

Weddings

Take My Advice

Wedding
consultants
come to the
aid of
busy brides.

by
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He's popped the question—or maybe you have (it's the '90s, after all)—and the first giddy rush of engagement euphoria has died down. Suddenly, you realize that you have an entire wedding to plan. *Don't panic!* You can get help. Take a deep breath, relax and read on.

If you're like most modern brides, you're probably trying to squeeze wedding planning into a hectic schedule filled with a growing career, visits to the health club and a burgeoning social calendar. Maybe you should consider joining the ranks of busy brides who are turning to bridal consultants for help in wedding planning.

"My clients tend to be career women or out-of-town brides who are returning home to get married," says Cheri Rice, owner of Personal Touch Bridal Consultants in Minneapolis and state coordinator for the Association of Bridal Consultants. "I even get young women who come in with their mothers; Mom is a busy career woman too and doesn't have time for intricate planning."

Also, brides and grooms are getting older and have set ideas, not to mention more money, for elaborate weddings. And second-time brides are willing to invest more money to ensure a memorable day.

How much do bridal consultants charge? According to Rice, most brides who use extended bridal-consultant services are planning weddings in the \$8,000 to \$15,000 range. Most consultants charge a flat fee, say from \$250 for a professional personal attendant the day of the wedding to \$1,000 for planning the entire wedding. Others may charge 10 to 15 percent of the total wedding costs.

How should a bride choose a bridal consultant? "Ask for three or four references," Rice says. "You wouldn't select a photographer without seeing examples of his or her work, and you should expect the same from a consultant." Ask how long she has been in the business and what her background is, Rice adds.

What exactly does a bridal consultant do? Basically, as much or as little as the bride

would like. While some brides just need general advice or a start in the right direction, others want the consultant to plan the entire wedding. Like Rice, most consultants first sit down with the bride and determine a budget—who is paying for what and what percentage of the total budget should be spent on each item. Next, the consultant recommends two to three photographers, florists and the like within the established budget. Sometimes the consultant will accompany the bride to the caterer or florist and handle confirming and reconfirming. Usually, the consultant will attend the wedding, assuring that everything runs smoothly and freeing up family and friends to enjoy the wedding.

Consultants can help with unusual requests. One of Rice's clients was an American groom marrying a Spanish bride. Custom in the bride's hometown dictated that the groom's closest female relative give each female wedding guest a gift. Rice's client wanted to give his Spanish guests something Minnesotan, so Rice commissioned a local artisan to make 100 desktop-size wooden loons. Don't be afraid to be creative; an experienced bridal consultant should at least help you explore your options. "Once a bride learns to trust her consultant," Rice says, "she can save time, energy and stress by taking the consultant's advice."

For those who can't afford a consultant, here are some good resources:

Books on wedding planning run the gamut from sweet and sentimental, such as Stewart, Tabori & Chang's *The Bride's Book: My Written Remembrances*, \$16.95 (sections include "The World We Share" and "Our Future Together"), to the practical, such as Beverly's Clark's *Planning a Wedding to Remember*, \$14.95 (with tips on handling divorced parents as well as a plethora of calendars and check lists).

Other books offer advice on photography, second weddings, showers, etiquette and videotaping weddings. Books range in price from *Emily Post on Weddings*, \$4.95, to Martha Stewart's deluxe *Weddings*, \$60. ❖