

A Lesson in Wedding Dress Shopping

So your partner has finally popped the question and for a few hours you are the happiest person on earth but as the champagne wears off, reality sets in and you suddenly realise the scale of the operation you have to pull off. It's enough to make even the most organised bride quiver in her stilettos.

It isn't easy selecting a [wedding dress](#), let alone knowing where to start, or what to ask when you get there. When it comes to gown shopping there are four things to remember – make appointments, find a style that flatters, choose colours that complement and ask questions.

And then there's the age-old bridal gown dilemma – to buy a gown or have it made. Made-to-measure, made-to-order and ready-to-wear – what do these terms mean and what's the best option for you?

Shop like a pro? Many women go clothes shopping with friends or family and wedding-dress shopping is no different. Invite those whose opinion matters to you most, but try to restrict entourages to a maximum of five. Rather than setting off to the major bridal precincts spontaneously, plan your day carefully by making appointments with all the dressmakers on your must-see list. If you want to go on a Saturday, you may need to book two to three weeks in advance. Finally, always ask how long the appointment will run for, as this can vary from 30 to 90 minutes.

Figure-flattering frocks? Although magazine clippings are great for inspiration, don't get your heart set on one particular style of gown. Remember, what suits a size-eight model might not suit you.

Well accustomed to these concerns, is bridal stylist and assistant manager at Mariana Hardwick, Suzie Braithwaite. Her advice to brides is to know what suits your body.

She says shorter brides should avoid straight necklines.

"This will cut them off, making them look shorter. Instead, they should opt for a gown with a sweetheart neckline or V-shaped neckline, which will create length," Suzie says.

She also says shorter brides should avoid super full gowns. "But if they've got their heart set on a full gown, they should make sure the skirt does not extend from the waist, it should graduate from the hip."

Brides who have broad or square shoulders should avoid straight necklines. "Square shapes should avoid harsh lines. However, a gown with a straight neckline can be softened with a slight dip to break it up," Suzie says.

Curve-conscious brides should choose a gown with a structured, boned bodice and all brides, unless tall and slim, should avoid bias-cut gowns, as they emphasise hips and show all lumps and bumps.

"Larger women should also avoid satins if possible, as they reflect the light and emphasise features," Suzie says. "Stiffer, de-lustred fabrics are always more flattering."

Colours? So many brides dream of wearing an ivory gown but the harsh reality is only a tiny percentage of the population can pull one off. "Only women with very dark olive or brown skin will look good in an ivory gown," Suzie says.

"Paler-skinned brides should choose an off-white gown or cooler colours."

Brides with a pink skin tone should avoid colours with a yellow base. "Choose blue-based colours like an ice pink but not a creamy blush pink," Suzie says.

About the Author

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