to dine out all year.

Dining out on Valentine's Day helps to make the day more special, and the following are a number of additional reasons why couples should enjoy a meal out this February 14.

**1. Embrace the chance to try new foods.** Dining out gives individuals the opportunity to try new cuisine they may not attempt at home. This is a chance to expand flavor profiles and give something new a chance.

**2. Enjoy creative plating.** Many restaurants expend extra effort on

presentation on Valentine's Day, dressing the plates with special garnish or with a unique presentation of the foods. Valentine's Day meals are often as beautiful to look at as they are delicious to eat.



Experiencing such visual masterpieces can add to the enjoyment of the night out.

**3. Enjoy a night off from cooking.** One of the biggest benefits of dining out

on Valentine's Day is enjoying an evening away from the kitchen. Heading out for a restaurant meal means no stressing over what to cook for dinner, no wrangling with ingredients and no post-meal cleanup.

**4. Learn something new.** Chefs and restaurants may pull out all the stops for a special occasion like Valentine's Day. Diners may learn more about exotic foods

and wine pairings on Valentine's Day than they might when dining out on less popular nights.

**5. Beat the winter blues.** For much of the country, Valentine's Day occurs during a time of year when winter is at its most harsh. Wintertime can be isolating as many people spend increased hours indoors to avoid inclement weather. Dining out gives couples the opportunity to get some fresh air and dine in a social environment that can help buoy spirits.

**6. Jump start other activities.** Dining at a restaurant may be the precursor to other things to come on Valentine's Day. While out, couples may opt to head to a movie, enjoy some local live theater or stroll through a museum gallery. A good meal can make for the perfect starter to a memorable Valentine's Day.

Dining out on Valentine's Day is a tradition that can benefit couples in various ways and make an already special holiday that much more memorable.

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## Romantic films to watch with your valentine

· *Beauty and the Beast* (1991): This animated classic tells the tale of a prince who is disfigured into a beast to outwardly represent his internal ugliness. Fans of the animated film will have another opportunity to fall in love again with the live-action retelling of the story set for release in March 2017.

· *Once* (2007): A modern-day busker in Dublin has a chance meeting with a Czech immigrant. The two begin to collaborate musically and a romance blossoms.

· *Say Anything* (1989): In a tale of first love, Lloyd seeks to capture the heart of Diane, who is an unattainable high school beauty.

· *The Notebook* (2004): Based on Nicholas Sparks' novel of the same name, this modern cult classic is set in 1940s South Carolina.

· *When Harry Met Sally* (1989): Close friends Harry and Sally have known each other for years and ponder if an intimate relationship would ruin the friendship.

· *Gone With the Wind* (1939): This sweeping epic is set in the antebellum south during the American Civil War. · *Sense and Sensibility* (1995): This film is a dramatic interpretation of Jane Austen's novel published in 1811. · *Roman Holiday* (1953): A European princess is disillusioned with her life and needs an escape.

· *The Princess Bride* (1987): Wesley and Buttercup begin with a tumultuous servant-master relationship. A classic and often hilarious tale of romance.

· *Casablanca* (1943): A nightclub owner in Casablanca is reunited with his old flame, only to discover she is traveling with her husband.

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