

Your day your way

Discovering that having the wedding you want isn't as easy as you hoped? Bride-to-be Olivia Gordon feels your pain



When my boyfriend, Phil, proposed last October, the very first thing we said about our wedding was, "We'll do it exactly the way we want." I could hardly have guessed in those dreamy moments that a few months down the line I'd be panicking about guiding my mother, fiancé, florist, reception manager and caterer through a 50-point to-do list in preparation for W-day.

I'm certainly not complaining. Planning a wedding is the only chance most of us ever have to put together all of our favourite things – flowers, friends, music, foods, wines and outfits – and indulge every whim. Heaven! But the flipside is that everyone, from relatives to friends to the saleswoman in the wedding-dress shop, thinks they know what you should be doing – and negotiating all these pressures can be surprisingly tough.

For me, it started with the engagement ring. One friend said Phil 'had' to spend a month's salary on the ring, while my non-materialistic mother disapproved of Phil spending his hard-earned money on a diamond. So Phil and I followed our instincts: we chose the ring together, and although I didn't want to know how much it cost, I told Phil not to spend a month's pay on it. We'd found a middle path that was our way rather than anyone else's, something we're trying to do with all of the other pressures that are coming thick and fast.

The wedding 'rules' include: inviting relatives you never see; buying each of your bridesmaids a £200 watch to say thank you; and taking lessons for your first dance. And God forbid you forget seatbacks. Of course we'd be lost without our hairdressers, cake-makers and invitation-printers, but it helps to remember the bigger picture.

The good news is that all the brides I know are flexing their creative muscles in their wedding planning. Chloë, 28, from Warwickshire, doesn't like the tradition of only men giving speeches at the reception, so she's doing one herself, and is asking her mum to as well. Eleanor, 29, from London, is wearing a silver and pink dress, not a white one, and having no bridesmaids or best man.

She and her fiancé are having a joint hen and stag party and will walk up the aisle together. Madeleine, 30, from London, says, "We're inviting some relatives we might have chosen to forget about, but having the tone of the day set by us. Receiving lines? Definitely not."

We brides aren't selfish – we know how important weddings are to our families, and sometimes you have to put others' wishes first to avoid a major rift. But it pays to keep true to your instincts, good taste and common sense. It can be hard to feel your reception will be complete without bank-breaking colour-coordinated flowers in every toilet and scatterings of favours over every surface. Joanne, 30, from Sydney, says, "I obsessed about the invitations, stressing that bridesmaids' dresses, flowers and table napkins have to match envelope liners. In the end, I realised that envelopes are admired for a second and then thrown in the bin, never to be thought of again."

Psychologist Trudy Hill believes the

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unrealistic idea that our wedding day must be 'just so' is responsible for a lot of the pressure. "A wedding is not a competition. If you manage to have all the very important things your way, the smaller details are less important and don't need to be stressed over."

So how can you be assertive without coming across as pushy? Trudy advises setting clear boundaries early on. "Make a list of things that are very important to you, then list things you don't mind compromising on. Communicate this to people clearly." To get your way without treading on any toes, 'sandwich' negatives between compliments. Trudy says, "Tell your bridesmaid: 'I really appreciate you putting so much effort into helping me pick my dress. I feel the shoes you selected aren't for me, but you've opened my eyes as to how good that style can look.'"

I've only had a couple of wedding nightmares, but if another one materialises, I'll try to remember what my wedding really means. Our guests won't be sneering at my dress because it isn't Valentino. They'll be celebrating with us, and even if our wedding was in McDonald's and I wore a bin-liner, our day would still be all about love.

IS THE PRESSURE GETTING TO YOU?

Envelope liners are:

- A** Carefully matched to your overall theme
- B** Something you'd love but probably can't afford
- C** Something you've never even heard of

Your bridesmaid hates her outfit. You:

- A** Fork out for the designer dress of her choice
- B** Calmly tell her you've made your decision and that's that
- C** Shout "It's my special day" and inform her she's no longer your bridesmaid

Your first dance is:

- A** An ultra-choreographed rendition of 'that' scene from *Dirty Dancing* to wow guests
- B** A romantic slow dance
- C** Non-existent – you don't want to be in the spotlight

Your beauty regimen is:

- A** Tougher than Victoria Beckham's
- B** More time in the gym and eating more fruit
- C** Ordering your dress a size too big so you can relax into it

When planning your wedding, you need to please:

- A** Your parents – after all, they're paying for most of it
- B** Family, friends, and you and your fiancé, too
- C** Just you and your man

You've always dreamed of a beach wedding for two – it turns out to be:

- A** A church wedding followed by a huge reception – you couldn't disappoint your mum
- B** An official ceremony for your loved ones, with private beach vows a few days after
- C** Just as planned – you don't breathe a word till you arrive home as man and wife

Mostly As The pressure's really got to you. Is this the wedding you want, or the one everyone else wants?

Mostly Bs You've found a 'middle path' and are doing things your way without treading on anyone else's feelings. Success!

Mostly Cs Your wedding is exactly how you want it. Not everyone will appreciate it, but full marks for assertiveness.