

Getting hitched

without the hitch



If planning your big day seems like a daunting task, a wedding planner may just be the answer to your prayers, writes **Gretel Hunnerup**.

When it comes to planning a wedding, the devil is in the detail. Wedding gowns, invitations, and venues are usually the first order of business for brides-to-be, but what about all the little things that make the day truly special?

If planning your day seems like an overwhelming task, then it might be

STATE OF THE UNION

Wedding planners are like the perfect best friend – they have all the contacts, ideas and experience to help you plan your dream day. You can hire a planner to organise a few of the big ticket items, such as sourcing a space or providing creative inspiration, or you can hire someone to do everything from hiring suppliers to handling all the

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time to call in the experts. But if the concept of a wedding planner brings flashes of the flamboyant and frenetic Franck Eggelhoff from *Father of the Bride*, never fear, wedding planners offer different levels of service, from planning the entire event to organising just a few aspects.

But what do wedding planners do, and how will you benefit from having a professional help you plan the most important day of your life?

finishing touches such as adjusting a bride's veil, directing the crowd and ensuring the band plays the right song on cue.

A resourceful planner can point you in the right direction and help you find exactly what you want with the minimum of fuss and provide sound advice to navigate the world of weddings.

“The key to a stress free wedding day is working with someone who shares your vision, and someone who



does all the legwork for you, which is invaluable, especially for women who work full-time and are juggling busy lifestyles,” says event planner Fiona Robison from Bright Young Things.

“Wedding planners have many industry contacts they’ve worked with before so they know what the end product will be like, and they have the knowledge to source unusual or exclusive locations to create something that’s unique for you.

“For example, we recently organised a wedding at the Collingwood Children’s Farm in Melbourne where the guests walked past all the animals, and we have one coming up at an amazing rambling house in the style of The Great Gatsby; lots of stark white tuxedos and staff with white gloves and silver trays.”

Wedding planners are also trained to handle more delicate tasks, such as calming frayed nerves and smoothing out any hiccups that occur on the day.

Fiona Dean-Dundas from Couture Wedding Planning says a planner can come in handy if something goes wrong on the day.

“I was coordinating a wedding where the cake had been damaged in transit. I called a cake designer and borrowed a similar display cake from her showroom for the couple’s photos and then had the venue staff cut up and serve the

damaged cake,” she says.

Julia Dillon from Concierge to the Bride has also saved the day for many a bride.

“I was planning a wedding for a bride in Adelaide, and when she arrived for the reception, she stepped on her train,” says Julia.

“We had a rescue kit handy with a sewing kit, and a few minutes later the bride entered the reception with no one the wiser.”

Hiring a wedding planner may even save you money, as most planners have relationships with suppliers.

Sara Sabey, who runs Chameleon Events, has also handled her fair share of last-minute hiccups. The planner had to think on her feet during a wedding for 170 held at a winery in the Yarra Valley on Black Saturday.

“Guests were handed bottles of chilled water and misting spray as they arrived, to keep them as comfortable as possible in the 40-degree weather,” she explained.

“When the fires were deemed uncontrollable we directed all guests to the De Bortoli restaurant and turned

Letting someone else take care of all the little details can make your day more enjoyable.

a three-course sit-down dinner into a beautiful makeshift cocktail party in a matter of minutes.”

EXPENSE ACCOUNT

The cost of a wedding planner varies depending on how much involvement your planner has. A full service might command around 10 per cent of the total spend, while a basic package might start at under \$2000. Bear in mind that some planners charge a fixed fee while others claim a percentage of the total wedding budget.

Hiring a planner may even save you money, as most planners have strong relationships with suppliers and are skilled at negotiating lower prices. Planners are also aware of all the hidden costs associated with big events, such as security, bottle removal and cake-cutting fees, which can help you avoid a budget blow-out.

Planner Marisa Welcome from A Lavish Affair says wedding planners are also skilled at creating more realistic wedding budgets without shattering dreams.

“One couple we worked with had lots of ideas for their wedding, such as providing entertainment on the buses, arriving as a couple by helicopter and handing out Krispy Kreme doughnuts for the return journey,” she explains. “I estimated their total outlay at

\$80,000 but they only wanted to spend \$35,000 to \$40,000, so together we determined what was really important to them and prioritised.

They ended up having the black-tie countryside wedding they wanted, with just a bit of tweaking, at a price they could afford.

CHOOSING YOUR PLANNER

When it comes to deciding on a planner, it is crucial to do your research and hire an experienced operator with a good reputation.

It’s wise to avoid planners who claim their services are free, and always check references from previous couples who have used their services.

“A lot of girls come to us who have been burnt because their planners were getting kickbacks from suppliers, and the girls were not able to really choose which suppliers they wanted to work with,” says Jessica Aguilera from Sydney’s Angelic Events.

“Reputable planners will charge for their services and provide multiple options and quotes.”

When it comes to researching planners, websites will give you a good first impression, but you should make appointments and meet potential planners in person to make sure you are comfortable with their approach and style of work.

WEDDING BLISS

Of course, not every bride will want to use a wedding planner.

“Girls who have been planning their wedding since they were little and those who really love to be completely in control won’t really enjoy having a planner do it all for them,” says Fiona.

If you decide you want to have more hands-on involvement but need a little direction, Marisa has the perfect the solution.

“A Lavish Affair has just launched an affordable DIY kit, which is a complete guide to planning your wedding,” she says.

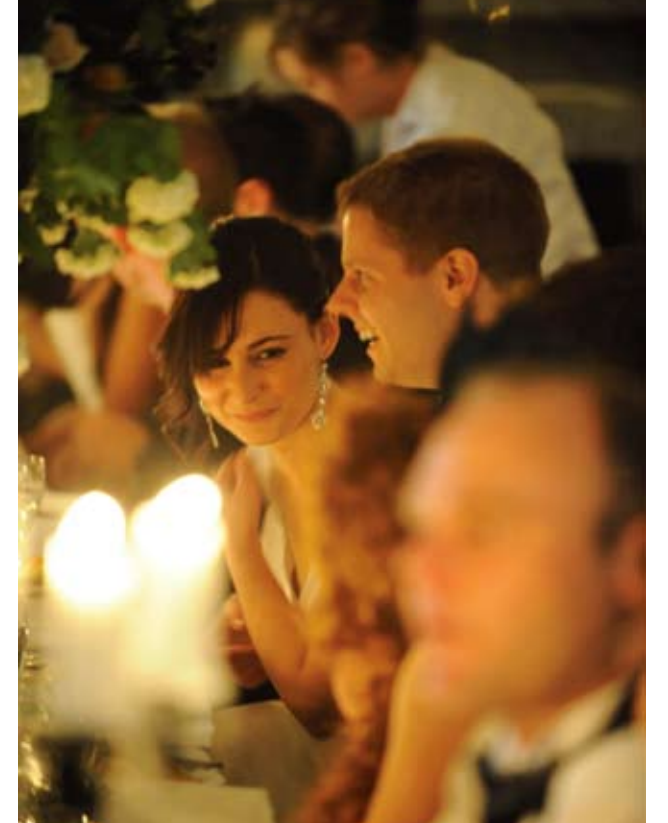
“The kit includes a wedding planning folder, 10-step wedding guide, tailored supplier recommendations, tips and hints, an assortment of product samples and planning must-haves, plus a few lavish goodies for the bride.”

TIMING

For brides who want to work with a planner, timing is reasonably important. Julia prefers to take on brides as early as possible and spend time getting to know her clients.

Marisa agrees, and recommends brides employ a planner eight to 12 months prior to their wedding date, but she has thrown together gorgeous events in as little as four weeks.

“The more time you have, the more



choices you have when it comes to suppliers, especially if you’re planning to wed in peak seasons, such as spring and summer,” she says.

“If you only have a short time to plan and book, you run the risk of missing out on your choice of suppliers.

“But if you only have a matter of weeks then you really will need to have a planner on board!” ◊

From venues to flowers and the cake, a wedding planner can provide helpful advice and recommendations.

BOB D'AMICO (OPPOSITE); MILTON STONE/BOB D'AMICO