

DRESSED,  
STYLED, *and*  
DOWN *the* AISLE

Becoming a Stylish Bride

# CHAPTER 12

## THE LIFECYCLE OF A CUSTOM BRIDESMAID DRESS

*brought to you by*

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Gone are the days when bridesmaids were expected to wear heinous dresses they couldn't wait to get out of. Today's bride wants her ladies to look— **and feel** — beautiful while also fitting perfectly into her aesthetic. Enter the custom bridesmaid dress. Beautiful, comfortable and designed by you, it's the best way to ensure you get **exactly** what you want. **Here's everything you need to know.**

### **MAKE SURE THE PRICE IS RIGHT**

In our experience, it's hard to do a custom bridesmaid dress that looks great for under \$1,500. I'm sure there are other resources out there that aren't on our radar, particularly outside of the NYC/LA areas.

### **IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT DESIGNER**

It is important that you **do your research** when picking your seamstress. You will want to find someone who has done this kind of work before. Not just someone who can make a dress, but someone who has **worked with brides, wedding parties and on a timeline**. It's perfectly acceptable to ask for examples and references. If you are struggling to find someone, ask your local bridal salon if they know of anyone in the area that does this kind of work.

### **GET A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT YOU WANT**

If and when you find someone to make them, start with a **mood board**. You will need to know the color scheme, styles and details you want to have incorporated into the dress. It's also a good idea to know what you **don't** want. Conveying that information to your designer can be helpful.

### **ASK FOR SKETCHES AND SWATCHES**

Unless you know **exactly** what you want, the designer will submit sketches to define the concept. I suggest that you only skip this step if you have a sample of a dress that you are modeling the dress from. The designer will also submit fabric swatches for you to choose from.



## GET MEASUREMENTS

Because everyone takes measurements differently, this can prove a little tricky, especially if your bridesmaids are in different geographical areas. To avoid this turning to chaos, **follow the following process in order to avoid mistakes:**

- 1) Have the designer send a detailed sheet of the measurements they need that the person taking them follows.
- 2) Have the measurements taken while on FaceTime with the designer or stylist.
- 3) Have the bridesmaids send photos of themselves in leggings and a sports bra or a bathing suit as a reference for a body type that the designer can refer back to.

## TIME FOR THE PROTOTYPE

Once all of this is done, the designer will make a **muslin of the dress**. This is a prototype of the dress made out of muslin fabric (or sometimes a different cheap fabric that will be able to better simulate the fabric you are using) to get the pattern correct. While they can sometimes just grade the pattern to accommodate different sizes, in an ideal situation, you'd have a muslin made for every bridesmaid. However, if that is not possible, you certainly need one to **ensure the design is correct**.

## FITTINGS

Next is the **muslin fitting**. This is when the designer can adjust the fit and style of the dress as needed. I love this part in every custom project because it's really cool to see them draw right on the dress to make notes, and cut and drape things on the person right in real-time.

## THE DRESSES ARE MADE

This is the longest part of the process, so you'll want to make sure you have a **clear timeline with due dates**. When working with smaller designers, it's important to know that they are often creative-focused and not process-focused. In our company, we have someone designated to frequently check in with them to **ensure that they are on track**.



## SHIP THE DRESSES

It's best to do this **eight weeks** before the wedding day to give time for alterations, but if that isn't possible, aim for **no less than one month before**. Even custom dresses require small tweaks to be done, even if just the hem. At *The Stylish Bride*®, we advise the bridesmaids to get this done with a local seamstress, but if they don't have a reliable vendor, the dress should be pinned and sent back to the designer to be altered. Should they go that route, have them on FaceTime when the fitter is pinning so they know what needs to be done. **Pinning is its own language** and everyone does it a little differently.

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