

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

Becoming a Stylish Bride

# CHAPTER 07

## 14 COMMON WEDDING DRESS CHANGES

*brought to you by*

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Sometimes you find a dress that you love, but it's only 90% perfect, and you need to decide if you should tweak it or move on. Remember that my best advice is to find a "dress with no buts", but if your heart is set on it, it's important to know what changes can be done, how much of a risk they present, and at what stage in the process they happen.

So, in order to keep the process streamlined (and save you a lot of frustration), we have put together this reference guide that highlights the most common changes brides consider making.



## 1. ADD STRAPS OR OFF THE SHOULDER SLEEVES

- **What to know:** It's easy to add a strap or an arm swoosh to a strapless dress, and many times, you can even make them detachable. You can usually take it from the hem, but if that is not possible, order more more fabric. This can be done in the fitting.
- **Difficulty level:** Low
- **Done during production or fittings?** Fittings
- **Alternatives:** N/A

## 2. ADJUST THE DEPTH OF A V-NECK

- **What to know:** Making the "V" of the v-neck to be higher is typically done in production. Always go higher than you think you will want because it can be taken down in the fitting, but not raised.
- **Difficulty level:** Low
- **Done during production or fittings?** Production
- **Alternatives:** You can always consider adding tulle, embroidery or lace trim to the V to provide more coverage without changing the pattern.

## 3. MAKE THE TRAIN LONGER

- **What to know:** Most designers will add length to the train for you. However, a word of caution: The longer the train, the bigger the bustle. You may not want to drag that much volume around all night.
- **Difficulty level:** Low
- **Done during production or fittings?** Production
- **Alternatives:** Consider adding a long veil instead. You will get the drama without the weight of the longer skirt. You can also consider adding an overskirt or a watteaux to the back that are removable.



#### 4. TAKING OUT VOLUME IN THE SKIRT

- **What to know:** When buying a ballgown or a-line dress, brides often want to take out some of the volume in the skirt. While you can reduce some (25%) without changing the way the skirt looks too much, it's important to pay close attention to the impact on the dress. Taking out too much can make the dress look deflated, depending on what fabric has been used.
- **Difficulty level:** Low
- **Done during production or fittings?** Fittings
- **Alternatives:** My suggestion is to order the dress as-is and decide in the fittings. More times than not, my clients end up leaving it.

#### 5. ADD BONING BUST SUPPORT

- **What to know:** Some dresses come with little or no boning in the bodice. Those with fuller chests will need some support. This can be done in a couple of different ways. First, you can change the shape of the bodice from molded (no underwire) to a corseted style (with an underwire). This change may or may not be visible depending on the fabric and must be done in production. Another option is to add boning to the bodice to give more support. This is typically done in a fitting.
- **Difficulty level:** Medium
- **Done during production or fittings?** Depends
- **Alternatives:** An alternative to this is to purchase a long line corset to give you the support without changing the shape of the dress. The fitter will often have a favorite type but will always suggest buying a few and bringing them with you to try at the fitting. You really want to purchase these at a bra shop that knows how to measure and fit a woman properly. If you are in the New York area, I highly recommend Bra Tenders.



## 6. ADD SLEEVES

- **What to know:** Adding a sleeve can be simple or complex, depending on the type. For example, a flutter sleeve can be easily added to a dress with a strap but changing a bodice so that is no longer strapless will require a pattern change.
- **Difficulty level:** Medium
- **Done during production or fittings?** Production
- **Alternatives:** An alternative is to add a bolero or jacket to give you coverage instead of changing the dress.

## 7. ADD SPARKLE

- **What to know:** It depends on how much sparkle, the designer doing it and the fabric it's on. Some designers have the ability to add sparkle to a treatment when the order is placed. Other times it needs to be added by hand in the fittings. Either way, it's typically a costly alteration to make.
- **Difficulty level:** Medium
- **Done during production or fittings?** Depends
- **Alternatives:** Sparkle it up with jewelry instead!



## 8. ADDING VOLUME TO THE SKIRT

- **What to know:** The first thing to consider is whether or not the skirt shape can accommodate more volume as is. If it's a circle skirt or a light fabric (like tulle), it most likely can. If it's a more structured fabric (like Duchess Satin), you should consult a fitter. Once you get the go-ahead, it's typically done by adding a few layers of crinoline underneath or by adding horsehair to the existing tulle. This will make it stand out more.
- **Difficulty level:** Medium
- **Done during production or fittings?** Depends
- **Alternatives:** If you want a little more volume, this can be done in the fitting, but I recommend ordering the dress as-is and seeing when it comes in. The dress samples are often less poofy because they've been tried on so many times which causes them to lose some of their stiffness.

## 9. CHANGE FABRICS

- **What to know:** This change ranges from easy to risky. If you know that you love a certain fabric (and the designer approves the change) then go for it (provided you have seen a sample or tried on a dress of theirs in your fabric of choice). However, if you are someone that has trouble visualizing things, don't do it. Changing fabrics works best when they are of a similar behavior and weight as each other. For example silk macado to silk faille.
- **Difficulty level:** Medium
- **Done during production or fittings?** Production
- **Alternatives:** The alternative is really to find a different dress that has already been done in the fabric you like.



## 10. CHANGE THE CUP SIZE

- **What to know:** Most dress samples are a B-Cup. If your size is any larger than that, they will 'open the cup' to accommodate your shape. However, this also changes the shape of the cup and can sometimes make it look more shell like. Call a fitter in to discuss your options before deciding.
- **Difficulty level:** Medium
- **Done during production or fittings?** Production
- **Alternatives:** If you love how the sample looks and are concerned about changing the cup shape, ask if raising the neckline would work instead. It doesn't always give the desired outcome, but many brides find it gives them just enough coverage.

## 11. CHANGE THE COLOR

- **What to know:** A lot of brides come in thinking they want white white and get thrown off by the dresses with a nude or cream lining, or a solid fabric that is a little too dark. It's ok to ask for a lighter option, but make sure you can actually see it. Color is subjective, and it's important to know that dresses in the stores are often oxidized from being out for a while and tried on by a lot of shoppers. This can deepen the color. It's important to ask to see an example of the fabric to see what it really looks like. And if you want to change the lining color, ask them to put a fabric swatch underneath the lace so that you can see what it will look like. Be aware this often makes the lace detail look less pronounced.
- **Difficulty level:** Medium
- **Done during production or fittings?** Production
- **Alternatives:** N/A



## 12. CHANGE THE NECKLINE

- **What to know:** Changing a strapless dress (straight across) into one with a dip or "V" can be done in the fitting. They will typically pin it in the appointment to give you an idea of what that would look like. However, if you want to go from a V-Neck to straight across, it will need to be done in production.
- **Difficulty level:** Medium
- **Done during production or fittings?** Depends
- **Alternatives:** If you are unsure if you want to change the neckline or don't know how much you'd like to change it, I suggest that you leave it as is. It's always better not to make a permanent change. If you are contemplating making a "V" into straight across, consider adding some lace or tulle instead of making a pattern change. It's less risky and can easily be done.

## 11. CHANGING THE SKIRT SHAPE

- **What to know:** Let's say that you fall in love with the top of one dress, but really want the skirt to be a different shape. Some designers will change this for you, and some won't. If they will, you'll want to try on the exact skirt you will be getting. Sometimes it is possible to stick the skirt of a dress on a top of the other in the appointment, and if you have a creative consultant, they can do that.
- **Difficulty level:** Medium
- **Done during production or fittings?** Production
- **Alternatives:** Make sure there you aren't just trying to create a different dress. Swapping out the skirt for another one can't be undone. Some of my clients that are handy with photoshop mock up what it will look like in a photo.





#### 14. REMOVE SPARKLE

- **What to know:** There are occasions when the designer has the ability to do this in production. They can order the fabric without the bling or change the color to be less 'sparkly.
- **Difficulty level:** High
- **Done during production or fittings?** Production
- **Alternatives:** It may be better to find a fabric you like as is, and use that instead. For example Monique Lhuillier and Mira Zwillinger will often interchange their laces on dress shapes.