



PLANNED TO *perfection*

Experts give us their who, what, where, when and why for big-day wedding planning

With the romantic proposal now behind you, it's time to start planning your dream big day, but where do you begin? Every wedding has its essentials so we've asked those in the know exactly how and when to get started...

THE DRESS: advice from boutique owner Sam Newby-Ricci

WHO?

Scour the pages of wedding magazines, start a Pinterest board, do your research and pick a few styles that call to you. Find out who the designers are and where they're stocked. Use the designers' websites to locate your nearest shop, then call the bridal boutique to see if the dress you like is on their rails.

WHAT?

If you have a certain style in your head, be open-minded. Quite often the dress you've fallen in love with in a magazine will look completely different on a real person rather than a model. Don't underestimate the expertise of the staff in the bridal shop. They know what style will suit your frame and can recommend alternatives. Always provide the staff with a guide figure of your budget. It's heartbreaking to find *the one* only to discover it's way more than you wanted to spend.

WHERE?

If you're lucky enough to have a quality bridal boutique close to you and it stocks styles you like, stay local. Going to try on the dress is just the start of the journey and it's likely that you'll have to visit the shop on a number of occasions – especially if you decide to buy. Make sure you feel comfortable with the staff, their advice will be invaluable and that you don't feel pressured into making a snap decision.

WHEN?

Always leave yourself plenty of time. As a rule of thumb, most designer gowns take four months from the point of ordering to being delivered back to the shop. And then you should allow some time for any alterations that might be needed to make the dress fit perfectly. If you have left it late, don't fret. Most bridal boutiques will let you purchase a gown off the rails, which can be taken home on the day, and these can often come with a slight discount.



WHY?

Because every bride wants to look and feel fantastic on her wedding day. Your wedding gown is probably the most expensive piece of clothing you'll ever wear and it should reflect your personality.

PHOTOGRAPHY: advice from wedding photographer Becky Kerr

WHO?

There are many ways to find the perfect wedding photographer, but be very careful as it's a huge decision to make. The rise in digital technology means it's never been easier for people to set themselves up with a camera and a website so make sure you ask how long they've been working as a full-time wedding photographer and if they have any relevant accreditation.

WHAT?

Decide what you want from your photographer. Are you looking for something traditional, or are you open to other ideas? Think about the style of your wedding and strongly consider the genre of

photography that's most appropriate for you.

WHERE?

Searching the internet for suppliers is an extremely popular way of finding your photographer. I like to encourage potential customers to come and visit me at my office so they can see a variety of my work and sample albums.

WHEN?

You need to get your photographer sorted at least 12 months before your big day, especially if it's going to be on a Saturday between May and September.

WHY?

Your photographs are what you'll look back on in years to come and they'll be a permanent reminder of your day.





HAIR AND MAKE-UP: advice from stylist Maria Hastings

WHO?

The best way to find your perfect hair and make-up artist is always by listening to recommendations and reading reviews.

WHAT?

Decide what image you'd like. Is the sultry look for you or are you more of an English rose?

WHERE?

Think about where you'll be most comfortable with your hair and make-up artist. Some brides like to go to a salon as it adds an extra element to the day, while others feel more relaxed preparing at home.

WHEN?

You'll ideally need to book your hair and make-up artist 12 months before the big day to ensure you get the person you really want. All good artists get booked up in advance.

WHY?

This is your special day and you need and want to look your absolute best. Your artist should be happy to oblige you in any location you choose – salon or home – so you get to relax from the moment you open your eyes.

CAKE: advice from wedding planner Maria-Antonia Greenhill

WHO?

The best way to find your perfect maker is to do your research and of course to taste the product! Websites are a great indicator of the level of craftsmanship bestowed by a cake designer. As well as feeling a connection with the overall designs that you see, look closely at the details such as the whether the cake boards are covered and if the piping is consistent. See if the finish is up to a standard that you're happy with as it's very likely that you'll get a similar finish on your big day. Be up-front about your budget so that you can focus on suppliers within your price range.

WHAT?

Are you looking for something traditional, or are you open to other ideas? Some things to consider are your wedding theme, the reception space where the cake will be cut, your budget, when the cake will be served and how many it should feed. Narrow your favourite designs down to a maximum of seven, as this will help focus your cake maker's creativity.

WHERE?

Search for suppliers that are relatively local to you or, local to your venue. Keep in mind the size of the cake you want and also the distance to transport it on the wedding day itself, as this can push the cost up a little too.

WHEN?

You need to have your cake sorted about seven months before your wedding day. The cake is one of the last items that many couples address on their 'to do' list but there's a big difference between leaving it until last and leaving it until the last minute. Good cake suppliers get booked months ahead and as such it's always advisable to get them in place for your date early even if you end up tweaking the design a bit down the planning line. Many couples underestimate how much the cake will cost and by leaving it until last, can easily find themselves with a very small pot of money which won't get them the cake they envisaged.

WHY?

Traditionally, the cutting of the cake is the first task that a newly married couple perform together as husband and wife so there's deep symbolism associated with that ceremony. It's also one

of the iconic photo moments of the day so it's always worth making sure the cake is positioned somewhere really flattering in the space and looks good because you'll have a picture of it forever.





WEDDING PLANNING

FLOWERS: advice from florist Janis O'Leary

WHO?

Search for florists in your local area and ones that have been recommended by the team at your wedding venue or by friends. Visit them all and choose someone you trust – don't necessarily go with the cheapest.

WHAT?

Flowers can pull together your whole look and give your day a real wow factor. Good florists research all the latest trends and products, visit trade fairs and can source materials to complement your theme. They can often hire suitable containers so look at pictures on the web and in magazines and take inspiration from dresses for your bridal flowers. The setting of the venue for your reception is an important consideration as well.

WHERE?

Try local directories such as www.freeindex.co.uk. These sites group suppliers by area and rank them by reviews received direct from customers and clients, rather than testimonials

on the supplier's own site. Check out their own sites too, but be objective – are they geared to weddings? Are there pictures, blogs or other references you can look at for an idea of their style?

WHEN?

If you're getting married at peak time, and by that I mean Easter, and August, or if you're having a large wedding, you need to secure suppliers a year in advance. Six months is usually sufficient for the remaining dates but popular florists can be booked up quickly so have an initial consultation, find someone you trust and confirm. You can sort out the finer details later.

WHY?

Flowers can be used to personalise the day and their ability to bring together all the different elements shouldn't be underestimated. The bridal bouquet is the traditional starting point for choosing flowers. The main bridal flower is usually incorporated into the venue flowers and roses are still the enduring favourite as they last all day and look beautiful. Current trends include bright clear colours, sunflowers or a 'just picked from the garden' look.



VENUE STYLING: advice from stylist Sarah Webb

WHO?

The best way to find your perfect venue is to shop around. I'd always recommend meeting with the wedding coordinators at the ones you like to discuss your ideas and see what inspiration they can throw into the mix too.

Make sure that you can relate to them as they'll be portraying your vision on the day and no bride wants any unpleasant surprises when she walks in.

WHAT?

It's always great to have an idea of the sort of look or style that you wish to achieve. We always suggest to our clients to use magazines such as *Your Herts & Beds Wedding* or Pinterest to get inspiration. If you choose to hire a venue stylist, they should be able to make suggestions and contribute to your ideas. Décor usually depends on the type of venue you choose, and I often advise that less is more.

WHERE?

Search the internet in the comfort of your own home. Arrange a meeting with the stylists you like best to discuss your requirements further. Visiting wedding shows is also a great place to meet suppliers and really see what people can offer.

WHEN?

Of course, choosing a venue is one of the most important parts of the planning process and you'll feel a huge sense of relief once that's done. There are no set rules around timescales for styling. Some brides wish to get this aspect sorted earlier so as to tick it off their list, while others are happy to leave it longer and see if they're inspired by anything along the way.

WHY?

Venue styling can be a great way to personalise your day and can often be a talking point for your guests. It doesn't have to cost you lots of money and often it's the simple touches that make a real impact.

CONTACT OUR EXPERTS

Becky Kerr, www.beckerphotography.co.uk

Janis O'Leary, www.daizy.co.uk

Maria-Antonia Greenhill, www.whitedoorevents.co.uk

Maria Hastings, www.glamourpusswedding.com

Sam Newby-Ricci, www.heritagebrides.co.uk

Sarah Webb, www.timelessinspirations.co.uk