

# Taking the plunge, front and back

Bridal Planner

## FASHION from H16

sleeves. (The Marchesa gown is part of the designer's spring 2012 bridal collection.)

And while tradition dictates modest gowns for royals, Kate Middleton and Charlene Wittstock, the bride of Prince Albert II of Monaco, both chose anything-but-stodgy necklines: Kate's classic V and Charlene's origami-style portrait neck both nodded to the modern while still covering their décolletage.

So how do you find the right neckline for you? First, determine whether you want something demure (a religious ceremony may require a modest gown) or a more sensual look. Do you want a neckline that will de-emphasize a large bosom or enhance a small one? Imagine your face as a portrait, then look for a neckline that flatters the shape of your shoulders and properly frames you. Remember that no matter what the neckline — straight, asymmetrical or plunging — an embellished finish will become the focus of attention.

Of course, the options can be dizzying. **"We are seeing silhouettes ranging from one-shoulder gowns to long illusion sleeves and everything in-between,"** says Julie Sabatino, owner of *The Stylish Bride*, a bridal fashion styling company in Manhattan. **"Non-strapless dresses are gaining popularity and have picked up momentum since Kate Middleton chose a long-sleeve lace V-neck gown and celebrities like Lauren Bush and Ivanka Trump opted for non-strapless dresses."**

For spring, designers are adorning necklines and fabric straps with everything from floral appliqués to beading and lace; they're draping tulle asymmetrically and even creating peek-a-boo and three-dimensional designs for the fashion-forward bride. Carolina Herrera took a unique approach, showing a strapless gown paired with a removable V-neck lace blouse to be worn under the dress, perfect for brides who want a bit more coverage.

For the bride searching for a sexy wedding-day look, there is no shortage of plunging V-necklines — which Sabatino says will both flatter your décolletage and

**highlight your face.** Perhaps the most daring: several to-the-navel V's by Badgley Mischka and Reem Acra.

And it's not just front necklines that are making bold statements. "Brides are beginning to take fashion risks by moving away from the typical clean back," says fashion editor and stylist Erica Sigel. "Unique back lines add an additional dimension to a wedding dress."

Forget the traditional scoop, straight, keyhole or V-line back. This season, designers are adding intricate detailing that can make a back as sexy or soft as you want it to be. "Backs covered in tulle or lace offer complete coverage while still being revealing," Sigel says. "Embellishments such as fabric flowers or petals, beading and embroidery will draw wanted attention to a sexy, toned back."

As anyone who's watched even one episode of "Say Yes to the Dress" knows, designer Pnina Tornai is the queen of the va-va-voom wedding gown, many of them sheer, bejeweled and cut down to here in front — and in back. For spring, she's ramped up the glam quotient, with a number of back-baring styles featuring "necklaces" of pearls and crystals draping from shoulder blade to waist.

Need something a bit more modest, but still want sexy? Marchesa's illusion-back gowns embellished with embroidery should fit the bill. The sheer tulle gives the impression of nudity while the silver bullion appears like an elegant tattoo.

"Because we've been in a strapless cycle for more than 15 years, it was so refreshing to see a sleeve again and an on-the-shoulder neckline," says Mark Ingram, owner of the Mark Ingram Atelier in Manhattan. "But what designers did was not to replicate the old-fashion long-sleeve high-neck look and instead created very sexy, very sheer, very interesting and very red-carpet looks."



## The embellished back

Marchesa offers a sexy back story with an illusion cowl embroidered with silver bullion, \$6,500. Available at The Wedding Salon of Manhasset, 516-869-8455.



## High neck

J.Crew adds glamour to a high neckline with crystal beading. Stones of various shapes and sizes create an ornate jeweled collar and add some sparkle to the deep-V back, \$2,200. Available at [jcrew.com](http://jcrew.com) or through the J.Crew Collection & Bridal in Manhattan. Call 212-824-2500.



## Va-va-voom

Add a dash of sass and sparkle with a soft cowl neckline drape that just covers a sprinkling of Swarovski crystals, \$1,200, by Maggie Sottero. Available at Bridal Suite of Centereach. Call 631-585-6040.