Choosing Your Wedding Gown

One of the most important decisions you will make when planning your wedding is selecting "the perfect gown," meant to dazzle your man.  Whether you know exactly what you are looking for, or if you're beginning your search with little more than a general idea, there are several things you should consider before purchasing your gown.

Remember, when planning an elaborate church wedding or a simple intimate affair, your gown should reflect your personality, taste and style.  Traditional styling is never outdated.  "Something old" is still "something new."  The exquisite formal weddings of days gone by, celebrated by your grandmothers, are very much in style today.

Although your mind may be made up and your heart set on one particular gown prior to going shopping, be sure to try on several different styles.  After all, this is a once-in-lifetime event.  Choosing the perfect gown should be fun!

Many bridal shops will not allow you to take pictures of their gowns, but be sure to take a camera along, just in case permission is granted.  Not only will having a picture, "in hand," be helpful in making your final choice, but after trying on several gowns, they may all begin to look alike.  It was my experience, as a bridal shop owner for more than 22 years, that many brides would return later, searching for the perfect gown they found in my shop, only never to find it again.  I cannot begin to tell you how often the bride "put together" in her mind, the perfect gown, after trying on so many.  Remembering, the skirt of one gown, the train of another and possibly even the bodice of a third, she would be unable to "find" it again.

One final point.  When you find the "perfect gown," buy it.  Period . . . End of story . . .  Stop looking.   Buy it that day!  Especially if the gown you "simply must have" is on a sale rack or is a one-of-a-kind sample.  I can tell you from experience, weeks may go by and no one will look at or try on a particular gown.  Then a bride steps through the door, falls in love with the dress, assumes it will be there when she returns later, at her leisure, and time after time, that very gown will sell to another bride hours later.  Don't be disappointed.  Buy your gown when you find it!

Whether shopping with your mom, best friend or alone, it will be helpful for you to have a basic understanding of the various gown styles. The following terms and descriptions will assist you in explaining to your bridal shop consultant exactly what you are looking for.

Wedding Gown Styles

Gown Lengths and Trains

Street Length styling features a hem just covering the knees.

Intermission Length features a hem falling between the knees and ankle.

Ballet Length features a gown softly flowing to the ankles.

Floor Length features a gown lightly touching the floor on all sides.

Hi-low Length features a gown of intermission length on the front and floor length or longer in the back.

Sweep Train features a gown with the shortest train, barely sweeping the floor.

Court Train features a gown with a train extending one foot beyond the sweep train.

Chapel Train features the most popular of all train lengths.  It flows from three to four feet behind the gown.

Semi-Cathedral Train features a train extending four to six feet behind the gown.

Cathedral Train features a cascading train for the most formal of weddings. It extends from six to eight feet behind the gown.  Also known as a Monarch Train.

Royal Cathedral Train unfolds to ten feet or more, reminiscent of Princess Diana's voluminous train.  Also known as a Traditional Royal Train.

Watteau Train (pronounced: "wa toe") features a train falling from the shoulder blades to the hemline of the gown.

Wedding Gown Necklines

**Queen Anne Neckline** features a high rising collar at the back of your neckline, cupping the sides of your neck, then sculpting low across your chest to outline a bare yoke.

**Bateau (Boat) Neckline** softly follows the curve of the collarbone, high in both the front and back, opening wide at the sides and ending in shoulder seams.

**Contessa Neckline** features an off-the-shoulder gown attached to sleeves which are cut approximately three inches below the shoulder and form a continuous line across the arms and chest when arms are to the side.

**Halter Neckline** features a deeply sleeveless gown, often displayed with a high choke neck.

**Illusion High Neckline** features a gown with a yoke of sheer net and an often ornately decorated satin band, fitting snugly on the neck creating a choker affect.

**Off-the-Shoulder Neckline** lies gently hovering across the top of your bustline.  It may also be attached to a sheer yoke of net or organza and a high collar. The shoulders are uncovered or able to be seen through the sheer yoke.

**Portrait Neckline** features a shawl collar that wraps the shoulders.

**Sabrina Neckline** features a high scoop neck.

**Scoop Neckline** features a softly curved line gently sloping downward across the bodice.

**Square Neckline** features an open yoke shaped in the form of a half square.

**Sweetheart Neckline** features a graceful, open yoke shaped like the top half of a heart.  One of the most popular necklines.

**Tank Top Bodice** features a sleeveless gown with a scoop neck.

**U-Scalloped Neckline** features an open yoke in the shape of a U, embellished with scalloped lace appliqués.

**V-Neck line** features an open yoke coming to a 'V' shape midway down the bodice.

**Wedding Band Neckline** features a gown where the yoke is either open or of sheer net with an ornate band fitting snugly on the neck creating a choker affect.

**Open Sweetheart Back Yoke** features a heart shaped opening, often fringed with beads.  Also known as a Keyhole Back.

Wedding Gown Sleeves

**Bishop Sleeves** are fuller in the lower forearm, and gathered with a wide cuff at the wrist.

**Capped Fitted Sleeves** are very short sleeves just cupping the shoulder.

**Dolman Sleeves** produce a cape-like effect, extending from large armholes and often fitted at the wrist.

**Gigot (Leg-of-Mutton) Sleeves** appear as loose, full sleeves, rounded from the shoulder to just below the elbow, then shaped to the arm, often ending in a point at your wrist.

**Illusion Fitted Sleeves** appear as long or short, slender sleeves following the shape of the arm, made from illusion net and often encrusted with heavily beaded and sequined appliqués.

**Melon Sleeves** appear as a highly exaggerated puff, rounded from the shoulder to the elbow.

**Renaissance Sleeves** appear with a slightly gathered puff at the shoulder, tapering down the arm to a point ending just below the wrist on the hand. Usually in satin, encrusted with appliqués of beads and sequins.

**Short Sleeves** are generally fitted sleeves, falling just short of midway between the shoulder and elbow. Short sleeves are slightly longer than cap sleeves.

**Tapered Sleeves** appear as a slightly gathered shoulder with little fullness, tapering down the arm to the wrist.

**Three-quarter Sleeves** appear most often as fitted sleeves ending slightly below the elbow.

Headpiece Styles

**Floral Wreaths** feature a circle of flowers or baby's breath that sit on top of the head, and may or may not circle at the mid-forehead.

**Juliet cap** snugly fits the crown of the head, ornately encrusted with pearls and sequins.

**Mantilla** features a lace trimmed netting with or without a simple base fitting closely across the top of the head, usually secured with an elegant comb, gently framing the face.

**Picture Hat** features a very large brim often elaborately decorated with laces, beads and sequins.

**Tiara** also known as a crown, rests high atop the head, usually encrusted with crystals, pearls or lace.

**Coronet** features a crescent shaped base decorated with satin and lace, resting high on the crown of the head.

Except for the Mantilla, veiling is usually attached to all of the above headpieces.

Veiling

Illusion is a very fine quality of veiling imported from England or France.  It may be found trimmed with lace or embroidery, but commonly used without edging.

Blusher is a loose veil worn forward over the face, or back over the headpiece; often attached to a longer, two or three tiered veil.

Fingertip length has long been the most popular, gracefully falling across the shoulders to the fingertips when the arm is extended.

Chapel length is a cascading veil about two and a third yards from the headpiece.

Ballet (waltz length) features a veil falling to the ankles.

Cathedral length features a veil flowing about three and a half-yard from the headpiece. Usually worn with a cathedral train.

Flyaway veil has multiple layers that brush the shoulders, usually worn with an informal gown, or with a gown featuring an exquisite back, too pretty to hide with a veil

Most veils are made from a fabric called "illusion".  Illusion resembles netting, but in a softer fabric often made of silk or nylon.  Veils often include poufs, which are small gathers of veiling on the crown of a headpiece.  Wreaths often have flowing ribbons cascading into "love knots" down the back.