



WHAT'S *your* PLAN?

REBECCA BOILLAT, FOUNDER OF SAINT LOUIS WEDDING DESIGN, TALKS WITH SLM ABOUT THE REASONS COUPLES COME CALLING, NEW TRENDS IN ST. LOUIS WEDDINGS AND WHY TAKING FOREVER TO PICK OUT YOUR ICING IS JUST PLAIN SILLY

By Margaret Bauer | Photographs by Katherine Bish

Do you have any specific DOS AND DON'TS for brides?

[Laughs] Hire a wedding planner! But I think the biggest mistake, if I had to draw one out of the bucket, is giving equal priority to all your choices. That doesn't work, period. Prioritizing is so important in terms of staying on budget, in terms of actually being able to enjoy the wedding, because if every decision has equal value, you will be insane by the time the date gets here—'cause there's about a thousand decisions.

In a nutshell: You cannot give every decision equal weight in this process. You can't take 4 hours to pick buttercream or vanilla icing. On the day of the wedding, this buttercream isn't going to do anything but go in your mouth.

Why would a bride want to HIRE A WEDDING PLANNER?

One of the things I always tell brides I had the luxury of having when I planned my own wedding, which I didn't even realize

until later, was someone who, no matter what I threw at her, I could trust to do what needed to be done. I think every bride deserves to have someone in their planning process who really gets them and gets what they want and will go to the end of the earth for them.

Because we've done this so many times, we can definitively say, "When you do this yourself, you won't enjoy it." It's almost tangible: The less time the girls put into the wedding, the more they leave to a wedding planner—the more they give the planner control—the happier they are on the wedding day.





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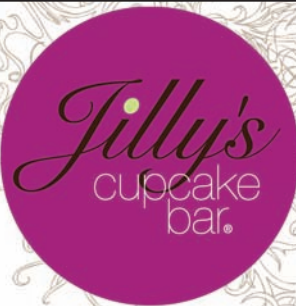
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Is there a CERTAIN TYPE OF PERSON who's more likely to give THAT CONTROL to a wedding planner?


Well, the average age of our brides right now is somewhere between 25 and 28, so they're already in their professions. Not many of them are still figuring out what they want to do in terms of their personal life. They're very much type-A personalities: They have the reins on their days and weeks and months, they have to be super-organized and they have to plan everything.

So there's definitely a common denominator with our brides: They've been exposed to what it's like to have an expert in your corner. They probably would also hire an interior designer if they built a new house; they probably would have a gardener. Not that they're spoiled brats, but their time is valuable, and they delegate, even if it means they have to hire a service.

And as much as these weddings cost now, anybody who has the ability to calculate that pretty quickly—after they get over the shock, they think, "How exactly would I govern this? This is maybe a \$50,000 event, with hundreds of people, and I've never done it before."

Whoa—\$50,000? What does the AVERAGE ST. LOUIS WEDDING COST?


There are two answers there. The average wedding in St. Louis is probably only \$21,000, but the average wedding we plan is about \$40,000. There's that age-old nasty myth that only those with big budgets can afford wedding planners; we definitely have a stereotype attached to us, unfortunately. Thing is, I'll work with an \$8,000 budget. You can—you have to—get a lot more creative with that, actually.



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Is the **TRADITIONAL ARRANGEMENT—**
BRIDE'S FAMILY PAYS—
still in play?

Yep, the bride's family pays. We do get a lot of Wash. U. students, a lot of medical students—a lot of times they're supplementing. And with about a third of our client list each year, the bride and groom are paying for the wedding. They're older, they have killer jobs and they know what they want.

What are **SOME TRENDS**
you're seeing in **RECENT**
ST. LOUIS *weddings?*

Food coming out late at night to keep people there—or counterbalance the alcohol intake—whatever the mode is, it's definitely a trend now in St. Louis. Whether it's ordering stuff in from Imo's or just creating a candy table or a coffee bar, that takes the show.

Another trend: rental items. We actually have a room where we house rentals—we've got just gobs and gobs of stuff. I will often have a vision for my bride's wedding, and I tell her, "If I get ahold of these 25 candelabra dealies from Pottery Barn, you guys don't have to buy it—just pay the shipping, and we can use them again."

Ultimately, what do the most successful wedding planners
BRING TO THE TABLE?

I worked as a florist before I got into this, so I had endless vendor friendships and relationships established before I ever became a wedding planner, and I heard all the backroom chat. I had a totally unique angle on what not to be as a wedding planner: *not uptight, not crabby, not condescending.*

You hear the same kinds of woes over and over again. It's always: Guests were kept waiting; the ceremony started and nobody said what was going on; cocktail hour just went on and on. No one's directing traffic—and when it's the couple knitting the vendors together, rather than a planner, there's no one to say, "Hey, don't start the first dance till we wheel the cake off the dance floor." A successful wedding planner makes sure all those pieces come together. ●

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