

Wedding

PLANNER

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SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO

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MORNING

SENTINEL



**The Barn: Winthrop
wedding venue prepares
for a busy two years**

Eric's Restaurant offers tips
for an elegant wedding reception

**Somerset Abbey wedding venue
retains its 1892 vintage charm**

**Material Instinques owner still busy
at needlework after 40 years**



Master the wedding

Many couples' weddings take more than a year to plan. Couples want all of the special people in their lives to witness their vows, and giving guests advance notice can ensure as many loved ones as possible attend the ceremony.

To be certain that guests have ample notice to clear their schedules, many couples now turn to save-the-date cards, which announce weddings well in advance of the actual wedding day.

Save-the-date cards once were reserved only for weddings that required travel or special circumstances, such as destination weddings. But such cards have now become commonplace for all weddings. That's because many people plan vacations or business trips anywhere from four to six months in advance. Busy people require plenty of notice to include this important date on their calendars, particularly when wedding dates fall during popular travel seasons or around the holidays.

Kleinfeld Bridal, a premiere New York bridal boutique, says that save-the-date cards are typically mailed six to eight months prior to the wedding, though some are sent as early as a year before the big day. Once a date and a location is secured, save-the-dates can be ordered and mailed.

Save-the-date cards require couples to assemble their guest lists well in advance of the wedding. The leading bridal resource The Knot notes that everyone who will get a wedding invitation should also receive a save-the-date card. There's no turning back once cards are sent, so couples will need to be certain everyone they want to attend is getting advanced notice.

It's acceptable to mail save-the-date cards even if some wedding day details are still up in the air. Guests really only need to know the date and location of the wedding. Couples also can use the save-the-date card to direct invitees to a wedding website where guests can learn the details of the wedding as they unfold.

RSVP information does not need to be included on the save-the-date card.

Save-the-date cards are much less formal than invitations, so couples can have fun with them. They can showcase couples' clever personalities or funny quirks. Keep in mind it is in poor taste to mention gifts or registries on save-the-date cards. There will be plenty of time to direct guests to registries later on.

Couples are increasingly turning to save-the-date cards when planning their weddings to make sure busy friends and family will have enough time to make plans to attend their weddings.



Kevin Couture Photography

Maine Wedding Show

New England Premier Events presents the Maine Wedding Show from noon to 3 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 15 in the North Wing of the Augusta Civic Center.

If you're getting married in the near future, you won't want to miss this Bridal show! Visit with the area's finest wedding professionals while enjoying catered appetizers and cash bar while catching up on the latest trends and advice throughout the day.

Thousands of dollars of door prizes will be drawn plus one lucky bride will win the grand prize given away at the show — an 8 day/7 night condo vacation with over 600 different location to choose from! Don't miss this event!

This Bridal Show caters to all budgets and styles. We encourage you to bring your family, friends, bridal party and groom to our one of a kind show! Bring a group of 10 or more and get a discount. First 100 brides will receive a FREE 3 day/2night getaway! Don't miss it!

Tickets \$8.50 - \$10. For more information or to purchase tickets visit myneevent.com.

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Why attend a bridal showcase

Most girls grow up dreaming about their wedding day. So when that magical moment happens and prince charming slips a ring on your finger you immediately beam with excitement. It has finally happened... you are getting married. This should be a piece of cake, right? Then reality sets in, and the stress of planning can get in the way of the excitement. Bridal shows are a great option for any bride-to-be. Whether you know exactly what they are looking for, or need help generating ideas, this is one stop you do not want to miss!

Go ahead; be picky about your wedding plans you deserve the wedding you have always dreamed of. So whether you are looking to solidify major details such as selecting your ceremony or reception sites or all those finer details such as decorations and invitations, bridal shows offer you a one stop shopping experience. The Black Tie Bridal Showcase is held twice a year in January and October and offers the area's largest and finest selection of wedding service providers.

Especially now with gas prices out of control, why not spend an afternoon collecting all your wedding information instead of hours, days, or even weeks driving to every bridal shop, flower store, and photography studio in the tri-state area. Bridal shows are designed to bring all of the magic of wedding planning under one roof.

You can expect to see all sorts of bridal companies including: photographers, DJs, reception facilities, caterers, cake makers, dress shops, tuxedos rentals, videographers, limos, hair dressers, makeup artists, jewelry companies, invitation designers, florists, musicians, gift registries, party suppliers, travel agents, and much more.

Make the most of your visit to the bridal show by using the opportunity to really interview possible candidates you still need to book. Do your research before the show and bring a list of questions to ask. Be sure to bring your groom and anyone

else that will be involved in the decision making process. You will be able to compare prices and products, personalities of the consultants, samples of their work, and even make reservations that day. With any luck, you can get some of your wedding plans out of the way. But be aware that most service providers require a deposit upon reservation. So take your time and talk to everyone, and make sure that you have your checkbook ready in case you find the perfect fit!

Don't be afraid to ask for referrals or a list of previous customers from the wedding vendors you are considering. Then check out those references thoroughly. If a company refuses to provide a list, or say they do not have references available, proceed with caution. Make sure to view several samples of their work, and only if you feel completely comfortable should you book their services.

How better to help get your wedding details underway than by receiving free gifts. Bridal shows offer couples the opportunity to win valuable door prizes worth sometimes thousands of dollars. To make registering for those prizes easy, bring along return address stickers so that you do not have to fill out numerous entry slips. And if you're lucky, you may just walk away with a new set of China, free floral arrangements, or even a honeymoon package.

Finally, most bridal shows host a fashion show toward the end of the afternoon.

These are fun for everyone. It is a great chance to see different styles of dresses and tuxedos in action. So kick back and enjoy the show! And remember, organizing your wedding can be a huge job, but with the assistance of services such as bridal shows, it cuts down on some of the work. So arm yourself with your most trusty girlfriends and head to the next bridal show. Make sure you go with an open mind, and do not forget your address labels. Most importantly, have fun!



Maine Wedding Association presents the Augusta Wedding Show

Come to the Augusta Wedding Show from 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 22, at the Augusta Armory, 179 Western Avenue, Augusta.

Weddings Start Here! Find your dream Dress, Explore Reception Locations, Discover New Ideas, preview DJs and other music options, taste your way to a perfect menu! Come see, feel and touch as you get to know your options.

Receive a one year subscription to Bride Magazine & a complimentary copy of Real Maine Weddings Magazine while supplies last.

Also, while supplies last, an Eco friendly bag & Spatula compliments of Royal Prestige and Dinner 4 Two.

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Augusta Wedding Show

Sunday, January 22, 2017

11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Augusta Armory • Western Ave. • Augusta

Receive a one year subscription to *Bride Magazine* and a complimentary copy of *Real Maine Weddings Magazine*. Also, while supplies last, an eco friendly bag and oven mitt from *Royal Prestige and Dinner for Two*.

Grand Prize Give-away Dream Vacation and Wedding Band Sets. There will be prizes throughout the day

Visit www.maineweddingassociation.com for more details.



The Barn: Winthrop wedding venue prepares for a busy two years

Veronica and Gene Carbona plan to open the party venue this fall after renovating a dilapidated barn on a 10-acre property



Reprint from Kennebec Journal
Original story by staff writer
CHARLES EICHACKER
Editorial update provided
by Darla Pickett

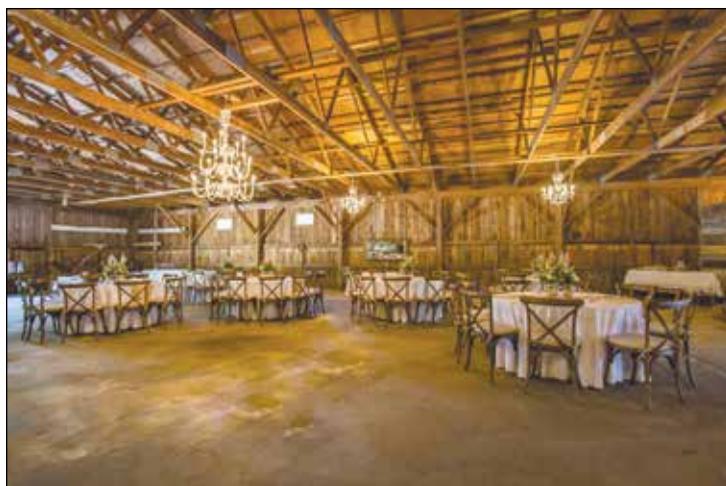
Owners Gene and Veronica Carbona call the Barn at Silver Oaks Estate in Winthrop “our labor of love.”

Readfield resident Gene Carbona was passing through Winthrop one day a year ago when he got stuck in traffic on Route 133 and Route 41, just before they fork in different directions. A for-sale sign recently had been posted on the east side of the road, and Carbona’s eyes were drawn to the dilapidated barn beyond it.

Gene and his wife, Veronica Carbona, bought the 10-acre property that slopes down to Maranacook Lake, called it the Barn at Silver Oaks Estate and began renovating it as a venue for weddings, proms and galas.

Today, just a year later, they are booked through the end of 2017 and beyond.

“We opened September 18 and are up and running with 41 weddings booked,” Gene Carbona said last week. “We have 2017 completely booked and 2018 almost booked. And we have two booked in 2019.”



Carbona said he is most proud of the connection they have made with local vendors. “We have been well received and we are most proud of our collaborations with a lot of local vendors — caterers, florists, seamstresses, bands, DJs — they have booked dozens of events,” he said. “We have learned so much

from them. We found we can provide good, local vendors without going outside to Boston or other places.”

The Barn was run-down and heavily wooded when they purchased it, but the Carbonas went to work on a renovation that, in the long

More BARN, **PAGE 5**

Save the Date

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Barn

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4
run, is expected to draw many visitors to Winthrop in the spring, summer and fall.

The Carbonas gave the rolling compound a “rustic chic” aesthetic, Veronica said, and called it the Barn at Silver Oaks Estate after the large oak trees that still stand in the farthest recesses of the property.

They have repurposed the long feed barn that first caught Gene’s eye as a reception area with several different sections: a bridal suite with manicure and pedicure stations, photo booths, a seating area and a saloon-style bar. Closer to the lake, they have cleared brush and created lawns. They are sectioning the land off into different areas. Ceremonies will take place in one corner, while another area will have a stage for bands and dancing. Smaller nooks are created for socializing, lighting campfires and playing lawn games.

They will clear a few trees in the part of the property closest to the lake, but mostly will keep it vegetated, Gene said.

The couple had been showing the property for just two weeks and they already had booked more than a dozen weddings for the next two years. Today, that figure has grown beyond their expectations, according to an enthusiastic Gene Carbona.

The Carbonas both work full-time jobs — he for a publishing firm, she as a physician assistant at MaineGeneral’s Bariatric Center in Augusta — but they have always wanted to own a business and describe the project as “our labor of love.”

They also expressed appreciation that town officials had welcomed their business concept.

They have plans to expand in the coming years, at some point adding a dock on the lake and maybe acquiring a pontoon boat for use by wedding parties, Gene said. He said they are open to hosting any weddings, regardless of age, race, gender or sexual orientation. They will not offer catering or planning services, but will have a preferred client list for brides and grooms.

The Carbonas, who now have several sons, originally got married in a courthouse in New York, they said. In 2017, they plan to renew their own vows in a ceremony at the Barn at Silver Oaks Estate.

Stunning engagement ring alternatives

Even though diamonds may be a “girl’s best friend,” they may not fit every woman’s style, particularly the bride who likes to buck tradition and think outside the box. According to *Money* magazine, the average engagement ring costs more than \$5,800. In addition to being one of the most expensive gemstones, diamonds have become quite commonplace. Some women even eschew diamonds for moral reasons.

Whatever the driving force behind shopping for alternative gems, women who want to set themselves apart from others — and men who want to “wow” their significant others with unique and eye-catching rings — may opt for other dazzling stones.



Morganite: According to the blog *Bridal Musings*, morganite is currently one of the most popular choices for engagement rings. Its pretty pink hue is romantic and feminine. It also sits at around the same hardness as sapphires, ensuring the rings will endure.

Vividly cut rubies, emeralds and tanzanite — all gems that are rarer yet less expensive than diamonds — can make beautiful engagement rings. Some couples also may opt for rings without gemstones, such as traditional Claddagh or “true lover’s knot” rings to signify their union.



Moissanite: This crystal naturally occurs in meteorites and is nearly as hard, dense and scuff-resistant as a diamond. Some feel moissanite offers more brilliance and fire than diamonds. Moissanite is a white-colored stone, so it can mimic the look of a diamond. And since it can be made in the laboratory at a fraction of the cost of even lab-made diamonds, it’s a frugal option. A nearly flawless one-carat moissanite gem can cost less than \$1,000.



Sapphire: Sapphires tend to be blue stones (of varying intensity), but they also come in peach, pink, yellow, green, and white. Sapphire may not sparkle as much as a diamond or even moissanite. However, with the right cut, it can be hard to distinguish any lack of luster. Sapphires are the third hardest mineral, and at about one-third the price of diamonds, they make an ideal diamond substitute.



Lemon quartz: This is the trade name for a lemon-yellow stone that is a variety of color-enhanced transparent quartz. Quartz is turned into this sunny hue through an artificial gamma ray irradiation process.

Like other quartz gemstones, lemon quartz is considered to be very durable and is therefore suitable for all types of jewelry.

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Eric's Restaurant offers tips for an elegant wedding reception

BY NANCY GALLAGHER
Correspondent

Getting prepared for a wedding reception is half the battle won, according to caterers.

There are three easy steps to help make that happen, according to Eric Veilleux of Eric's Restaurant, Spirits and Banquets in Waterville, who has been identified as the "Best Caterer in the Greater Waterville Area" for seven years by Market Survey, an online voting system.

Veilleux shared his tips.

1. Confirm the date.

There are only so many Saturdays in the prime wedding months of April through August, so check availability for the venue and caterer early, Veilleux said. He recommends checking six months to a year in advance of the wedding date. An in-person visit to 105 College Avenue in Waterville, or a telephone inquiry to 859-8761 will verify available dates at Eric's.

2. Take the devil out of the details.

A detailed conversation with Veilleux or his co-owner and sister, Cyndie Cote, can smooth the path to an organized, worry-free reception or rehearsal dinner. Veilleux and Cote freely share their nine years of planning expertise with not only food, but also the many important details that comprise a dream wedding. They can make appropriate suggestions, such as how to arrange the room.

Need a gift table? Having a DJ? Where will he/she set up? How many at the head table? Will they need champagne glasses? What is the pacing of the event? Will guests be served appetizers while waiting for a photographer to complete the formal photographs?

"Most times, people have never been married before," Veilleux said with a chuckle, so "I like to sit down with a client face to face, to make sure they're comfortable with us...with the finances, and with what they've done," he said. Eric's accepts cash, checks and credit card pay-



ments.

Since Eric's seats only 60, most weddings will be catered off site. They have catered locally and as far away as The Forks and Lewiston, both indoors and in tents outdoors. Travel fees are listed in their printed wedding packet.

The restaurant's intimate seating offers an ideal venue for a sit-down rehearsal dinner, with a full bar available. Dinner linens and floral centerpieces can be coordinated to the bridal colors. Rehearsal dinners require advance booking.

3. Menu, please.

What types of foods and non-alcoholic beverages will be served? Carving stations, a buffet, or perhaps a special request? Eric's does not bake wedding cakes, but can arrange for a cake or provide vendor information, based on the client's wishes. Their convenient take-home planning packet includes printed, pre-priced menu choices for both the foods and beverages to be served. When a tight budget calls for flexibility, the possibilities are just a friendly conversation away.

A professionally-dressed chef and wait staff prepared

and served the selected foods and beverages, and then, at the appropriate time, cut and serve the wedding cake.

As a cost saver, Eric's recommends using its discounted linen service. This includes white linen tablecloths, table skirting, linen napkins in a color to coordinate with the bridal party, flatware, china, water goblets

and salt and pepper shakers for the tables.

Eric's Restaurant, Spirits and Banquets is located at 105 College Avenue, Waterville, Maine 04901. Business hours are 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday. For reservations or more information, call Cyndie at 859-8761.

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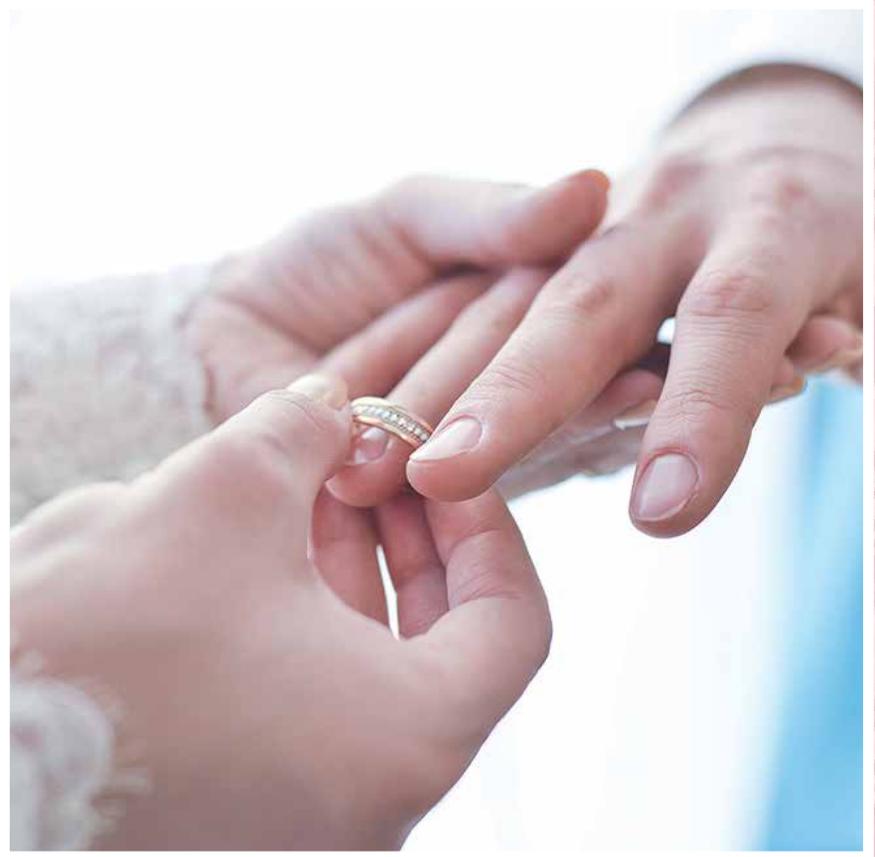
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WEDDING PLANNER



Bride's Name: _____

Groom's Name: _____

Engaged On: _____

Wedding Date: _____

Ceremony Location: _____

Reception Location: _____

Comments/Notes: _____

A wedding checklist is a very simple tool that is very easy to use, but it does a lot for you. The main goal of the wedding checklist is to make sure that you get everything that you need for your wedding. These wedding planning tools can give you the piece of mind that you need to really enjoy your wedding to the fullest.

Use the wedding planner checklist on the next three pages to guarantee you've covered all the necessary details to ensure that you have the perfect wedding. And check out the advertisers in this section for all your wedding needs.

WEDDING PLANNING CHECKLIST

12-16 MONTHS BEFORE THE WEDDING

- Choose Wedding Date
- Discuss and Choose Style/Formality of Wedding
- Select and Reserve Wedding Location
- Select and Reserve Reception Site
- Decide on Budget for Wedding
- Place Engagement Announcement in Local Paper
- Hire a Wedding Consultant
- Begin Shopping for Wedding Dress

8-10 MONTHS BEFORE THE WEDDING

- Select Bridal Party
- Hire Reception Caterer
- Secure Wedding Officiant
- Decide on Bridesmaid Dresses
- Start Compiling Guest List
- Contract Photographer
- Contract Videographer

- Hire Band or DJ
- Sign Up for Gift Registry

5-7 MONTHS BEFORE THE WEDDING

- Finalize Guest List
- Arrange Accommodations
- Select Wedding Cake
- Begin Honeymoon Preparations
- Shop for Wedding Stationery
- Review insurance needs - Auto - Home - Life

4 MONTHS BEFORE THE WEDDING

- Book Florist
- Visit Your Doctor
- Shop for Wedding Bands

3 MONTHS BEFORE THE WEDDING

- Select Tuxedos

- Send Out Invitations
- Finalize Menu Options and Costs With Caterer
- Arrange for Rental of Items
- Arrange Transportation/Limo Service
- Order Wedding Favors
- Begin Counseling Sessions With Wedding Officiant
- Shop for Bridal Party Gifts

2 MONTHS BEFORE THE WEDDING

- Select Wedding Music
- Confirm With Formal Wear Shop
- Schedule Alterations
- Select a Location for Rehearsal Dinner
- Schedule Fittings for the Bridesmaids and Flower Girl
- Address Labels With Couple's New Names and Address for Thank You Cards
- Confirm Order With Florist Order

1 MONTH BEFORE THE WEDDING

- Apply for Marriage License
- Design Wedding Programs
- Have Final Gown Fitting
- Choose All Wedding Accessories
- Visit Hair Stylist
- Visit Make-Up Artist
- Get Hair and Makeup Done
- Have Formal Bridal Portraits Taken
- Finalize Details with Wedding Service Providers

2 WEEKS BEFORE THE WEDDING

- Call any Non-RSVP Guests
- Give Caterer Final Head Count
- Give Band or DJ List of Songs
- Confirm Rehearsal Plans
- Pick Up Marriage License
- Complete Floor and Seating Plan

- Confirm All Rental and Floral Delivery Dates and Times
- Confirm Arrival Time for All Attendants
- Check Parking Arrangements
- Obtain any Legal Information

1 WEEK BEFORE THE WEDDING

- Confirm Honeymoon Reservations
- Adjust Seating Arrangements/Adjustments
- Organize Wedding Day Attire
- Confirm Reservations for Out-of-Town Guests
- Pack for Honeymoon
- Pick Up Passports
- Gather All Necessary Travel Documents
- Confirm Rehearsal Plans With Attendants
- Confirm Reservations for Rehearsal Dinner
- Pick Up Formal Wear



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WEDDING PLANNING CHECKLIST

1 DAY BEFORE THE WEDDING

- ___ Get Manicure and Pedicure
- ___ Pack Wedding Day Emergency Kit
- ___ Double Check List of Things to Do
- ___ Put Wedding Attire and Accessories Together
- ___ Pamper Yourself
- ___ Give Rings to Best Man
- ___ Go To Bed Early

WEDDING DAY

- ___ Get Hair and Makeup Done
- ___ Be Sure to Eat Breakfast/Lunch
- ___ Have Someone Check Reception Site
- ___ Dress for Wedding
- ___ Have Candid Photos Taken With Family

AFTER THE HONEYMOON

- ___ Have Your Wedding Gown Preserved
- ___ Write Thank-You Notes
- ___ Change Name

NOTES:



Reconnect during wedding planning

Wedding planning can be intense and often requires dedication and many hours of work. Coordinating a wedding often requires that couples make many different decisions and spend a considerable amount of time in the wedding-planning trenches.

Couples expend so much energy planning their weddings that it can be easy to lose sight of the bigger picture — namely the relationship that is the basis for the marriage in the first place. But as easy as it can be to get lost in wedding planning, couples can use this time together to connect on a deeper level and learn to work cooperatively.

- **Divide and conquer.** Separate wedding planning duties so that both of you feel you are contributing equally and no one person gets overly stressed out. Stress can lead to short tempers and arguments.

- **Establish a mutual budget.** Even the healthiest couple argues over finances from time to time, but budgetary debates should not set a negative tone for wedding planning. Couples should discuss their potential budget before they even begin to plan their weddings, and both partners should do their best to compromise while also understanding where the other person is coming from.

- **Schedule time for fun.** Do not let wedding planning be all-consuming. Schedule days that allow you to enjoy yourselves together without having to think about or discuss your pending nuptials. This may include date nights that may have fallen by the wayside since getting engaged or periodic day trips to get away from it all. Explore your mutual hobbies or try something new.

- **Learn to laugh at the little things.** Not every detail will go off without a hitch. How you react as a couple may influence how much you enjoy your wedding. Recognize that certain things will not go your way, but that unforeseen circumstances will not ruin your wedding day, no matter how unpleasant they may seem. Laugh at what cannot be changed and recognize that, in the long run, the details you think are major today may actually prove trivial when you look back on your wedding day in the years to come.

Did you know?

Longevity in marriage is something to be celebrated. Couples who reach fiftieth and sixtieth wedding anniversaries often commemorate those anniversaries with big parties. But there are some around the world who would consider golden anniversary celebrants to still be newlyweds. In December 2015, Karam Chand, 110, and his wife, Kartari Chand, 103, from Bradford, West Yorkshire (originally from India), celebrated their 90th wedding anniversary, becoming the world's longest-betrothed couple. In America, John and Ann Betar, ages 104 and 100, respectively, have been married 83 years as of 2016. The couple eloped in 1932. They have been named one of America's longest-married couples by the Worldwide Marriage Encounter.



Successful toasts help shape social events



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.

Toast of the town

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.

Did you know?

According to the 2015 Real Weddings Study from the premier multiplatform wedding resource The Knot, **the most popular month for couples to get engaged is December.** Sixteen percent of survey respondents became engaged in the final month of the calendar year. **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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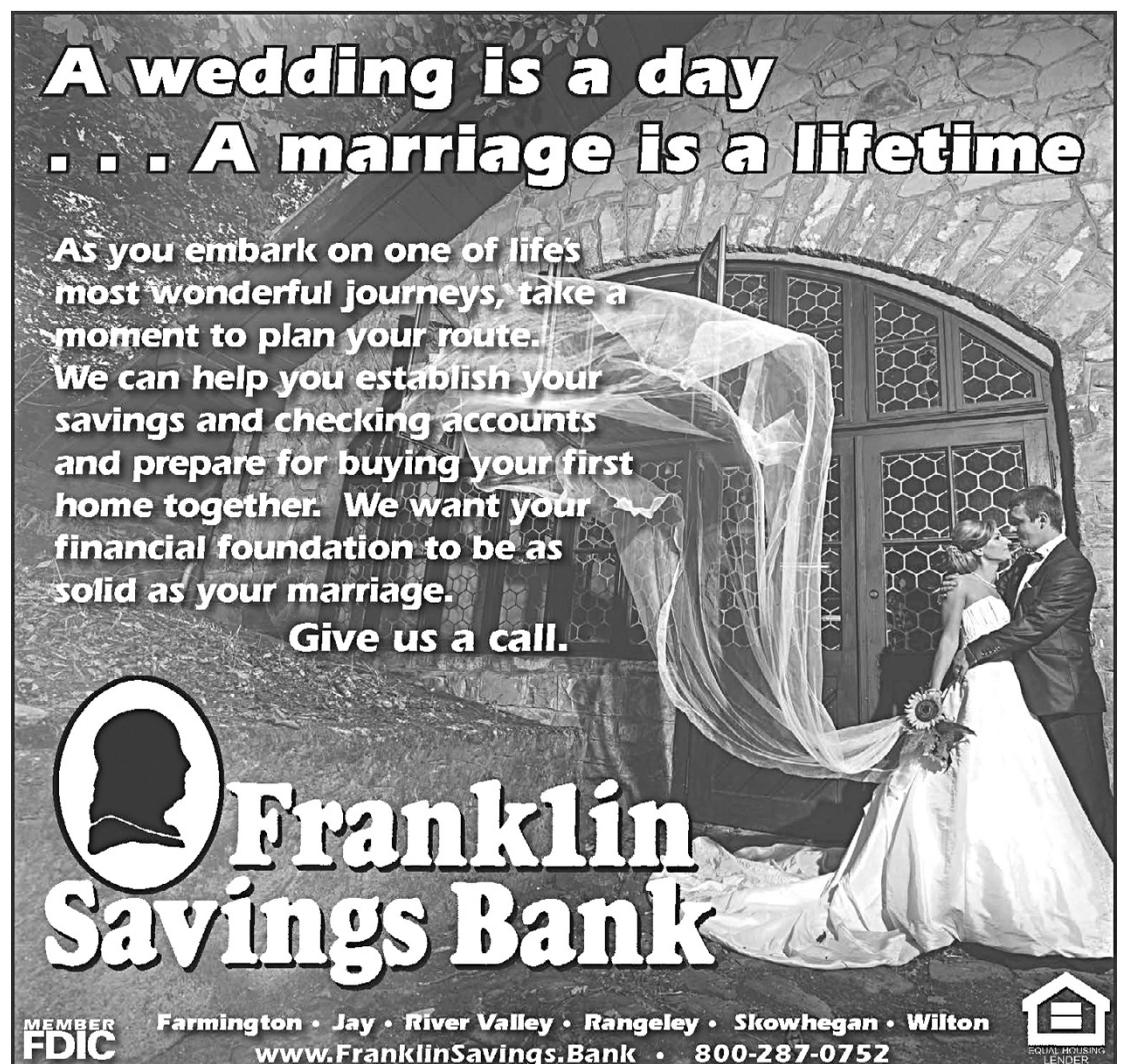


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Somerset Abbey wedding venue retains its 1892 vintage charm

Karningul Cottage adds a cozy place to gather

BY VALERIE TUCKER
Correspondent

Somerset Abbey is central Maine's newest destination wedding venue. Built in 1892 as the Madison Congregational Church, the building was purchased by Tom and Stacy O'Brien in 2014. The O'Briens were determined to preserve this downtown turn-of-the-century charmer, with its original woodwork, soaring arches, intricate stained glass and a grand E.M. Skinner pipe organ.

"Couples who tour the building love the elegance and warmth of the unique historic structure," Stacy said.

Geographically, the Abbey is an easy and pleasant ride from airports or on the areas scenic rural highways. The O'Briens have compiled a comprehensive list of activities in the area, including golfing, fishing, swimming, boating, river rafting, snowmobiling and skiing, along with a variety of performing arts.

With 35 years in the wedding rental business, they and their friendly staff at Somerset Abbey customize wedding packages for nearly every budget.

"We always plan every step to ensure that the event is unique to every couple's vision of their special day," Stacy said. "Our guests and customers have said it all when they tell us we helped them make memories of a lifetime."

The wedding reception is where the Abbey staff really shines, Stacy said. The sit-down dinner reception remains the most popular, but their spin on the modern cocktail reception is the perfect choice for a more casual gathering.

"We work with our clients on every detail beforehand, so everyone will know just how the reception will look," she said.

The venue is available for either short, simple ceremonies or more elaborate events. After the ceremony, guests can be ushered to the vestibule, where they can enjoy cocktails and hors d'oeuvres.

The Abbey's larger reception

room can accommodate up to 100 seated guests, with tables surrounding the dance floor.

"We welcome bands or DJs to use our top-of-the-line sound system," Tom said. "It's Bluetooth-enabled, so our customers also can bring their own personalized playlist."

The reception room also offers complete handicapped accessibility and a full bar. In summer months, the O'Briens offer a tent on site to accommodate 150 guests.

With advance notice, the chefs can prepare gluten-free dining options and can prepare dishes for people with food allergies. Menu favorites are Chicken Francaise and the prime rib entrees. The soup and sandwich menu features a delicious Italian wedding soup, and the dessert menu includes a chocolate lava cake from scratch. The bridal couple only has to provide the wedding cake.

"We focus on real food that we try to source locally," Stacy said. "We serve homemade favorites, with all the real sugar, butter and love your grandmother would have put into her meals."

This year, the O'Briens are offering something that completes the experience for the bridal party or family of the wedding couple. The newly-renovated Karningul Cottage offers four bedrooms, two baths, full kitchen, dining room and living room. The guest house was built in 1909 as a parsonage, and today, it offers a beautiful blend of modern and vintage charm, with all the comforts of home.

The cottage's Victorian fireplace is a cozy place to gather with the bridal party after rehearsal.

"(They can) enjoy a glass of wine and relax before the big day after decorating the reception room," Stacy suggested.

A generous homemade continental breakfast is served each morning. Other amenities include an in-house massage therapist who will relax away any stress or jitters with a Swedish, hot rock and deep tissue treatment. Stylists can be



Photo by Whittemore & Co. Photography

The historic and elegant Somerset Abbey, once home of the Madison Congregational Church, offers a beautiful chapel, large and small dining and reception options and a newly-renovated, four-bedroom cottage for the wedding party or guests. Owners Tom and Stacy O'Brien customize packages to fit every couple's budget. One very special event was the recent wedding of their manager, Joy Lynn and her fiancée Darryl Caswell (pictured).

booked for a cottage appointment for a wedding up-do and make-up on the big day.

Somerset Abbey's very reasonable and competitive rates are based on each couple's needs and time requirements. Couples can choose to rent the chapel and reception room

for the day. The O'Briens can customize a package with or without the Karningul Cottage, the rehearsal dinner, ceremony or reception. They also offer the chapel for a four-hour block for a ceremony.

"It is really up to our customers to decide how much or how

little they want" Stacy said. "No wedding request is too big or too small."

For more information about the Somerset Abbey and Karningul Cottage, visit www.somersetabbey.net, call (207) 696-5800, or email stacy@somersetabbey.net.



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Material Instinques owner still busy at sewing alterations after 40 years

BY WANDA CURTIS
Correspondent

One of the challenges when selecting a wedding gown is finding a gown that fits properly. It's not uncommon to have a wedding gown hemmed or altered in some way after it's purchased. Since most brides-to-be have a lot invested in their gowns, it's important to locate a professional seamstress when alterations are necessary.

In Augusta, that choice might well be Wanda Lessard, the owner of Material Instinques, who has been doing alterations for more than 40 years. She has worked full time in her shop at 234 Water Street for the past 23 years. Lessard said she takes in as many as 80 to 100 sewing projects each week and many of those are wedding gowns; she also alters a lot of prom gowns.

According to Lessard, sewing was very popular when she was growing up. She said that she learned to sew in home economics class and also received instruction at home from many of her family members, who also were seamstresses.

"Back then everybody sewed because they couldn't afford to go out and buy stuff... everybody did their own sewing and mending," Lessard recalled. "My grandmother and my mother sewed. I always sewed. My sister Linda Merriam owns a quilt shop in Monmouth; she makes special order quilts."

While the bulk of her work involves altering wedding and prom gowns, Lessard also does custom-made wedding gowns. She said that she doesn't make a lot of those because apparel today can be made for much lower prices overseas, but said she enjoys doing it when the opportunity arises. She said that older brides often request that she make them a gown that's more simple.

Lessard said she is able to make gowns either smaller or larger depending upon the need. She said that if a gown needs to be made larger, the bride-to-be should request extra fabric at the time of purchase from the company that she buys it from. She said that it can be more difficult to get

"My grandmother and my mother sewed. I always sewed. My sister Linda Merriam owns a quilt shop in Monmouth; she makes special order quilts."

WANDA LESSARD, OWNER OF MATERIAL INSTINQUES



extra fabric when dresses are purchased online. She said that she likes to have three weeks to a month for altering wedding gowns because she does smaller jobs in between the bigger jobs such as wedding gowns.

Lessard has remade a number of family heirloom gowns and vintage gowns for customers. She's also worked on some very expensive wedding gowns. She said that one of the most expensive ones that she ever altered was a \$6,000 Vera Wang gown.

"That made me slightly nervous," Lessard said. "You just have to take extra care with those."

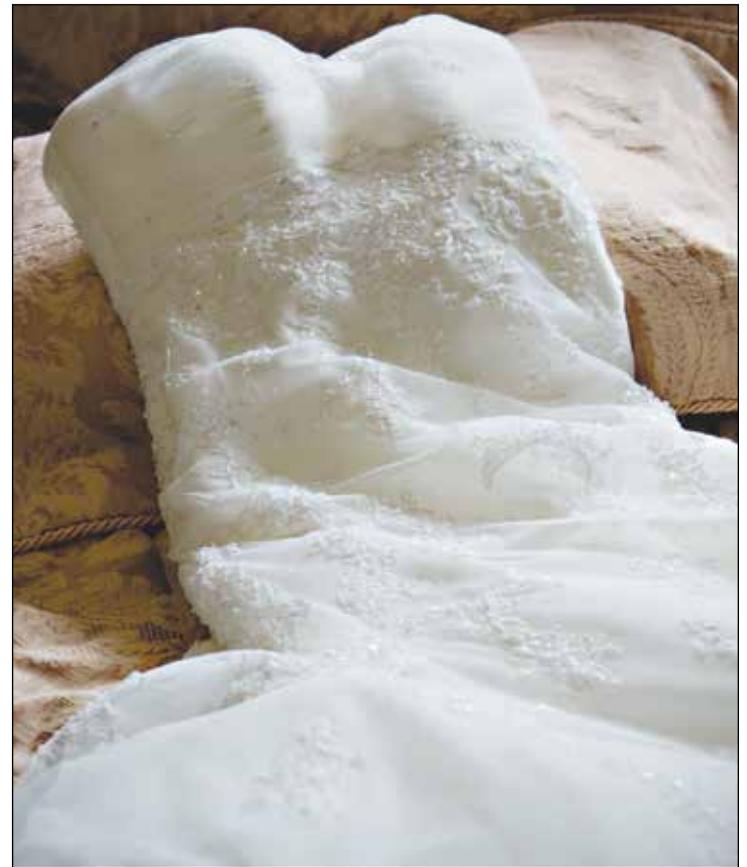
Although she does her best to please her customers, Lessard admits that it's not always possible to make a dress fit. She said that gowns ordered online from overseas are sometimes more challenging to work on because they seem to make the dresses to fit the people in their own culture. She said that one customer brought in a mermaid style prom dress purchased from China that was very narrow in the hips. She said that it was impossible to get the extra material needed to enlarge it, so the customer ended up having to purchase a different dress.

"I'm not a superwoman or a miracle worker but I do my best," Lessard said.

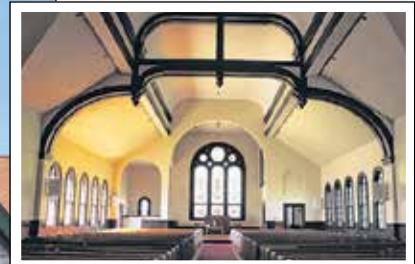
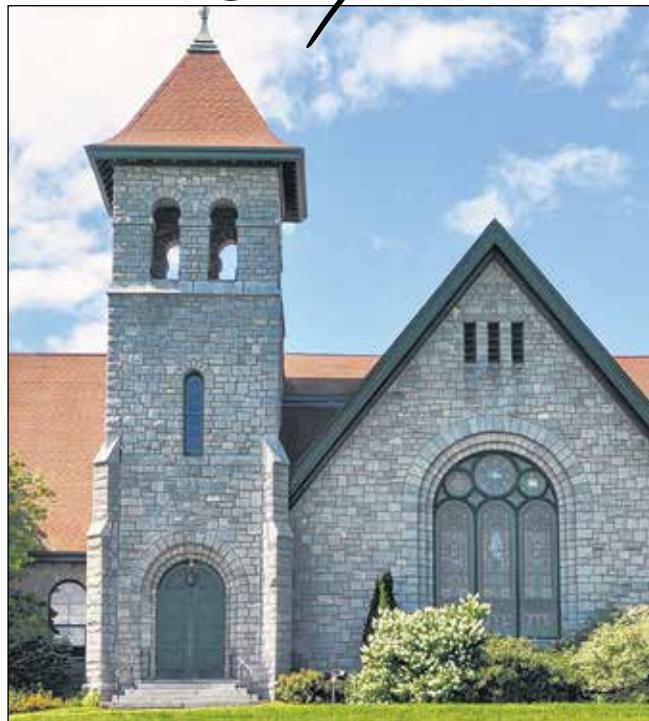
In addition to making alterations for brides, Lessard also does alterations for other members of the wedding party. She will alter suits, tuxedos, bridesmaids' gowns and children's clothing. She will also make alterations on everyday

clothing, do custom sewing, and make drapes or curtains.

Material Instinques is open for business from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appointments can also be scheduled for evenings and Saturdays by calling the shop at 623-0086. The entrance to the shop is located on the Commercial Street side near the Key Bank drive through.



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Treat guests to personalized vows

Couples who choose to write their own wedding vows recognize how special such personal gestures are. Writing one's own vows can impart a personalized and special touch to the ceremony. But as anyone who has stared down a blank piece of paper or blinking cursor can attest, a case of writer's block may encourage couples to abandon the idea of writing their own vows.

Writing vows can be nerve-racking. Many couples are unaccustomed to speaking in front of crowds, and then there is the challenge of turning life-altering feelings into language that will appeal to the masses.

But couples struggling with their vows need not throw in the vow-writing towel. With some practice and guidance, anyone can write cherished vows that will be remembered for all of the right reasons for years to come.

Skip the schtick. Jokes may pop up in speeches throughout the evening, but wedding vows can be your chance to truly speak from the heart. Humor may come across as insincerity. Rather, list the words that describe your feelings for your future spouse, and build on that.

Tell a story. If you need inspiration, look to a moment in your relationship when you really knew this was the person with whom you wanted to share your life. Relay the story, but keep it brief. Try to be as specific as possible, and recognize that it's acceptable to be playful with your words. When it's really coming from the heart and not the head, you'll know it.

Borrow from traditional words. Take traditional vows and tweak them to make them your own. This works especially well for those who have trouble getting started or are unsure of which format to follow. Incorporate key words, such as "partners," "love," "friends," "joy," and "forever."

Be sure the officiant is on board. Depending on the type of ceremony, the officiant may have final say over what can or cannot be included in your vows. Religious ceremonies, for example, may be limited to certain scripture readings and traditional vows. Before you devote any time to writing vows, ensure that it's alright to include them. Otherwise, save personalized sentiments for a special toast at the wedding reception.

Decide on a mutual structure for the vows. If you and your spouse will not be writing the vows together, agree on a format that you both will follow. Otherwise, you might be writing about your unending love, and he or she may be promising to keep updated on favorite sports teams or television programs. You want the tone and style of the vows to be cohesive.

Dig deeper. Look into the future and project how you hope your life to be in 10 or 20 years. Explain all of the reasons you want to be together for the duration.

Read the vows several times. Read over your work and make sure the language is clear and there are no glaring errors. It may take a few versions to get the final version right where you want it.

Get a second opinion. Ask someone you trust to listen to the vows and offer feedback. This needs to be a person who will be honest and not just tell you what you want to hear.

Personalized vows can add an extra special touch to wedding ceremonies.

Selecting a comfortable 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 decollete 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, shapewear 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 accoutrements.

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 crêpe, 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.

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Make proposals special and successful

A marriage proposal is a couple's first official step toward the altar. Tradition dictates that men pop the question, with their surprised — and hopefully soon-to-be-fiancées — ultimately deciding if wedding bells will be on the horizon.

Proposing marriage can be nerve-racking. However, if the time seems right and love is in the air, popping the question can be exciting. Regardless of who is proposing marriage, the following strategies can help make proposals memorable and successful.

Turn the tides

An old Irish tradition known as "The Lady's Privilege" was established in the fifth century by a nun named St. Brigid. She decided to create an opportunity for women to propose marriage. This day fell on every leap year, February 29. Centuries later, women can still use this tradi-



tion as the impetus to take the marriage reins into their own hands. But women need not wait for the next leap year to propose.

Many women view proposing as an empowering action that is tied to the evolving view of independent women.

Couples are negotiating more in the marriage process, and the dissolution of commonly held practices is occurring more often.

Choose a sentimental location

Couples will remember the proposal for the rest of their

lives. So choose a proposal location that has sentimental connections. Think about where the first "I love you" was uttered or where a first date occurred. These can be prime locations to pop the question.

Note her style

Engagement rings play a big role in many couples' proposals. One person's style is not necessarily what his partner will like. Bigger isn't always better. Rather, choose a ring that reflects your partner's preferences and personality. Take your partner jewelry shopping and see which types of jewelry he or she is most drawn to. Certain preferences can serve as a jumping off point for ring designs.

Ask for the family's blessing

Men no longer need to ask their girlfriends' fathers for "permission" to wed their daughters. However, asking your partner's family for their blessing is a sign of respect

and can add a romantic and heartfelt touch to the proposal.

Capture the moment

Though we live in an age when every moment of people's lives is documented with videos and photographs posted to social media, proposals still stand out as extra special moments. Hire a professional photographer to discreetly capture the proposal and your partner's reaction so it can be cherished for years to come.



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Hotel How-To: Tips for guests looking for lodging

Couples about to tie the knot often arrange for discounted hotel rooms for their wedding guests. Many hotels offer substantial discounts to wedding parties, but some guests and bridal party members might still want to examine their options before booking rooms. The following tips can help guests find the right room so they can enjoy their loved ones' wedding weekends to the fullest.

- Don't overlook the wedding hotel. Many couples put a lot of thought into the hotel where their guests will be staying. Couples may have already done the legwork with regard to finding a hotel that's closest to the wedding ceremony and receptions sites and still within arm's-length of other attractions guests can enjoy while in town. Give ample consideration to the hotel or hotels affiliated with the wedding prior to beginning your search, even if the hotel is a chain you have never used before or have not liked in the past.

- Prioritize proximity. It's important to consider factors aside from cost when searching for a place to stay for a loved one's wedding. The most affordable option is not always

the most ideal. Proximity to the ceremony and reception venues should be a priority, as guests won't save much money, if any, if their hotel is so far away from the weekend's activities that they must rent cars or take taxis all weekend.

- Share rooms to reduce costs. If the wedding rates are unaffordable, float the idea of sharing rooms with fellow guests. Splitting the cost of a double room instead of booking a single room by yourself can

save substantial amounts of money. And staying in the hotel with many of the other guests will make you feel like you are not missing out on anything during your stay.

- Look for lower rates in the wedding hotel. Room rates are locked in once couples choose a particular hotel or hotels, but guests might be able to find more affordable rates at the same hotel by waiting to book and perusing discount hotel websites and apps.

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