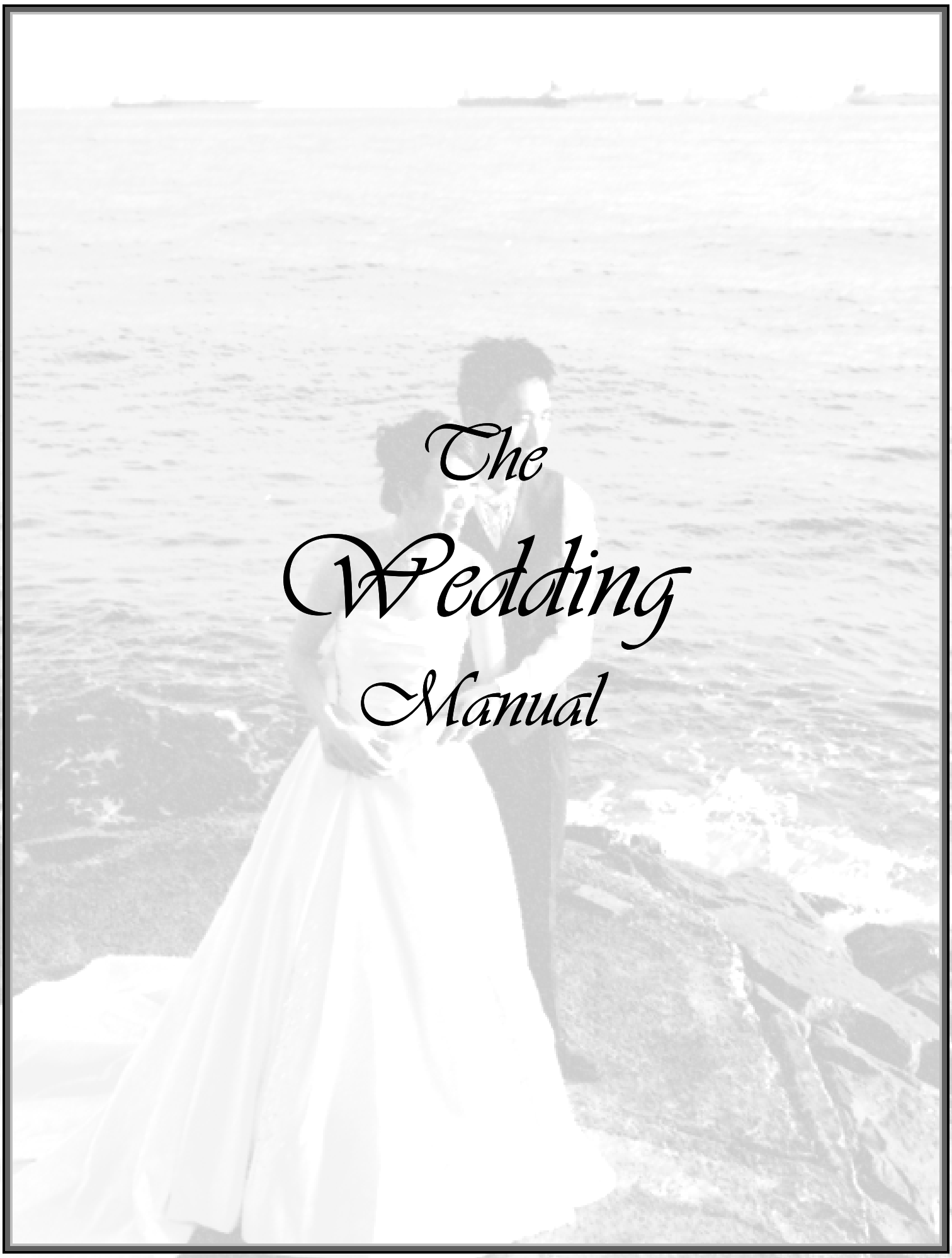

The Wedding Manual

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Contents

Introduction 3

The Proposal 4

The Wedding Theme 6
- Interview: Invitation with Love 8

Choosing the Rings 10
- Interview: Rings and oh that Diamond! 11

Skin and Body Care for the Bride 15
- Interview: Looking The Best 16

The Perfect Gown? 20
- Interview: Gown of My Love 21

Shoes! 23
- Interview: A Lifetime Choice 24

Wedding Expenses 27

Acknowledgement 29

INTRODUCTION

We don't know who started it but getting married in Singapore can be such a complicated affair. Many men and women can attest to that. In a modern society like ours that still attempt to retain some traditions, we end up having to balance both sides.

Many can be so clueless. I came across those who had no idea when an engagement ring should be given. A friend of my husband actually asked him for a template of potential wedding expenses. Many researched extensively for the right diamond at the right price while fearing the consequences of a rejected proposal.

What follows after the proposal is a mountain of tasks that both excite and drain a couple. Which bridal package to take? Or should one even go ala carte? From wedding gowns to photography and videography, where can one find the best and the cheapest?

Whenever I browed through the local and overseas wedding sites, I get the feeling that most of our local weddings look like run-of-the mill products. Not to say that the grass is always greener on the other side. After all, I personally feel that our traditions here make our weddings distinct. Nonetheless, on the whole, local weddings, at least of the same race or religion, look like each other!

In the process of creating a wedding that might just look like any others, your bank accounts start to dwindle significantly and if you don't watch it, you might end up laden with debts to service for years.

While marriage could be an once-in-a-lifetime event, decades of couple-hood follow after the wedding. The debts that follow a wedding pose a stress on the marriage. In fact, the top reason for a breakdown in marriage is attributed to finances. Could we have done it differently?

In this book, I do not aim to cover every aspect of the wedding in detail. My intention is to show how one can plan a wedding wisely with independence, freedom and excitement. I had the honor to interview some freelance designers for gowns, rings, shoes, invitation cards and even a clinical doctor. I have personally engaged their services for my own wedding preparations after a lot of research, trials and disappointments. In particular however, I got them involved in this book because they represent the freedom of choice and individuality.

May I have the pleasure here to share with you how you can do it differently?

The Proposal

My husband proposed to me every single day we dated. He would cheekily explain that is for practice. On the day that marks the leap year, he presented me a handmade book titled Epiphany. On the last page, he wrote, “Would you marry me? (Yes, I’m serious.)”

Every girl and woman would love to see her own proposal as something memorable. Must the event be glamorous or expensive? Depends. One size never fits all. You can take ideas from movies but do realize that this is your girlfriend you are proposing to, not any make-believe role.

Consider what your girlfriend likes. What would make her so touched that she can’t think of anything else but to be with you forever? Relive the good memories of dating. A friend made an album of the photos he and his girlfriend took together through their years of dating when he proposed.

Look into your strengths. Forget the weaknesses. You don’t want to feel so inadequate that you procrastinate. Balance your strengths with what your girlfriend likes. My husband is good at handicrafts and I like books in general. Hence the handmade book was perfect for us.

A proposal is hardly complete without the engagement ring. This ring signifies the agreement to marriage and may even serve as a “back off, guys, she’s mine.” There is a saying that a decent engagement ring should be some months’ of the

man's salary. Perhaps it does come across as being sincere but honestly, there are more economical ways of showing sincerity. More money is going to be spent on the wedding later anyway, so budget in advance. What makes a nice engagement ring? Read the chapter on "Choosing the Rings."

Of course, you need not fret a single cell in your brain if both you and your girlfriend fall in the ultimate practical category. The question is not "Will you marry me?" but "Shall we apply for a flat?" Another friend of mine always jokes that he was conned by his wife into marriage when she asked him if they should apply for a flat while he was engrossed in his computer games.

No matter how you choose to do it, the Proposal is only the beginning of a long journey. Make it enjoyable within your means.

The Wedding Theme

No matter what budget you are on, you are going to spend on a wedding anyway. So why not make it memorable?

Before everything else, decide on your wedding theme.

A theme personalizes a wedding and enhances the meaning of it. It is a clear reflection of the couple's personalities and is representative of the couple. Hence a theme makes a wedding event unique. It also gives coherence to the event, creating beautiful memories for both the marrying couple and guests. The good thing about deliberating on the choice of the theme is that it will guide the process in planning for the wedding. It becomes easier to determine what invitation cards to make, what gowns to choose, what hotels or restaurants to pick, what programs to set and so on.

Without a theme, the guest leaves the event with hardly any memories of it, save for some bad food experience perhaps. When you look back at your pictures, if not for you and your other half's presence, you probably cannot tell it is your own wedding. With so much money, time and energy spent on a wedding, it is really unjustified to have something that is like all others.

There are couples who invest a lot of resources to set up their unique wedding themes. If your pockets are not that deep, don't despair! Wedding preparations should be enjoyed, not seen as a burden on your pockets. Learning to work with limited resources is the ultimate creativity unleashed. Here are some questions you could ask yourself to determine the wedding theme:

1. 20 years later, when you look back at the photos and videos of your wedding. What feeling do you wish they should convey? It could be glamorous, homely, saccharine sweet, romantic, innocent, absolute happiness and so on. This would determine the venue, gowns, invitation cards and even the food possibly.

2. What interests do you have in common with your other half? Some couples love Star Wars and movies so much that their wedding dinner looks just like it. I have read about a couple who were so eco-friendly that they did not serve shark fin. Yet another couple likes traveling and hence they included vintage features in their invitation cards.

3. What kind of colors do you think will fit your wedding theme? This color can be used to determine the flowers, decorations and the invitation cards. Wedding colors need not be pink all the time. Nowadays some hotels have gone retro by introducing the black and red theme. After browsing through many wedding-related sites, I figure combinations of peaches and

orange, green and black, aqua and red or even purple and grey look refreshing. I personally like this website Style Me Pretty for the real life examples of vivid color themes and budget ideas.

4. What would you like to tell the guests about yourself and your other half? The whole point of a wedding is to inform the guests of your marriage and to invite them to celebrate with you on the union. So that they can share your joy, it is appropriate to share with them some history, like how the two of you met. The place of your wedding could also be determined by the history you and your other half share. I read in The Straits Times in Urban – Bridal Special, how this couple who worked in the bio-medical field created a theme of lab coats and test tubes to reflect exactly their backgrounds.

5. How involved do you want your guests to be? I was told that in Malaysia, the guests are invited to sing at karaoke. The Indians would have a roll of a time having mass dance. And so do many other ethnicities like the Jews and Greeks. Why should only the wedding couple get to move around? They might be the hosts but not exactly the entertainers of the night. Do you have the time to plan out the details? Be sure to get some extra hands and legs on the day. Pay back in return, through barter trade, a treat or some tokens.

6. Be realistic and budget. How much can you really afford to spend? Stick to the figure. Research extensively online for resources. Singaporebrides.com is the local forum and can be useful if you do not mind scrolling through pages after pages. While decorating the venue for our ROM, we were a bit overwhelmed by our florist's quote. So we decided to decorate the guest tables ourselves. With miniature rose heads and dried rose petals from Australia, tea light holders and candles from IKEA, we got our helpers to do up a simple decoration for each guest table. Even with shipping costs, we still managed to save.

7. To what extent do you need to keep to tradition? You might like to play techno music but your mum might freak out. It is fine to push boundaries, just ensure that there is no unhappiness, especially the in-laws!

INTERVIEW: INVITATION WITH LOVE

I had the honor to interview Gobbs Lim, owner of Forest Creatives. Her mission is to turn business dreams and marketing vision into fruition with seeds of great ideas and prides herself as a geek wannabe. She has worked with some of the major clients like Hewlett Packard, Nickelodeon, Sembawang Engineers and Constructors Pte Ltd, and Underwriters Laboratories Inc.

1. To design or to choose a wedding invitation card, what should be the first question that one should address first?

The overall theme of the wedding event, the location it will be held and what the husband and wife-to-be will be wearing.

2. Other than informing guests of the event venue, date and time, are there other things that the card should ideally convey?

Show your guests how much it means to have them as part of your event through conscious design and overall presentation.
Things to include could be the names of bride and groom and their respective folks. the driving direction, advice on type of food available with consideration for halal and vegans and RSVP details.

3. How does one make a wedding card striking? You know, those that you are not likely to throw away immediately after reading...

Work with Forest Creatives! But seriously, you can choose to work with a designer who is strong in conceptualizing yet does not design for him or her own ego.
Authentic design that goes with theme and messaging specific to the bride and groom's union makes their card special.
Hint: Forget everything you know about what a wedding card should be. Ask yourself if it's necessary for all wedding cards to go with 1 fold and script fonts?

4. Is there any one part of the card that one cannot save on?

Paper and quality printing. A lousy finishing does great injustice to a great design and cheapens the whole presentation.

5. Is it really necessary to splurge to make the ideal card?

It's not necessary. A reasonable budget can get you an impressive card.
Work with an experienced designer with good production knowledge and is able to

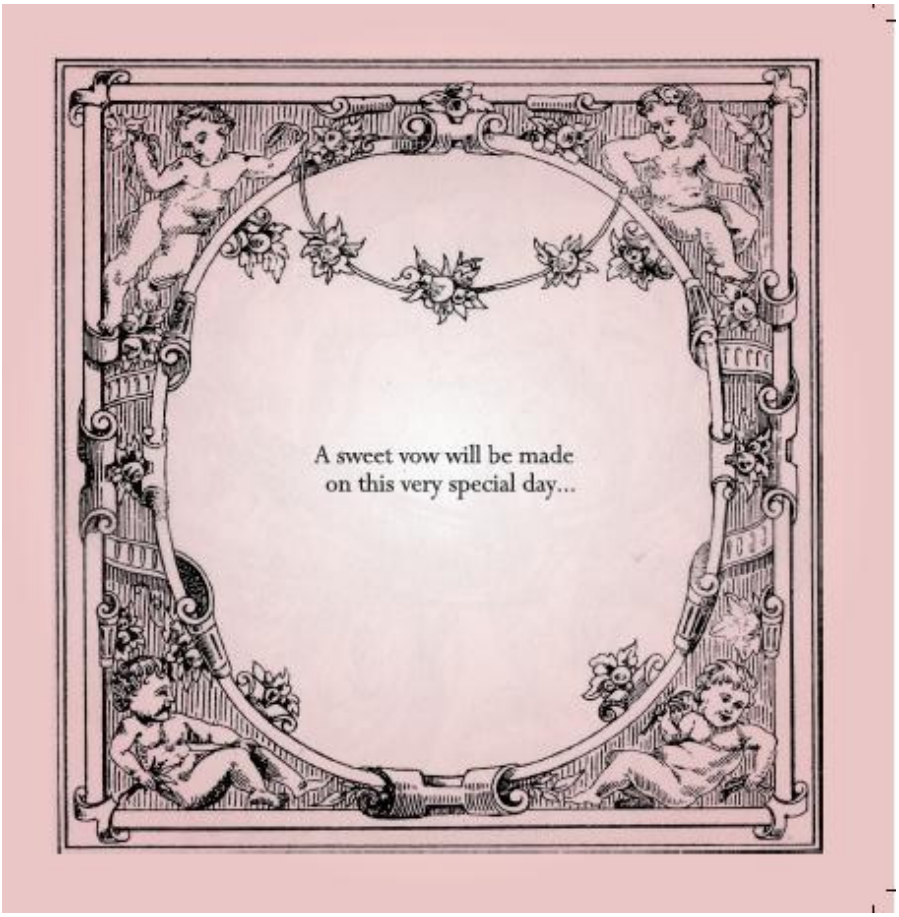
think strategically so that the finishing of your card and your pocket are taken care of at the same time.

6. We are in the age where most things have gone electronic. How can paper cards still continue to make sense? What do you think of electronic invitations?

E-card is definitely one of the methods to go by! Having said that, there's always the environmental friendly paper stock to use.
Let's not forget the older folks who may not as internet savvy as we do.

7. If it is for your own wedding, how would your invitation card look like?

It would be an elegantly designed book mark made of environmentally friendly paper stock to mark my special day. It will be accompanied by an e-invite with adapted look and feel.
Visual graphic will be a shot of me and my partner dressed in our wedding gowns on a white water raft with a message that goes something like ' All dresses up and rearing to go but not without you!'



Choosing the Rings

This is one of the most exciting parts in the entire process. Those of us who have limited budgets to stick to would scour the island for the ideal ring. Those with unlimited budget also scour the island in search of the elusive one and only one ring.

Trays and trays of sparkling jewelries look awesome under the spotlights. Which to choose? There is plenty of advice given in forums and sites by people who meant well or over enthusiastic salespeople. Unfortunately, many are really opinionated, based on personal experiences (thus biased), myths passed down or simply advertising gimmicks.

INTERVIEW: RINGS AND OH THAT DIAMOND!

For some independent and professional advice, I consulted a jeweler, Amanda, General Manager of eClarity, an online jewelry store, providing email and web-cam consultation, 24-hour SMS customer service.

Amanda, eClarity

Accredited Jewellery Professional (GIA, New York), Graduate Gemologist (GIA, New York)

1. Most men are befuddled by diamonds. Some heard that the bigger the diamond, the better. There are others who claim the cut matters most. Still, there are those who are only assured by the brand name. Can you briefly explain what to look out for in a diamond?

It sounds like a cliché, but the bible is – the 4Cs.

a. Carat – Is a weight. Except for unusual deep/shallow-cuts, most of the time, weight does reflect the size (i.e. big or small). And size, is known to be the most obvious C.

b. Colour – The second most obvious C ranged from D to Z, it's graded by trained pair of eyes under daylight, by comparison. DEF are colourless and are most desirable. Most people perceived a whiter diamond to be a better diamond. Because the rest, are harder to judge.

c. Cut – A good cut gives a diamond optical efficiency. It's internationally recognised that 57/58 facets gives the best brilliance, fire, and scintillations. The many-facets or the many-patterns-under-fire-scopes, are advertising subjects. If you love premium cuts, 3EX (in cuts/polish/symmetry) is believed to emit maximum light returns, and since it's noted on GIA report, and since GIA is reliable, international, and academic, the grading last longer than advertised cuts.

d. Clarity – Refers to the freedom from inclusions, which are usually microscopic. Except for rare big clouds that affect light reflections, VS1 or 2 are totally acceptable and recommended.

The 5th C is Cost. I've heard that the proposal ring should cost 3 times of the man's salaries. A general guideline for a nice diamond to be proud of, and yet practical in dollars and sense, would be DEF, VS, EX/VG. Size wise, it does matters, but it's very personal.

2. For engagement rings, is there a standard that it should be a solitaire?

I have designed and made rings with other stones like sapphires or rubies requested by bride-to-bes. However, since diamonds are believed to be forever (literally because they have hardness scale 10). And one single diamond symbolizes my-only-one forever, it is undeniably more meaningful.

3. This question is for men who want to buy the engagement ring secretly but they don't know their girlfriend's ring size! Could you advise?

I have received thread, paper strips, diameter and circumference in mm, but they are all not accurate. If you don't have help from bride-to-be's best friends/ sisters/ mother, we could follow the following guidelines, which is my general observations for non-Cinderella-Singaporean-girls. Bigger is better than smaller (so that you could slip her into the ring), and remember to ask for 1 free resizing from the jeweller.

Clothes Size: Extra Small
Ring size: 5/6/7

Clothes Size: Small
Ring size: 7/8/9

Clothes Size: Medium
Ring size: 9/10/11

Clothes size: Large
Ring size: 11/12/13

Clothes size: Extra Large
Ring size: 13/14/15

4. I have seen most wedding bands are made different for the bride and groom. Typically, the bride's band has diamonds and the groom's band will be plain. Are diamonds a no-no for the masculine?

I find Asian guys (Japanese and Hong Kongers) more opened to diamonds than Westerners. For Singaporean guys who live in highly mixed cultural society, the choice would depend on the individual.
I think guys could keep an open mind. Singaporean guys are getting more interesting in their outfits; they could slowly get more opened to diamonds. As long as you don't work in the jungle, one nice hardy diamond, (if he doesn't like rounds brilliant, he could venture into less sparkly cut, like baguette, emerald, tapered shapes), a black diamond, or a manly blue sapphire, would make your wedding band special.

5. What kind of metal would you recommend for the band? White gold, yellow gold, platinum or even titanium?

Traditionally the valuable metals are gold and platinum. Titanium, light and cheap, together with other metals like stainless steel, was used more for industrial purposes. So I would rule out Titanium for wedding bands.

18k white gold, an alloy of gold and palladium (and sometimes nickel) is lighter and more affordable than platinum. It's strong and highly recommended for setting of diamonds. It does turn yellowish after wearing for sometimes (a year or more), but re-plating (of rhodium) is a simple process. 18k yellow gold and 18k rose gold (with copper content) look good on fair skin, and it adds on to the variety in designs.

Platinum is heavy. The benefit is that it's a white metal. However, do note that it's usually 2 to 3 times more expensive than 18k white gold.

6. For those looking for a unique pair of wedding bands, what would you suggest?

a. Design your own rings together. If you are genetically not strong in drawing, you could get inspirations from magazines; work with your jeweller to combine your favourite designs. It would be even better to be inspired by designs that you see on physical rings, you could visualise better that way.

b. Don't just get what you see from the counter, make changes – like change the diamond shape, the colours, the finishing (gloss/ matte), would add little pleasant surprise to your bands.

c. Create a joint signature and let your jeweller craft it on the rings.

d. Lastly, and simplest of all, engrave a special or a secret message inside the ring.

7. For the budget conscious, what would you recommend?

a. Choose plain white gold instead of platinum, or a mixed of white/rose/yellow gold.

b. Choose bands that are not too broad, the broader it is, the heavier it is, and gold/ platinum price go by grams.

c. Select from the counter designs, make minimal changes to the rings, you could still change the finishing.

d. Do without comfort fit if you can, choose straight fit. A comfort fit ring could be 1-3 grams heavier than a straight fit ring.

Skin and Body Care for the Bride

On the Big Day, tonnes of photographs and miles of video footage would be made. The moments would be immortalized. If you are going to be made immortal, chances are you would rather look pretty.

Other than beauty shining from the inside, the next two things to note would be to smile and to keep good skin. Smiling should be easy on that day unless it is forced marriage (I hope not!). Caring for the skin is a challenge if you are not genetically favored or Father Time has simply been unforgiving. It is even more so a problem in our humid environment. Piles of makeup put on the Big Day start to melt, in part also due to overactive glands. Carry lots of tissues and blotters else you risk looking like a shiny frying pan on that day! I personally like Fancl's oil control powder.

Again, the world wide net is a very useful engine to look for resources. However, you must be discerning enough to note that not all are credible or suitable for you. Word of mouth might be a good way of verification but do note that some stuffs could just be old wives' tales. Note that even if it does work for other people, remember, your skin could react differently.

A common measure that brides take would be to sign up for facial packages. Typically, the advice given is to do it consistently over some time in order to see effects. These days technology has made it such that facials are no longer just cleansing, exfoliation and extraction. You can even have fairer skin, taut and shapely face, they promise. It is even claimed that you can eliminate pimples overnight with a handheld device, Zeno. Nonetheless, do understand the technology behind, the possible side-effects and always inquire about the downtime and maintenance required.

INTERVIEW: LOOKING THE BEST

I had the opportunity to interview Dr Low Chai Ling from The Sloane Clinic. Dr Low is also the author of "In Full Bloom", a book on how to look fabulous during and after pregnancy.

1. How much time in advance should the bride start to prep her face and figure for the big day?

The amount of preparation time needed for each bride will depend on her skin condition and if she has always been taking care of her skin. If her skin is relatively problem-free, she can start a month before the wedding with a few skin prepping facials, and that will be sufficient to put the glow back to her skin.

If however, a bride has greater skin concerns such as acne, or scars, it would be advisable for her to seek a doctor's advice at least 6-8 months prior to the "big day". This is because some types of acne scars may require laser treatments done monthly for at least 6 sessions for optimal results. Other types of stubborn acne may require treatment for 2-3 months before complete clearance, and thereafter the bride may have other skin issues such as scarring or enlarged pores that need to be addressed.

2. There are so many beauty centers and aestheticians providing facials and treatments. How does the bride determine what is appropriate?

The bride should always do her research and not be swayed by gimmicky promotions or advertisements. It is better to receive a clinically effective treatment at a higher cost than to go for cheaper treatments that do not work, and end up having to do ridiculously large packages of 20 – 30 sessions. When preparing for your wedding, time is of the essence and the last thing a bride needs is to be bogged down by ineffective and time-consuming beauty treatments.

It is good to speak to your friends and ask around for recommendations. Word-of-mouth usually works well, especially if it comes from a reliable source. You should also go down to the place , be it a clinic or a beauty salon , to take a look at their menu of services. If you are short on time, browse through their website so you have an idea of the list of treatments that are available. If it is an aesthetic clinic, you can also make an appointment for a consultation and skin evaluation before committing yourself.

Lastly, it is important for you to be comfortable with the person who is going to take care of your skin for this big day. Having a good relationship with your doctor or aesthetician ensures that your concerns are well taken care of, and exponentially increases the success of any treatment.

3. In our humid weather, oily skin is a problem for most brides on the Big Day, especially when they are in their 20s. Other than blotting every few hours, are there other remedies?

There are a few suggestions for oily skins:

a. Start on an oil-control skincare regime at least 2 weeks prior to the big day. It is important to give your skincare regime some time for it to work. Your doctor or aesthetician can advise you accordingly on the most appropriate skincare for your skin type. This can reduce oil production and ensure that your skin stays matte and fresh for a longer time.
b. Stay cool. And this may mean hydrating with ice cold beverages or sneaking to air-conditioned places whenever possible; this will ensure that you perspire less and in turn have skin that is drier and matter for longer periods of time.

c. You can choose to receive an Aramis laser treatment a week before your big day to get on top of your sebum production. Aramis laser will regulate overactive sebaceous glands so your skin is less oily. It is an effective treatment for oily and acne prone skins.

d. For the really desperate brides, some do start on a short course of Isotretinoin (Roaccutane) tablets a week prior to the big day. However, this can only be done under a doctor's supervision, and the bride needs to be aware of certain side effects, such as dry mouth, dry eyes, changes to your liver function or cholesterol levels etc. Patients cannot be pregnant at the time of medication and needs to have stopped the medication for 60 days prior to conceiving to avoid the risk of fetal defects as a result of his medication. A blood test prior to starting this medication may also be necessary.

4. The worst that can ever happen is a big zit erupting the day before or even on the Big day itself. Any emergency remedy?

a. Apply a cold compress or ice to the area to bring down swelling

b. If you have a doctor taking care of your skin, ask for an intralesional steroid injection that will bring down the pimple in as little as 24 hours.

c. DO NOT pick at the pimple

d. And in your hurry to bring down the pimple, never over-apply anti-acne medication, this will only dry up the area excessively, resulting in redness and flaking of the skin which is more unsightly in the long run.

5. Flabby arms and tummies are some of the common problems faced by brides especially when the gowns can be pretty unforgiving. Are there measures that they can take in advance?

A good diet and exercise regime is very helpful for toning up the body. *The Sloane Clinic Guide to Successful Weight Management* is available at all branches of The Sloane Clinic, and brides -to-be can pick them up free of charge. The guide also discusses other methods of weight management which will include medications to control appetite.

The Sloane Clinic's series of guide books is a not-for-profit public education project dedicated to providing up-to-date and accessible health information. The Sloane Clinic's doctors and staff members work together to compile relevant and concise information so that members of the public, regardless of whether they are existing patients of the clinic, can have a reliable source of medical information at no or little cost.

Bride s -to-be can also turn to Solidea Undergarments which is a specialized Italian compression hosiery to improve lymphatic flow and help to reduce water retention and bloating in areas such as tummy and thighs. Available in various sizes at the Sloane Clinic, and can be worn a week prior to the big day or even on the actual day itself as a "corset".

Thermage Body is a radiofrequency treatment aimed at tightening and toning up loose, saggy and flabby body bits in as little as one session. Results may take 6 months to be fully apparent so this is something you want to plan for in advance.

6. It is prevalent among brides to lose weight before the Big day. What is a sensible target?

Many brides hope to look their skinniest on their big day. Some have realistic goals, others do not. If you are already at your ideal weight, then there is no need to lose anymore weight. You should concentrate on toning and firming your muscles instead, as well as keeping your body healthy and strong for your important occasion.

If you are above your ideal weight, then it is realistic to drop a few pounds prior to the big day, and maintaining it even beyond your wedding day! You can work out your ideal weight by calculating your BMI. BMI is calculated as Weight/ (Height x Height). An ideal BMI for Asians should be 18.5- 23 kg/m2.

7. For the budget conscious, what kind of care steps would you recommend?

a. Start with good exercise and a proper diet; it takes little to live healthily as you will be eating out less. Eat more vegetables and fiber, aim too cut down on sugar, red meats and processed foods.

b. For your skin, start with some good skincare products first and see if that works for your skin.

c. If you want to splurge a little, you can also do DIY home facials by using over-the-counter scrubs and masks to spruce your skin up on a regular basis.
d. You can also try your hand at homemade scrubs and masks, there are many websites that will give you details on how to create a home facial using natural ingredients.
e. If you have a severe skin condition, consult a doctor and highlight the fact that you are on a budget. There are still many ways that they can help you with your budget in mind. This will ensure that you receive the best care without busting your wallet.

The Perfect Gown?

I have always been head over heels with Greek-inspired gowns. I like to visualize an off-shoulder soft creamy gown that flows along the curves of the body gracefully. I didn't see anything that matched my fantasy until I stepped into a bridal gown boutique shop. The designer had used layers of purple and pink chiffon to create an evening gown, using braids as straps and pastel flowers as details. I melted on the spot. Greek Gown! Only, it wasn't mine.

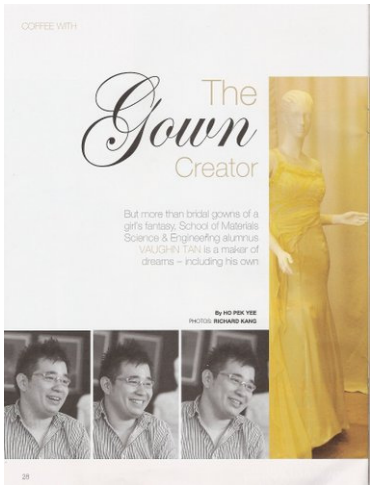
Any perfectionist like me is hard to please. Unfortunately, the search for the perfect gown stumbles upon road blocks. Firstly, it is never recommended to buy a gown online and secondly, most sites that sell gowns do not ship internationally.

There are a couple of things you should take note when choosing your gown. Firstly, how does a gown accentuate your figure and hide away the unsightly? Secondly, what color suits you best? Thirdly, what kind of theme should your gown be based on? Is the event held indoors or outdoors?

Although I am considered slim, I have hips that are large in proportion to my waist which is also higher than normal. So while designing my gown for the ROM event, my designer suggested an empire cut to take advantage of the high waist, hiding the hips. I also insisted that the gown should not reveal any tummy. I cringe at the thought of after-food bloat. Next, he assessed my skin color which is medium fair. He also wanted to know where the event would be held. Our event was a garden theme with a colonial flavor. Given my medium built and skin color, he decided I could carry off bright colors. Since I am open, he gave me a choice of apple green or sweet pink with yellow layers. I chose the latter. Seeing how smitten I was with the Greek Gown, he incorporated the soft flowing feel into the design.

INTERVIEW: GOWN OF MY LOVE

Vaughn Tan has a degree in Materials Engineering but his childhood dream was to become a fashion designer. He landed his first job in a bridal boutique chain where he was immersed in wedding gown design. Today he has his own boutique shop and his work has been widely published in local news.



1. To choose her wedding gowns, what should the bride ask herself first?

She should have a vision or concept about her gown & overall wedding theme. After which, she needs to discuss whether her concept can be carried out successfully.

2. It is often said that for the solemnization ceremony, the gown should be a short one or at least simple. How true is that?

It is not necessarily true. It depends on the solemnization ceremony's nature. If it is a grand function with many relatives and friends invited, then the gown and the overall concept should be proportionally customized to reflect the ceremony's nature.

3. In the world of today, it seems that the more flesh revealing the gowns, the better. Does that make sense?

No. It depends on the bride itself, whether her overall body structure can carry the overall 'feel'.

4. How does a bride choose a gown based on her shape and size, assuming the categories of endomorphs, ectomorphs and mesomorphs?

Different cuts and design are suitable to different body shapes, so it is best to get the gown designer's advice on what design or cut is suitable for you.

5. I was quite freaked that my arms might show up as flabby or tummy sticking out when I wore my wedding gown. How can a bride ensure that she is saved such embarrassment?

You have to choose the right cutting and also the right design & 'cover up' to hide the embarrassing portions and accentuate the good points of the body.

6. How do you make a wedding gown stand out?

The important part of making the gown stand out is to focus on the details (of the gown) and to ensure that the bride wears the gown, not the other way round.

7. For the budget conscious bride, what would you recommend?

We can focus the design suited to her budget, and a good recommendation is to go for the concept 'simple, clear cut and nice'. However, the bride must be realistic and cannot wish for elaborate details, embroidery and the best fabric as all these work require conscious time, money (raw materials) and manpower.

SHOES!

I used to think that shoes should be the least concern for a bride. After all, the gown is so long that it will cover the feet, isn't it?

Alas, I was duly informed that the shoes are visible, albeit for some seconds, throughout a day of photography and videography. (Hint: The picture of your husband bending down to help you wear your shoes is priceless, try it!)

Watching the movie, Sex and The City, confirmed the importance as Carrie Bradshaw lifted her gown to walk up the stairs, revealing enviable shoes, making her look and feel even more glamorous.

More importantly, however, considering that the bride is going to be pretty uneasy moving around with thick makeup, piled hair and tight bosom-hugging "balloon" gowns, comfortable and beautiful shoes is indeed a heavenly godsend.

And I quote a friend, Ilane, from her blog, "But if I have less stellar shoes, I will feel like the girl who's all dressed up in a sexy cocktail dress with granny undies."

The quest for the perfect shoe includes factors like the color, the fabric, the price tag, the uniqueness, the height and so on. In the process, we should not neglect the groom! You do not want to end up towering over your husband. Grooms can always go for hidden platforms so that they can elevate themselves instantly.

I generally categorize bridal shoes into three categories – the lacey, covered shoes, the bling-laden shoes and the most unlikely bridal shoes. I got bored with the first two categories but never could identify those of the last category that can complement the gown.

The essential question is - How can we choose the shoes of a lifetime more effectively?

INTERVIEW: A LIFETIME CHOICE

I had the privilege to interview Belinda Loe, owner of an online shoe boutique, Loe and Behold. Inspired by her own wedding preparations, this petite and chic looking lady has made dreams come true for many more brides.

Loe & Behold
My Heart and Sole ®

1. **When the bride is choosing her bridal shoes, are there any critical questions that she should address?**

Wedding shoes and wedding gowns are often bought on separate occasions.
The dress may be flawless, the shoes gorgeous, but they still may not be perfect together.

Here are 7 important questions she should ask herself to ensure that the shoes are an ideal match for the wedding dress she'll be wearing on the big day. Expressing these thoughts out loud would help her focus on styles that are more flattering.

- **What's the material of her gown?**

- **What color is it?**

All whites are not all created equal. When choosing wedding shoes, be sure to take a swatch of fabric from your wedding dress, tea dress and evening gown. Many wedding gowns are offered in a confusing array of colors such as diamond white, off white, cream, ivory and champagne gold. The intensity of the color is also influenced by the fabric.

- **Where's the Venue?**

- **What's the Height Difference between Bride and Groom?**

- **What's the Heel Height Preference?**

- **What's the bride's greatest footwear worry?**

Bunions, flat feet, prone to abrasions, ugly tows, bulging flesh, weak ankles, skin discolorations and imperfections?

- **What is her body type?**

  Plump girls should avoid flat shoes as the feet would be compressed and flesh spread out, creating an optical illusion of a wider width.

Remember – a slight elevation can elongate the limbs and give the saggy bottom a tight muscular contraction.

Skinny girls often have thin long toes. Its best to keep them covered instead of wearing open toed shoes as it would be more refined thus avoiding the "Chicken Claw Syndrome".

2. Frankly speaking, I find most bridal shoes similar. They have lots of blings and are white or in shades of it. What can make the shoes stand out?

Shoes should not "stand out" in the manner of being disjointed from the theme of the dress. It should carry certain accents already found on the dress, e.g. diamante, pearls, flowers, pleats, ribbons etc.

The right footwear gives an elegant finish.

3. In the movie, Sex And The City, Carrie Bradshaw was wearing very funky bridal shoes (Dior Extreme Shoes covered in smoke- and oyster-colored crystals). In real life, who can pull off such shoes?

A tall girl with a bigger frame can certainly have more advantage in carrying a larger variety of styles.

The gladiator styled shoe in Sex And The City., have thick straps that wrap the feet. So for a petite girl, she would look like being in bondage. Thick strappy shoes look more substantial on a girl with a larger built. Conversely, thin strappy shoes would be lost and looks overly fussy on a big frame.

4. How important are bridal shoes since they are hidden under the huge gown almost all the time?

Wedding is a formal event unless you have intentionally wanted a casual do.

Purchasing bridal related items should be geared towards achieving the desired look. Afterall, considerable research was put into finding the gown of your dreams.

Brides who penny pinch and disregard details fail to realize that pairing it with an inappropriate shoe will diminish the overall visual impact.

With just a little more effort, the footwear and gown will heighten one's sophistication

For many brides, wedding shoes will be part of a sentimental value or keepsake after the rented gowns are returned. It shouldn't just be viewed as a functional item.

5. How many pairs of bridal shoes does the bride need?

At least 3 pairs would be needed. One would be for her wedding gown, one for her evening gown and another for the photo-shoot or back-up shoes.

6. For a budget conscious bride, what would you recommend?

Just because you are budget conscious does not mean you have to go for an inferior product.

Go for good quality shoes that can be dyed. It will give the shoe more mileage and ultimately, that reduce the cost per wear.

Alternatively, shoe clips can give some bling to a plain surface.

7. The grooms are frequently (sadly?) neglected when it comes to shoes and clothes. Would you have some advice for them in their shoe choice?

Comfort is a prime consideration.
For grooms, a tapered or sharper design will lengthen their frame and make them look taller and slimmer.
Try not look like a fuddy-duddy just because you want the shoe to be used for office wear.

Remember the bride will be making every effort to look stunning from head to toe and why shouldn't the groom go through the same degree of effort, after all it's his wedding day too.

Black is always dressier than brown.

Believe it or not, people notice the guy's shoes at a wedding, particularly if they aren't shiny. If the groom hasn't had the inclination to polish his leather shoes in a while, take them to a reputable shoe repair specialist. It's worth the $5 effort.

In terms of socks, you will want black socks that are knee-high. There is nothing more unsightly than a groom wearing socks that are old, faded and droop

Wedding Expenses

The expenses clocked up during the preparations are pretty daunting unless you insist on a simple style. Friends of my husband would often ask him, how much is enough? A colleague of his even did his own version of economics and decided that the money was not worth getting married. Another friend used to joke that she is a budget bride and I almost felt embarrassed for spending a wee too much on my bridal shoes, gowns and so on. Wedding expenses can be such a painful check on reality.

The most important lesson I learnt is to set a budget upfront. Do the necessary research but don't go signing packages or contracts with anyone before you know what your budget is. Stick your feet firmly on the ground and say, "let us consider". Don't worry about the promotion. They all claim it is promotional rate. They just forgot to inform you that it's a round-the-year event.

Potential wedding expense items could include the following:

1. Bridal studio package including photo-shoot
2. Rental / Purchase of bridal gowns and suits (if you go ala-carte)
3. Hidden costs from bridal studio package – ampoule and fake eyelashes for photo-shoot and actual day, choosing extra pictures from the photo-shoot beyond that allowed in your package, second hairdo on the actual day's wedding dinner
4. Hiring of a make-up artist (if you go ala-carte)
5. Photography and Videography
6. Wedding banquet or hotel package
7. Venue rental (if it's not a hotel or restaurant package)
8. Wedding bands and engagement ring
9. Bride and groom's shoes
10. Dowry
11. Red packets for the helpers and the Solemniser who officiates your ROM
12. Wedding invitations printing cost

13. Rental of bridal car (top up if you want the chauffeur to fetch people other than you and your partner)

14. Decoration of venue (if it's not covered as part of the package)

15. Miscellaneous including bridal bouquet, corsages, ring pillow, angbao box (if it's not covered as part of the package)

ALA-CARTE - Personally, if I were to recreate my wedding again, I would go ala-carte instead. There are many competent vendors in the market who provide competitively priced services in their area of specialty. It also gives you more bargaining power if you engage more services from a vendor. Besides, it makes economical sense that when we do away with a middle party, there are potential cost savings for the same quality. Finally, you avoid run-of-the mill-look since you can mix and match, depending on your wedding theme.

Naturally, a package would make wedding planning a lot easier than if you are to go ala-carte. However, in the case of packages, your freedom to choose is limited and you might not be able to find something that fits your wedding theme.

NO COMPROMISE FOR SOME THINGS - How can one balance quality with cost savings? Discuss with your partner which are the things that both of you cannot bear to thrift on. For my husband and me, we decided that the venue décor was very important as it would bring out the feel of the event that could be captured and immortalized. We capped the number of invitations however. To us, it did not make sense to invite people who are rarely in contact. I know of couples who invite people whom they see probably once a year or even less than that, for the sake of filling up the seats.

VENDOR FREEBIES - Get your vendor to throw in some freebies. Our décor vendor gave us a free money box which was designed to be in line with our theme, thus saving us time, energy and money to look for one. They also supplied bags and bags of huge fresh rose petals for free. Flexibility is essential too. Thanks to my gown designer, I had my ROM gown converted to an evening gown, thus enjoying the privilege of made-to-measure gown with savings.

NETWORK - And of course, your network is invaluable. Identify the talented friends you have, engage their help in the wedding if relevant and offer barter trade. A friend who is a graphic designer created our ROM invitation card while another friend who owns a printing shop gave us fifty cards printed for free. In exchange, we spread the word about their services to others who are getting married too. Lastly, Do-It-Yourself projects are feasible when you have some extra hands and legs.

In all, we spent close to S$25,000 for the entire wedding. On hindsight, we could have saved more had we done more research. Hence, read up more, ask more questions, talk to the right people and have a joyful wedding!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the contributors from the bottom of my heart. Without them, if they had not given me the honor of interviewing them, this book will not be possible. Freedom, individual expressions, the joy of planning a wedding would be lost if not for the values these loving people stand for. They are:

1. Amanda from eClarity, *www.eclarity.com.sg*
2. Belinda from Loe and Behold, *www.loeandbehold.com.sg*
3. Dr Low from The Sloane Clinic, *www.sloaneclinic.com*
4. Gobbs from Forest Creatives, *www.forestcreatives.com*
5. Ilane, *www.ilanefoo.blogspot.com*
6. Style Me Pretty, *www.stylemepretty.com*
7. Vaughn from The Vaughn Tan's Work Loft, *www.vaughnt.com*

Special thanks also go out to my buddy coaches, Ben and Andrew, from Executive Coach International. They not only held me accountable for my write-a-book project, they also held my integrity to complete something I promise I will do.

More thanks are in order for my family for giving me the space to move out, helping out when possible, feeding me well whenever I come back

Lastly, I can never forget to thank my husband. I have the bad habit of bombarding him with all the research materials I dig up and he has the unlucky (or lucky?) task of filtering. Thank you dear. Without you, this book would be non-existent from the start!