



PHOTO: REME CAMPOS

GO YOUR OWN WAY

... and other words of wedding wisdom from brand-new bride Olivia Gordon

Planning your big day is a steep learning curve. When you get engaged you won't know where to begin, but by the time it's over, you'll be an expert. Ex-bride Olivia Gordon has some hard-won advice.

BE YOURSELF

One of the first things my mum said to me when I got engaged was not to feel I had to do everything the conventional way. Did I listen? No! I was too busy

fretting about how we'd afford favours for 150 guests. But by my wedding day, I'd learned my mother's lesson for myself.

Going to five very different weddings in the months before our own day helped. I realised that there really are no rules: everyone else was doing whatever they wanted. One friend took off her veil the second the ceremony was over; another wore hers until she left her reception at midnight. Not everyone had flowers at the ceremony. And only half the couples gave out favours.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Before you know it, you've picked your bridesmaids and put a deposit down on a venue. But six months on, you might change your mind and find commitments hard to break.

By the end of my engagement, there were people I wished I hadn't invited in the initial excitement: invitations are easy to give and impossible to take back, so treat them like gold dust. Having planned for flowers to be done by a family friend, I eventually realised that, despite her kindness, I wanted a professional – a rather awkward situation. And the honeymoon we thought we wanted in January wasn't what we'd have chosen by the time August rolled around.

Of course, be organised and don't leave planning too late – but give yourself as much time and flexibility as possible.

DON'T SETTLE FOR A SECOND-BEST DRESS

Tracking down your dream dress can be surprisingly hard, but don't take no for an answer. I found a dress I adored online, but it had been discontinued and wasn't stocked anywhere. I resigned myself to finding something else, but nothing came close. Weeks later, I Googled my dress again and up popped a shop advertising a sample of it hundreds of miles away for a fraction of the original price. I drove five hours to try it on – it was three sizes too big, but could be altered. I bought it on the spot and was so glad I did.

One bride I know fell in love with a £2500 wedding dress, which was far above her budget. So she shopped around until she found something more affordable. But, having opted for the cheaper dress, she couldn't get the other one out of her mind. Realising she had to have it, she bought it. She ended up spending more than she would have if she'd just followed her instinct.

Never give up on the dress you love; if you're told it's not available, keep asking. Chances are, it's out there somewhere.

AVOID THE 'W' WORD

As soon as you mention the word 'wedding' to a supplier, prices seem to double. Often they do need to know this is your special day, but if you can avoid telling them, you could make savings.

I'd have saved weeks of research if I'd realised that calling a cake a wedding cake can send its price well over £500. We did the sums: eight large fudge cakes from our local bakery, enough for 150, cost £180. Our florist decorated the cake with a canopy of rosebuds and daisies. Another bride I know had a makeover in a high-street salon for her make-up on her wedding morning, never letting on that in two hours' time she'd be walking down the aisle.

LOSE THE STRESS

Like most brides, I turned into a little bit of a control freak, but eventually I realised you can't think of everything. A motorway accident two hours before

Only go to trouble if you enjoy it. I spent every evening for a week sewing lace on to place cards, but few noticed my hard work

our wedding meant that several guests were stuck in traffic and missed the ceremony. I prayed for it not to rain, but it did. Yet these problems didn't matter in the end; the thing that annoyed me the most was that I'd worried too much.

And absolutely only go to trouble if you enjoy it. I spent every evening for a week sewing lace onto place cards – I love making things – but few of my guests

noticed my hard work. Your friends will adore your wedding no matter what.

PREPARE FOR SURPRISES

A wedding throws all relationships into the spotlight. Some people amaze you with generosity and kindness, while others let you down. Many brides find it extremely hard coping with the fact that there are always a few people who don't behave as well as expected – family going awol, guests who never RSVP and bridesmaids who throw strops. Some people just don't understand how much brides need their support. Happily, though, other family and friends will more than make up for this with loving and dependable behaviour.

TAKE A TIME OUT

Something changes when you have three weeks until your wedding day. There's so much to organise at the last minute that you don't get a day off, and such strong emotions are bubbling up that it feels like you're walking into a hurricane – everything gets swept into it and normal life is suspended.

Nobody warned me that a few days before your wedding, your body and mind seem to switch into a different mode – I was living off adrenaline, my heart beating faster than usual, neither eating nor sleeping properly thanks to excitement and nerves.

However calm and organised you've been, be prepared for the last few weeks to be emotional and tiring. Try to get plenty of rest, good food and exercise and go easy on yourself. Ultimately, enjoy it – you'll never have the same amazing day again.

AND ANOTHER THING...

- Some guests will go off list. If, like me, you choose a honeymoon list, be aware that some guests will still give you homewares. Plan for it and ask guests to check with you if they prefer to buy you something for your house, so you can tell them what you need.
- Don't arrange to do anything on the day of the wedding apart from getting ready. Be sure to try on your dress the day before so you know how to do up

any complicated buttons and bustles.

- Many newlyweds, including me, end up wishing they'd stayed around for a few days between the wedding and the honeymoon to avoid missing out on the post-wedding atmosphere, which is filled with all the gossip and congratulations. It may sound unbelievable until you've been through it, but trust me, you'll probably also be dying for a few days of rest and normality at home.