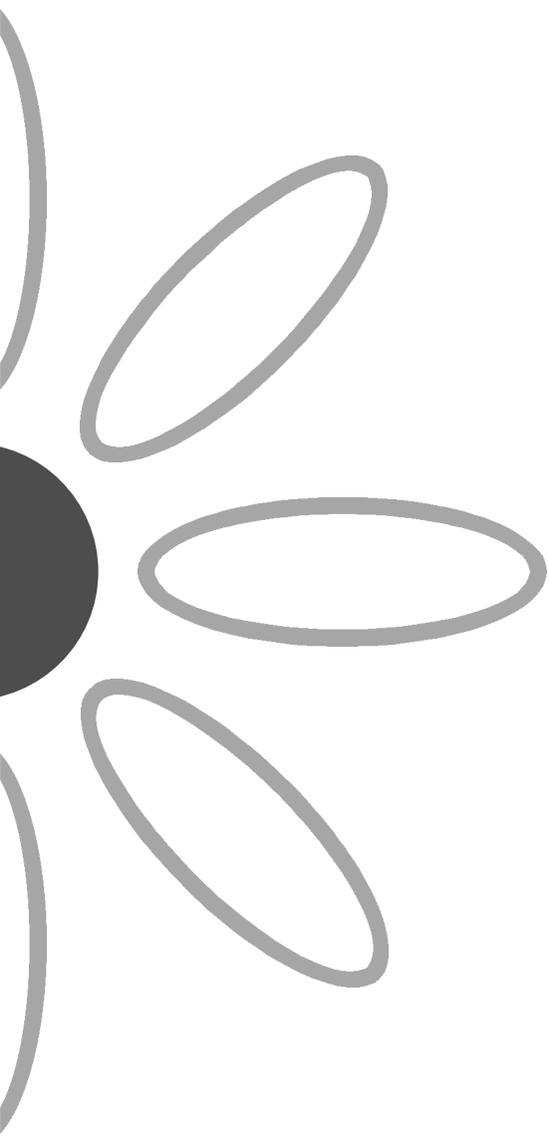


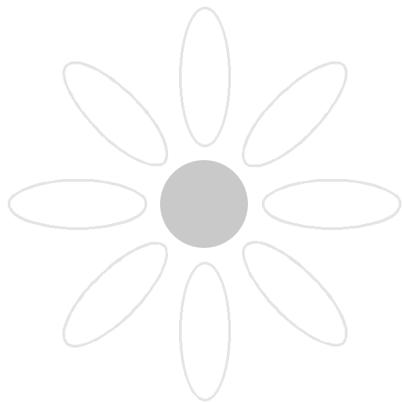


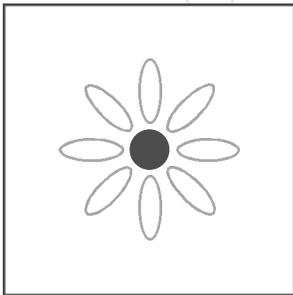
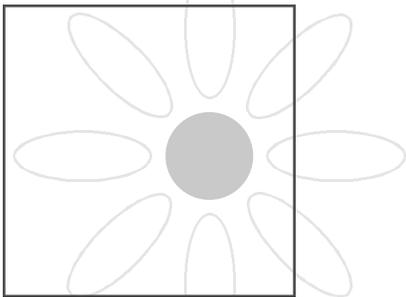
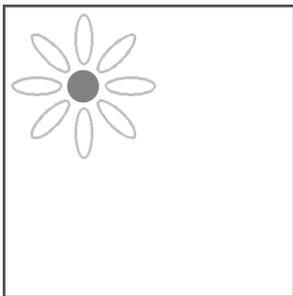
# A BRIDE'S GUIDE TO BRIDESMAIDS





## A BRIDE'S GUIDE TO BRIDESMAIDS





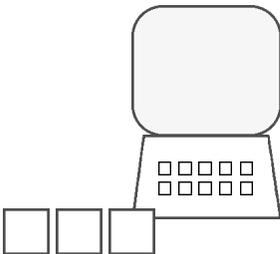
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Planning your wedding is not easy. Everyone has advice. Everyone has an opinion. And that's just the people you know! If you were to read just half the books, pamphlets, web sites, etc. written in the last half-century about wedding etiquette and protocol, you'd be reading and planning until your retirement! So how do you choose whose advice to heed and what resources are most relevant?

Unfortunately, we can't help you with the first part of that question: You'll have to wage your own battles with Aunt Frances and Grandma Helen over the seating arrangements. We can, however, point you to the most helpful resources: books, magazines and web sites that tell you what you need to know, not what you need to do (a selection of resources is listed at the back of this book). We restrict our discussion to what we know best – information and tips on "managing" your bridesmaids. We refrain from telling you what to do, because your creativity and imagination are what will make your wedding celebration memorable. We'll just provide a little help along the way.

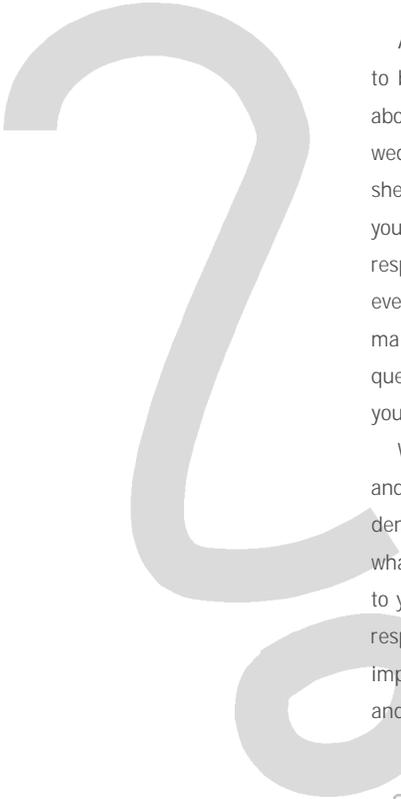
As a bride-to-be, wedding chief executive and senior creative officer, you'll be faced with a barrage of questions, comments and suggestions from your bridesmaids. Your "staff" will look to you for help, direction and sometimes even dispute resolution. We hope that after reading this book, like a seasoned CEO, you'll have the background, context and knowledge to manage your bridesmaids effectively and easily. So, without further ado, The Bride's Guide to Bridesmaids.







# INTRODUCTION



Although there is a tremendous amount of literature on how to be a "good" bride, there is a noticeable lack of information about bridesmaids. Even if you were a bridesmaid in another wedding, did the bride explain to you what your role was, what she expected from you, and where you could help? As a bride yourself, you will find that establishing your bridesmaids' responsibilities up front is the most effective way to be on top of everything. Perhaps your biggest questions surround the bridesmaid dress, fittings and finding the right fabric. Whatever your questions are about managing your bridesmaids, we can help you find the answers.

We open with a brief discussion of the bridesmaid tradition, and then move on to modern day rituals, expectations and tendencies. As we move from the past to the present, we'll lay out what you need to know to run the show in the days leading up to your wedding – including a detailed list of your bridesmaids' responsibilities. Finally, we step into the future, outlining the important information you'll need to organize your bridesmaids and enjoy the wonderful celebration on your wedding day.





# CHOOSING YOUR BRIDESMAIDS

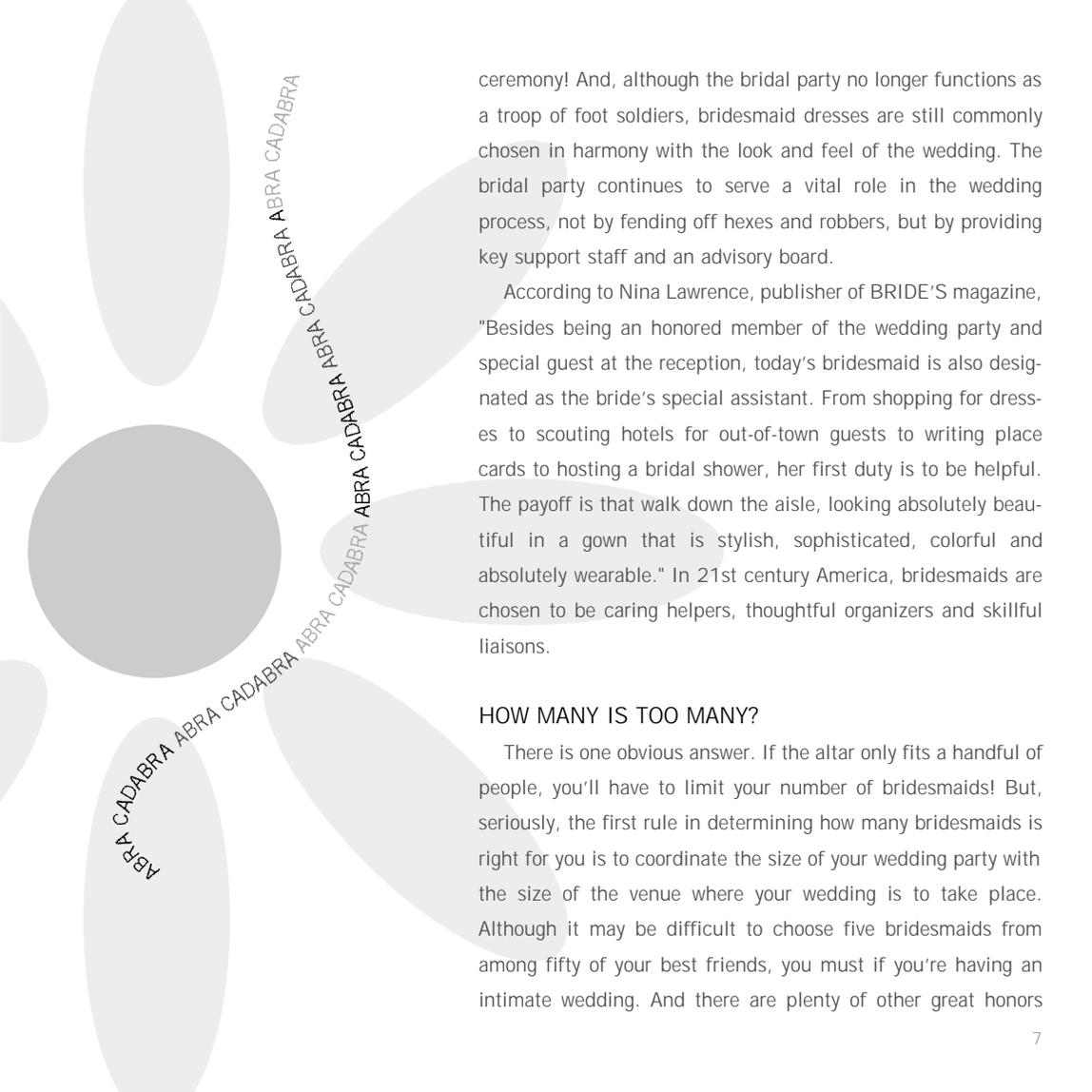


## A BRIEF HISTORY

The history of the bridesmaid varies across cultures, religions and time periods. In early Roman times, bridesmaids formed a kind of bridal infantry as they accompanied the bride to the groom's village. This "protective shield" of similarly outfitted bridesmaids was supposed to intervene if any wayward thugs or vengeful suitors tried to hurt the bride or steal her dowry. However, the Western bridesmaid tradition seems to have originated from later Roman law, which required ten witnesses at a wedding in order to outsmart evil spirits believed to attend marriage ceremonies. The bridesmaids and ushers dressed in identical clothing to the bride and groom, so that the evil spirits wouldn't know who was getting married. Even as late as 19th century England, the belief that ill-wishers could administer curses and taint the wedding still existed. In Victorian wedding photographs, for example, it can take quite a bit of inspection to pick out the bride and groom from among the other members of the bridal party!

## THE MODERN DAY BRIDESMAID

These early customs continue to have an influence today. The expression "thrice a bridesmaid, never a bride" arose from the bridesmaid's interception of, and gradual infection by (over the course of three weddings), the evil spirits trying to disrupt the

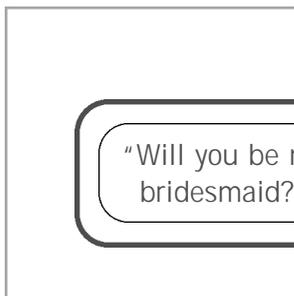
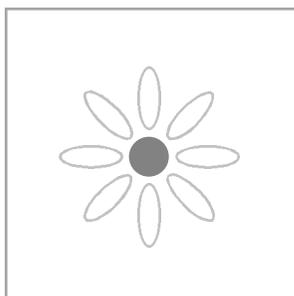


ceremony! And, although the bridal party no longer functions as a troop of foot soldiers, bridesmaid dresses are still commonly chosen in harmony with the look and feel of the wedding. The bridal party continues to serve a vital role in the wedding process, not by fending off hexes and robbers, but by providing key support staff and an advisory board.

According to Nina Lawrence, publisher of BRIDE'S magazine, "Besides being an honored member of the wedding party and special guest at the reception, today's bridesmaid is also designated as the bride's special assistant. From shopping for dresses to scouting hotels for out-of-town guests to writing place cards to hosting a bridal shower, her first duty is to be helpful. The payoff is that walk down the aisle, looking absolutely beautiful in a gown that is stylish, sophisticated, colorful and absolutely wearable." In 21st century America, bridesmaids are chosen to be caring helpers, thoughtful organizers and skillful liaisons.

## HOW MANY IS TOO MANY?

There is one obvious answer. If the altar only fits a handful of people, you'll have to limit your number of bridesmaids! But, seriously, the first rule in determining how many bridesmaids is right for you is to coordinate the size of your wedding party with the size of the venue where your wedding is to take place. Although it may be difficult to choose five bridesmaids from among fifty of your best friends, you must if you're having an intimate wedding. And there are plenty of other great honors



that you can hand out to close friends who want to participate in the wedding (e.g., they can help coordinate any other wedding-related activities, or they could write a special song or toast for the reception, etc.).

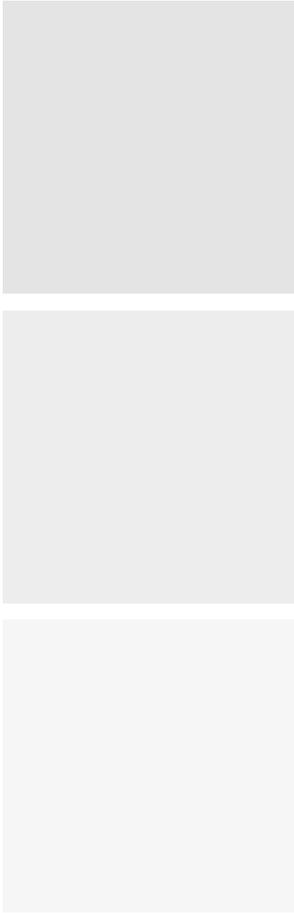
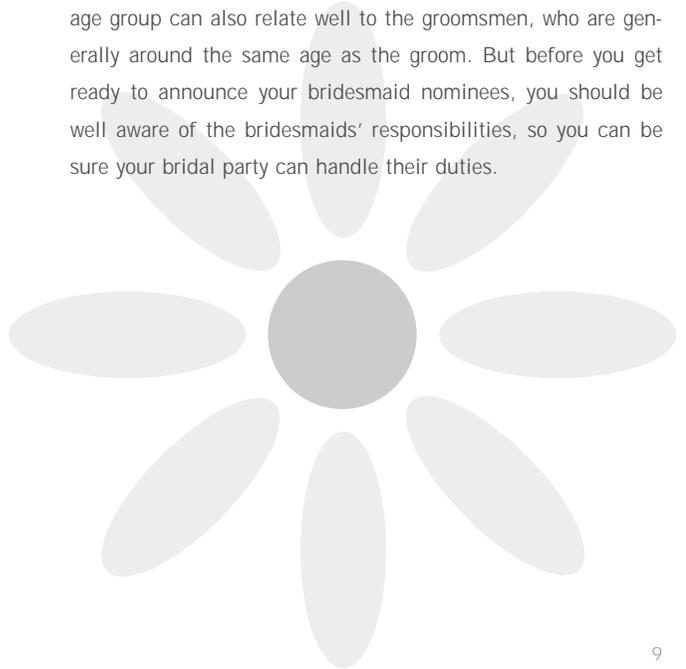
A good second rule is to consider the formality of the wedding. In general, formal weddings have a half dozen or more bridesmaids in addition to the maid of honor (it could be as many as a dozen, but that is very rare). Semiformal and casual weddings can have just one bridesmaid – the maid of honor – but typically have about three to five. And don't worry if the groom has more ushers than you have bridesmaids: Ushers can always double up in the recessional.

Of course, the final decision rests with you, the bride, but remember that the larger the number, the more difficult it may be for you to manage. And remember that the bridesmaids will all have to work together on many aspects of planning, so addressing any conflicts up front will avoid problems down the line. So the more the merrier...or too many cooks spoil the broth...you'll have to decide!

### "POPPING THE QUESTION"

In all likelihood, your bridesmaids will be among the first people to know that you're planning to get married. That's because most brides ask their closest friends and family members in a flurry of excited phone calls! However, there are no rules prescribing the right people to choose and there is no particularly right way to ask. It's entirely up to you. In general, your brides-

maids should be your sociable and engaging friends and family members, since many of their duties (in addition to organizational ones) will involve hosting, greeting and introducing. You can also have Junior Bridesmaids, generally between eight and fourteen years of age, who wear "junior" bridesmaid dresses. Or you can have Senior Bridesmaids – like a great aunt or grandmother – who may be your closest confidant or best ally. However, in the great majority of weddings, brides select friends and family around their own age, whom they know will be supportive and helpful in the planning process. Bridesmaids in your age group can also relate well to the groomsmen, who are generally around the same age as the groom. But before you get ready to announce your bridesmaid nominees, you should be well aware of the bridesmaids' responsibilities, so you can be sure your bridal party can handle their duties.



# BREAKDOWN OF BRIDESMAID RESPONSIBILITIES



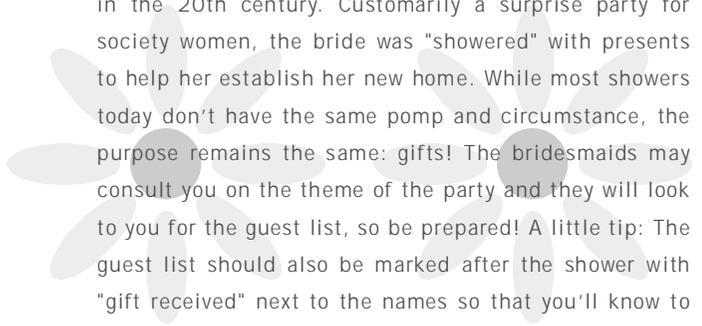
## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Your bridesmaids are the perfect people to turn to when you are stressed or frazzled from the details of planning. Emotional support may also mean clearing some space for you – brides often ask their bridesmaids to host a relative or friend from out of town. Most importantly, as people who care about you, your bridesmaids want to help. Some say they feel left out when they aren't consulted for support or guidance!



## THE BRIDAL SHOWER

The bridal shower gained popularity in America early in the 20th century. Customarily a surprise party for society women, the bride was "showered" with presents to help her establish her new home. While most showers today don't have the same pomp and circumstance, the purpose remains the same: gifts! The bridesmaids may consult you on the theme of the party and they will look to you for the guest list, so be prepared! A little tip: The guest list should also be marked after the shower with "gift received" next to the names so that you'll know to whom and for what to send thank you notes. NOTE: If you're worried about your planners' competence, there



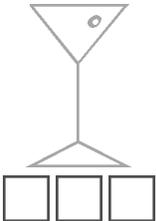
are a host of instructional resources available at major bookstores and online for theme inspirations and how-to advice on getting organized and running a posh soiree.

## THE BACHELORETTE PARTY

Once a quiet evening of word puzzles and hushed tales between demure ladies, some bachelorette parties now compete with the bar-hopping, raucous excitement of the notorious bachelor party. However, some brides simply want a tame evening of martinis with their closest friends (this is not to imply that bachelors wouldn't want this too!). Another growing trend is a joint party for the couple to celebrate the end of their bachelor/ette status together. Whatever the style, location and gender of the stripper (shh!), the bridesmaids have the opportunity (read: financial responsibility) to make a memorable celebration! NOTE: Make sure you weigh in with your own ideas, though, or you may end up with strippers when you wanted martinis!

## ASSORTED TASKS

These can range from the drawn-out and complex (e.g., making origami favors, helping choose the bridesmaid dress) to the simple and rote (e.g., addressing envelopes, fluffing the bride's train). You should be able to rely on your bridesmaids to reduce your stress by aiding in a wide range of detail work. This should be a con-



sideration before you "pop the question" – especially for your maid of honor, with whom you may spend a significant amount of time. Friends or family members who like to help and are easy to work with are great for these types of tasks. It may also behoove you to rely on recently married bridesmaids, who may be able to help by going through the nitty-gritty details that are still fresh in their minds.

## THE BRIDESMAID OUTFIT

Since bridesmaids foot the bill for their own dresses, shoes and other wedding apparel, many brides take one or all of them shopping. This may serve political ends for your bridesmaids – they get to send an ambassador of style – or it may be a matter of convenience for you – having someone to keep you company in what can be a long and complicated process. Since the dress can be a touchy issue for some bridesmaids, many brides prefer to involve them in the process as much as possible. We return to the dress, its politics and other bridesmaid accoutrements in Section IV.

## THE REHEARSAL DINNER

Your bridesmaids will be a central part of the wedding rehearsal as you go through the steps to ensure smooth sailing on your wedding day. Although they do not have any special responsibilities at the rehearsal dinner, it



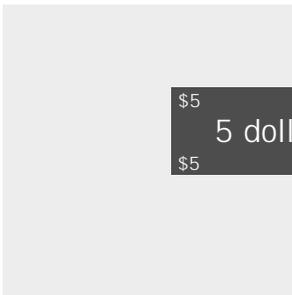
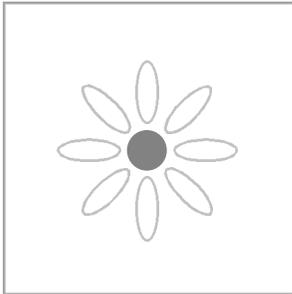
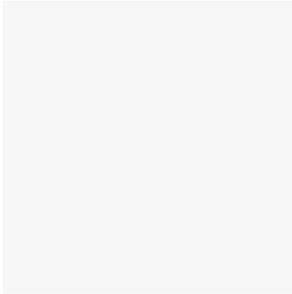
will be a good chance for them to mingle with the groomsmen so they will feel comfortable socializing with them at the wedding. It is also customary at the rehearsal dinner to present your bridesmaids with a token of your appreciation for all their help. As Lord Tennyson noted, "A happy bridesmaid makes a happy bride." (hint, hint)

## HOSTESSING

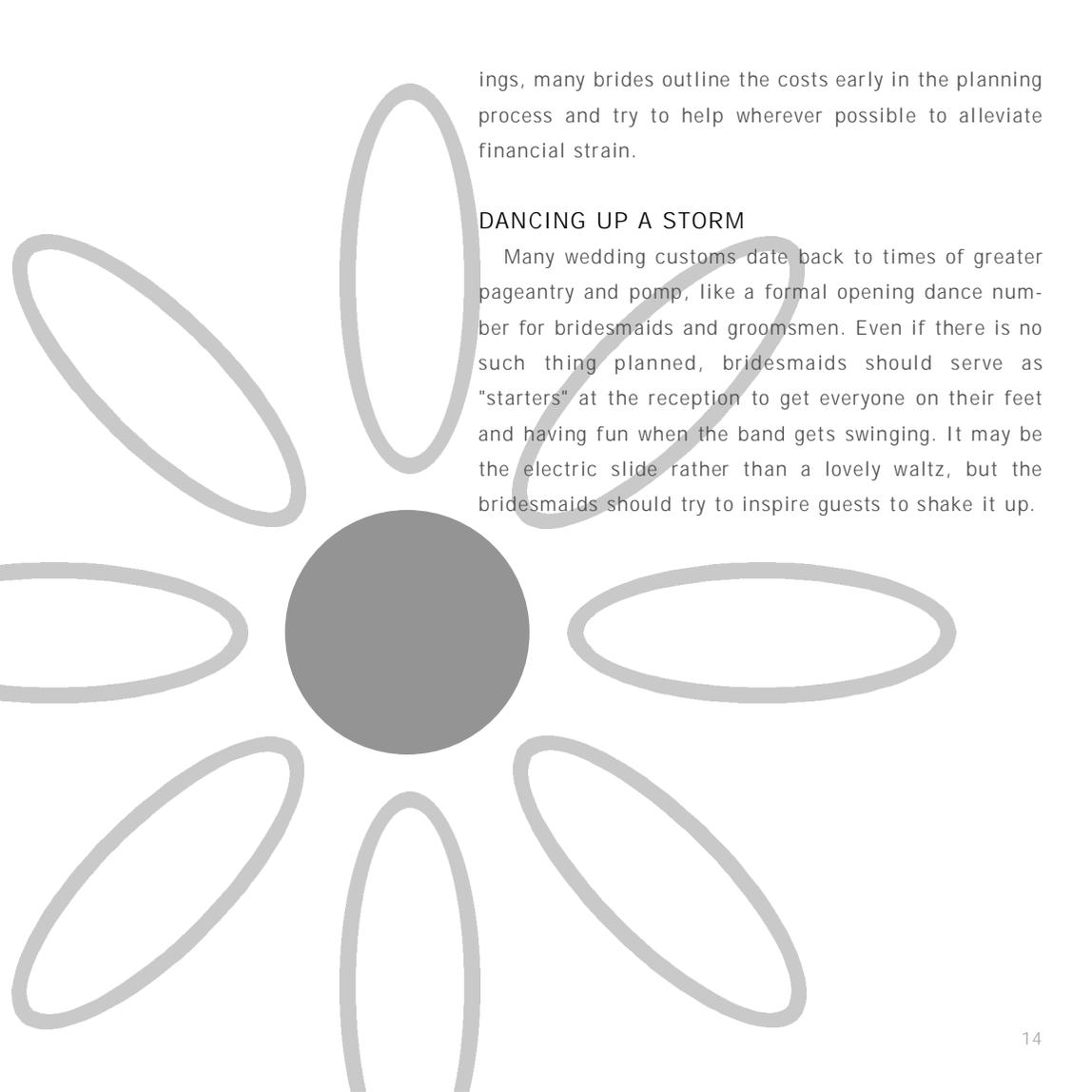
One of the main functions of the bridesmaids throughout the whole wedding process is to serve as your representatives and cheerleaders. As members of the receiving line, the bridesmaids have the difficult role of moving guests, friends and relatives along smoothly and making sure that everyone has a chance to speak briefly with the bride and groom. At the reception, hostessing may require introducing people (and introducing themselves) to make relatives and friends feel comfortable.

## FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Part of the financial responsibility of being a bridesmaid, in addition to the dress and accessories, is paying for incidentals such as hair styling, makeup, pedicures and manicures. You can offer to help, but your bridesmaids should know up front that they will share some of these expenses. Also in this category are accommodations and transportation. To avoid any misunderstand-



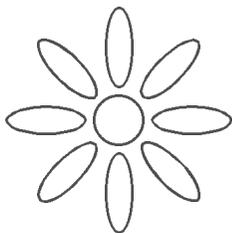
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5 dollars  
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ings, many brides outline the costs early in the planning process and try to help wherever possible to alleviate financial strain.

### DANCING UP A STORM

Many wedding customs date back to times of greater pageantry and pomp, like a formal opening dance number for bridesmaids and groomsmen. Even if there is no such thing planned, bridesmaids should serve as "starters" at the reception to get everyone on their feet and having fun when the band gets swinging. It may be the electric slide rather than a lovely waltz, but the bridesmaids should try to inspire guests to shake it up.



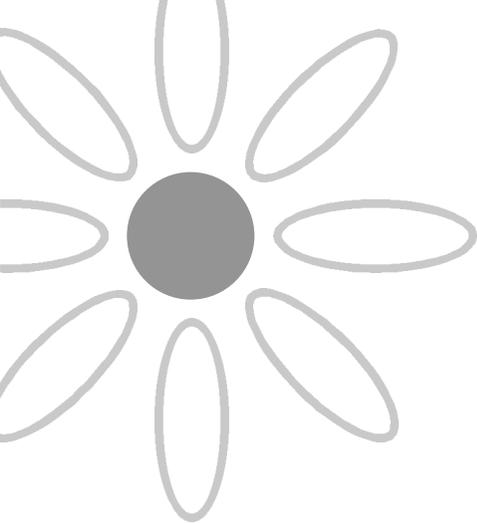
## TURNING HEADS AND AVOIDING HEADACHES



### THE DRESS AND ACCESSORIES: A WORTHWHILE EXPENSE

In all likelihood, the largest expense for your bridesmaids will be the dress, and accessory items like shoes, jewelry and a headpiece. Contrary to popular opinion, choosing and ordering a bridesmaid dress should not be a chore.

Dresses have come a long way in recent years, as manufacturers and designers have started to create fashionable, modern pieces that can be worn again to a variety of affairs. In general, the bridesmaid dress will cost between \$75 and \$375, averaging somewhere around \$200, with an extra \$30-\$40 for alterations. If you have more lavish tastes, though, the dress could be quite a bit pricier, so it's always helpful to make sure your bridesmaids can afford the additional expense. If you're uncomfortable about preparing your bridesmaids for the expense (especially if they've never been in a wedding and aren't aware that they have to pay for the dress), you can gently explain the tradition. If money is a major issue, then you can look for more affordable dresses or find other ways to help. "Conflicts over the cost of a bridesmaid's dress should never come between friends," says Nina Lawrence. "The bride-to-be should show sensitivity toward the possibility that one or more of her attendants might have an issue with costs, and choose gowns and accessories accordingly. In special cases, the bride and her family



may gracefully offer financial help, but as a general rule, the bride's selections for her bridal party should be as acceptable to them as they are to her, at prices well within their means."

## OUTFITTING THE BRIDAL PARTY

In an overwhelming majority of weddings, bridesmaid dresses are chosen to complement the wedding's unique colors, style and feel. This may mean that bridesmaids wear identical dresses, but this isn't always the case anymore. Some brides maintain a coordinated look by buying dresses that vary slightly in design or color but still match the formality of the affair and the overall look of the bridal gown.

## COORDINATING AMONG BRIDESMAIDS

Most important, though, is that all the bridesmaids' dresses are normally ordered from the same manufacturer at the same shop. Ordering all the dresses from the same shop means that all the dress orders will be submitted at the same time. It also ensures that all the dresses for the bridal party will be drawn from the same dye lot, to guarantee that they coordinate.

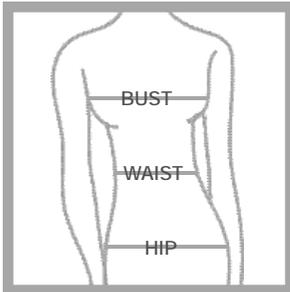
In addition, any accessories should be matched to the bridesmaid dress. Brides generally ask bridesmaids to buy shoes in the same color as the dress and at a similar, if not identical, heel height. It may be easiest to find dyeable shoes, so that the exact color of the dress can be replicated. If you're planning on asking your bridesmaids to wear gloves, specific jewelry items, special undergarments or headpieces, the further in advance you

ask, the better. (NOTE: Jewelry items are a popular bridesmaid gift for this reason – your bridesmaids will have matching accessories and they won't have to pay for them!) The more specific and detailed you make your accessory request (e.g., let them know where the items can be purchased, or show them an advertisement or a picture), the more helpful it will be to your bridesmaids.

## DRESS SHOPPING PREP

Before flipping through catalogs and visiting the local bridal shops, warehouses, department stores or special occasion stores, you can speak to each bridesmaid or set up an online chat to discuss what kinds of dresses they have in mind and what kinds of dresses are out of the question. To get the ball rolling, you can send pictures of dresses you like, or point to web sites where they can check out your selections online.

Also, in advance of shopping, gather all of your bridesmaids' measurements (this can be confidential if your bridesmaids are uncomfortable sharing their sizes with the group). The chart at the end of this guide is a useful way to keep track of them all. You should encourage your bridesmaids to have their measurements taken by an experienced tailor or seamstress, in undergarments only. If they cannot go to a professional, having a friend or relative help out is always more accurate than trying to measure themselves. When you're ready to place the final order for the dresses, you will need the following measurements: bust (fullest point of bust), waist (natural waist – across the belly but-

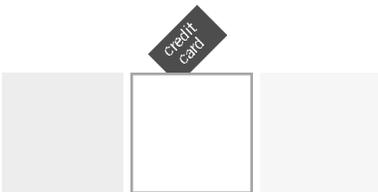


ton), and hips (fullest part – right across the derrière). Although measurements can be tedious, they are imperative for a good fit. Remember: It is possible for everyone to be happy with her dress as long as you keep in mind that everyone wants to look good and feel comfortable. Flexibility and communication are key.

In general, brides start shopping for bridesmaid dresses shortly after they order their own gown – about six to seven months before the wedding. The reason for the early preparation is that complex orders can take awhile to be delivered: You want to leave plenty of time to deal with fittings, alterations and, of course, Murphy's Law (whatever can go wrong will go wrong). When you do start shopping, try to be organized – especially if you have six bridesmaids with you! – so that you don't have to labor over each dress. Shopping should be fun and everyone should be included. There is no reason for anyone to be surprised by the final choice.

## HITTING THE STORES: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

There are a number of different places to shop for bridesmaid dresses, and you'll probably try them all! Department stores may have several of the same dress off the rack ready to buy, which can certainly save you a lot of time (and perhaps money). But they may not be from the same dye lot, which can be visible upon inspection. In addition, department stores generally don't carry special order dresses, so you'll miss out on a large variety of beautiful dresses. Department stores also lack the level of service that most brides want: In most cases, the store will not





offer helpful extras (e.g., alterations, swatches, accessories) like a specialty shop.

Large discount bridal chains can also be very inexpensive, which is their major advantage, and they usually have a short turnaround time for delivery. However, the quality of the merchandise can be shoddy, and, like department stores, they do not carry special order brands or provide helpful services. Online retailers are usually of the "you order it, it's yours" mentality, which means that you will find discounted prices, but a lack of customer service. Like discount chains, they can offer quick turnaround, but you'll miss out on an even larger selection of dresses, since many manufacturers do not supply online retailers with merchandise.

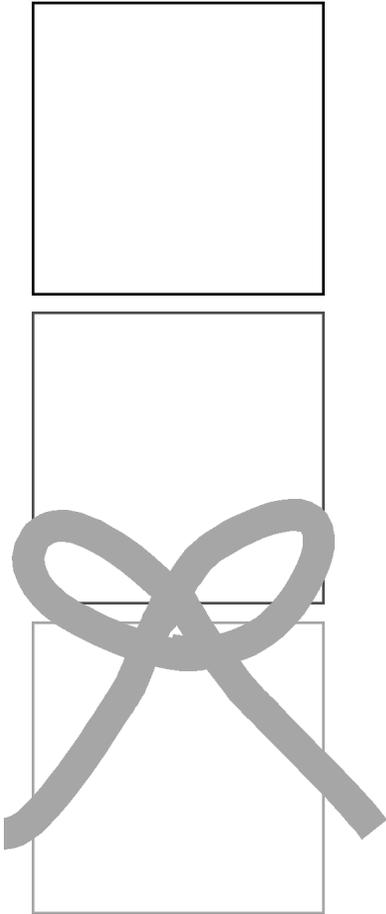
A full service bridal shop is the most comprehensive choice, providing information and advice on measurements, sizing, undergarments, shoes and order time. They provide fabric swatches and usually have seamstresses on staff to perform all necessary alterations. They are professionals, and usually charge slightly higher prices than discount retailers. However, it is their business to make sure the wedding day goes perfectly. Brides often find it convenient to choose one shop they like and purchase everything there, including the bridesmaid dresses, shoes and accessories, which can work out to an overall discount for the bridesmaids.

It is important to scrutinize the differences in quality among the dresses you look at and try on. It will become apparent to you very early on in your search that there are stark disparities

between manufacturers, shops and styles. You should ask yourself if the manufacturer you are looking at carries a full range of colors, dress linings for comfort, attractive styles that work with your wedding gown and any other questions that are of importance to you and your bridesmaids. As an educated shopper, it will be much easier to find the perfect dress and accessory items.

## WRAP-UP >

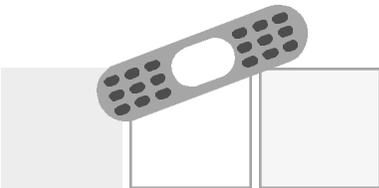
So the big day has finally arrived! Your bridesmaids look beautiful in their luxurious dresses, the cake is perfect, the band is wonderful and everything is organized. This sounds about right! In all seriousness, though, hopefully you have a better idea of the details of successfully managing your bridesmaids. Like a good scout, you are prepared for your Big Day and can be confident that everything will go smoothly. It is your day to celebrate, so enjoy yourself!



## QUICK TIPS



- The number one conflict is over money. Be clear, and help whenever possible.
- The number two conflict is over the dress. Discomfort (both physical and emotional) can lead to disharmony.
- Make sure that your bridesmaids try on their dresses and accessories several times!
- Make sure your bridesmaids are getting enough attention and have a clear idea of what to do, i.e., what you expect.
- Don't be too demanding. Remember that your bridesmaids have a life beyond planning for your wedding.
- Extend thanks often and do little things to make your bridesmaids happy. The little things make a huge difference – especially if they're gifts!
- Organize a bridesmaid survival kit for the wedding, but leave someone else in charge of bringing it (you'll have enough to worry about). Contents should include aspirin, band-aids, nasal spray, tissues, white medical tape, needle, thread and scissors, safety pins, nail file, clear nail polish, smelling salts, eye drops, hair spray, breath spray/mints, bobby pins (hair pins), tampons and liners and mirrors.
- Don't forget that you may have to be a bridesmaid in one of your bridesmaid's weddings in the near future – the Golden Rule should be in full effect!



# [FABRIC SAMPLES]



# BRIDESMAID DRESS SHOP WORKSHEET



Name:
Address:
Email:
Phone:
Appt. Date                  Time:
Contact Name:
Notes:

You may want to enlarge the above, or make your own worksheet to which you can attach business cards and more notes.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK AT THE SALON

- Which designers do you carry? Can you carry other designers or catalogs upon request?
- How much do dress orders typically cost?
- Are appointments necessary?
- Can you look through the dresses on your own, or must they be presented to you?
- How long does it usually take for dresses to come in? Can they be rushed?
- Are there discounts available for multiple orders? For alterations?



## CHECKLIST

- \_ Make sure you have every bridesmaid's full set of measurements.
- \_ Upon payment, make sure the receipt (or your records) has the following:
  - \_ The wedding date
  - \_ All special requests and accessory descriptions, including shoes
  - \_ Delivery dates
  - \_ Refund and/or cancellation policy
  - \_ Amount due upon checkout
  - \_ Full dress description
- \_ Designer name
- \_ Style number or detail
- \_ Sizing
- \_ Color(s)
- \_ Fabric(s)
- \_ Quantity of dresses ordered
- \_ Call the store a couple of weeks before delivery to make sure everything is taken care of.



# BRIDESMAID LIST AND MEASUREMENTS



Name:
Bust:                      Waist:                      Hips:
Fitting Date:
Alterations:

Name:
Bust:                      Waist:                      Hips:
Fitting Date:
Alterations:

Name:
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Name:
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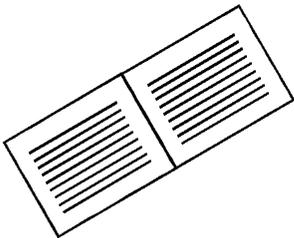
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