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Becoming a Stylish Bride

CHAPTER 07

IS A CUSTOM WEDDING DRESS RIGHT FOR YOU?

brought to you by

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There can be something really exciting about the idea of creating a dress that is completely and your own. No one else will have it, so you don't run the risk of someone else that you know wearing it before you, it will be (in theory), exactly what you want that you can't find, and it will fit you like a glove. However, after working on many custom wedding dresses over the years, I'd like to share with you the realities and potential challenges you can face so that you can make an educated decision. So let's break it down.



1. WHAT IS A CUSTOM WEDDING DRESS?

A custom wedding dress is a dress that is made specifically for you by a designer.

2. HOW MUCH DO THEY COST?

This is highly variable and depends on who makes it and the fabrics they use. It can be anywhere from a few thousand dollars if it's a lesser-known designer to well over six figures if it's made by a top design house such as Dior, Elie Saab, or Chanel to name a few.

3. WHEN SHOULD I EXPLORE THIS OPTION?

- A) After going to wedding dress appointments and exploring all of the options.*
- B) When you are trying to make too many changes to an existing dress.*
- C) If one of your top priorities is a dress that is unique to you and no one else will have.*

4. WHAT DOES THE PROCESS LOOK LIKE? .

It starts with a brainstorming session, then sketches are created, fabric swatches are shown and selected. Then a "muslin or toile" is created which is the dress made out of muslin fabric (or a less expensive version of another fabric) so the design and fit can be perfected. Then the actual fabric dress is made and fitted to you.

5. HOW DO I SELECT THE BEST DESIGNER FOR THE JOB?

1) Select someone with Wedding Dress Experience

Over the years I've had many women ask me about working with a cool up and coming designer or their favorite ready-to-wear house. And while I think it would be really fun and creative to do that, it's almost always a bad idea. It's absolutely imperative to work with someone that makes wedding dresses for a few reasons:

- A) Wedding dresses are different from making other types of clothing. The fabrics are more delicate, they need to function well in various locations and climates, and they have to be comfortable for the bride to wear and move around in. These are things that wedding designers are very familiar with and a non-bridal designer may not be.*
- B) Your wedding dress is arguably the most important and probably expensive garment you will ever purchase and the pressure brides feel to look perfect is high. It's very important to work with someone that understands the psyche of a bride and work within that context.*
- C) A wedding dress has a very specific timeline and you need someone who can work within those parameters. I've worked with designers before who are traveling constantly and it's difficult to get on their schedule for fittings. Or they don't realize the importance of not rescheduling meetings or missing deadlines. I'm not saying that everyone does this, but it's something that creatives may not understand in the same way that a wedding dress designer does, and it can end with stress and frustration on both sides.*



2) Aesthetic

Finding a designer that you connect with stylistically is easier today because of social media. Just make sure that you properly vet them and always speak to other brides they've worked with before moving forward.

3) Budget

This one is a little trickier because it's hard to know how much a custom dress will cost until the design and details are defined. If you really love the work of a particular designer, give their corporate office a call and find out how much the starting cost is for a custom dress.

6. HOW DO I KNOW IF THIS ROUTE IS RIGHT FOR ME?

The reality is, I think most brides are not a good fit for a custom dress. Unless you have all of the following things, it can be a difficult and stressful process. The last thing you want is to end up with something that doesn't match the idea in your head and that you don't love. These are the things that I feel you must have in order to be a good custom candidate:

1) Clear Vision

To set yourself up for success you need to know what you want and what you don't want in a dress. Whenever we explore the custom route with a client it is because they know what they are looking for, and it doesn't exist in the marketplace. We always go to several appointments and try on many different shapes and styles. It's important not to skip this step because it's common for a bride to think she wants one thing, only to end up with the exact opposite

2) Faith in the process

Whenever you create something from scratch, it's going to be more work and have more steps than purchasing something that already exists. It's imperative to work with a team that you trust, have a defined timeline of dates to be met, and a clear understanding of the deliverables. If these things all align, and you trust the designer to produce something you love and work with you until it's right, then you are halfway there. I've seen this go badly, and believe me, it's not fun.

3) Time and accessibility to travel

As mentioned above, you will have more meetings and be needed in person more frequently than if you bought a dress that exists.

4) Budget

Typically getting a custom dress is not an inexpensive route and you are going to want to make sure you are aware of all the costs involved. Are the fittings included? When are payments required (never pay 100% upfront). And factor in travel expenses too.



7. WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL CHALLENGES?

The biggest issues I've come across over the years are the following:

- A) The bride couldn't envision the dress and therefore had trouble trusting that she would like it which made the process difficult.*
- B) The bride couldn't articulate what she liked or didn't like.*
- C) The designer didn't have a set process and timeline, and they weren't easy to work with.*
- D) The bride was concerned about offending the designer if they didn't like something and therefore didn't speak up.*
- E) Traveling was hard for the bride so it was difficult to schedule the time needed.*

With all of that said, some of my favourite projects and dresses have been custom and there is really nothing like it if you are the right bride for it. Know yourself, how you operate and whether or not you can live with a little more uncertainty than buying something off the rack. If you can, then you are well on your way to creating something special and unique.