

SOUTHSIDE *Wedding*

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Wedding GUIDE

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WEDDING PARTY ROLES

A wedding can be a wonderful and memorable experience for all of those involved. That's why you ask friends or relatives to share in the event and serve in your wedding party. Your offer is a wonderful honor, one that carries with it varying degrees of responsibility depending on the role each person will be playing. To help you decide whom to ask to be in your wedding party, here is a list of titles and responsibilities for each participant's role.



MAID OF HONOR

The maid of honor is a role typically filled by a sister or a very close friend. It is the equivalent of the groom's best man. The maid of honor's role, therefore, is typically very involved. Among her many responsibilities, the maid of honor accompanies the bride on shopping trips for her wedding dress while also planning the bridal shower, bachelorette party and coordinating the bridal party gift for the bride. Also, the maid of honor helps the bride get dressed on her wedding day, holds the groom's wedding ring during the wedding and may also help in the writing of invitations. The maid of honor will also typically act as a witness to the wedding and dance with the best man at the reception. If the woman you're asking is married, her title will be matron of honor.

BEST MAN

Perhaps the most well-known responsibilities of the best man are organizing the bachelor party and giving the toast at the reception. But the best man, who is typically a brother or best friend of the groom, also has a slew of other responsibilities. In addition to helping the groom choose his tuxedo and get dressed before the wedding, the best man coordinates the couple's gift from the groomsmen and takes care of the newlyweds' transportation to the airport after the reception or the next morning. The best man may also hold onto any payment that's due to the reception site or the donation for the house of worship, and take care of any final financial details. He also holds the bride's wedding ring during the ceremony.

BRIDESMAIDS

Along with walking in the wedding procession, bridesmaids attend the shower and contribute to the bridal gifts. Bridesmaids, who are typically sisters or friends of the bride or groom, also dance with the groomsmen during the reception. To be further involved, each can be given specific roles, like reading a religious passage at the ceremony, providing assistance with choosing wedding vendors or helping to address wedding invitations.

FLOWER GIRL

If the bride has a sister who is especially young, that sister typically fills the role of flower girl. Since most flower girls are very young, their responsibilities are generally limited to carrying a basket of flowers during the processional and, depending on the bride's preference, tossing flower petals on the ground to mark the bride's entrance.

PARENTS OF THE BRIDE

The bride's parents may be responsible for hosting the wedding, if they will be completely financially responsible for the event. In some cases, the father of the bride escorts his daughter down the aisle alone, but in other instances or in religious ceremonies, both parents may accompany the bride. In all cases, it's her preference. The mother of the bride may help fund or contribute to the planning of the bridal shower if the maid of honor needs assistance. These parents may also foot the cost of an engagement party or dinner to meet the groom's family.

PARENTS OF THE GROOM

The groom's parents should host a rehearsal dinner prior to the wedding. They may also choose to contribute to the wedding if they desire. In most cases, the groom's parents have limited responsibilities, but can be involved as much as the wedding couple would like. Traditionally, the groom's mother confers with the bride's mother on what color gown she is wearing, so as not to go with the same shade. The groom's parents may walk down the aisle in advance of the rest of the wedding procession and take their seats.

RING BEARER

Like the flower girl, the ring bearer is a very young member of the family, only the ring bearer is a male. The ring bearer's role is to carry a pillow with the rings sewn on it during the processional. Some couples choose to have the ring bearer and the flower girl walk next to one another during the processional.

GROOMSMEN

Groomsmen are the male equivalent of the bridesmaids, typically having nearly identical responsibilities. Sometimes, groomsmen can act as ushers for guests arriving at the ceremony. Groomsmen walk in the wedding processional and attend and help organize the bachelor party, as well.



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WEDDINGS

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COUNTDOWN TO THE BIG DAY

To help you get a better understanding of how to plan a wedding and when you should be making certain decisions, here's a time frame you can follow that should ensure that your wedding goes off as smoothly as possible.

10 TO 12 MONTHS BEFORE

If you haven't done it already, this is a good time to announce your engagement and introduce your respective families. Since most reception halls and churches have busy wedding schedules, it is also important to book both as early as possible, preferably at least a year in advance of your wedding day. It's also a good idea to start putting together a guest list around this time and ask your parents whom they'd like to invite as well. Also, since your budget will determine just about every aspect of your wedding, sitting down and determining what you can spend and developing a savings plan should be first and foremost.

6 TO 9 MONTHS BEFORE

This is the time when you want to start booking some services, such as a florist, caterer, a DJ/band and a photographer. However, some of the more experienced DJs and bands, as well as photographers, might have their schedules booked a year in advance, so this might be something you'll want to consider doing shortly after you get engaged and choose a date. Also, this is a good time to inform any guests who will be traveling significant distances of the date of your wedding. The earlier your guests can book a flight, the less expensive that flight will be.

This is also a good time to order gowns for both the bride and bridesmaids, as some manufacturers require a few months to ship to bridal shops. You might want to ask someone, such as your priest or rabbi, to be the officiant of your wedding. And much like out-of-town guests will save travel dollars the earlier they learn of your wedding date, you will likely save money, too, if you book your honeymoon around this time.

4 TO 5 MONTHS BEFORE

This is a good time to decide on wedding invitations, of which there are many styles to choose from. Also, now is ideal to start hunting for a wedding cake by sampling a number of different bakeries' cakes before ultimately making a decision. Just to be sure, confirm that all of the bridesmaids have ordered their gowns and start looking for a tuxedo for the groom as well as the groomsmen. If you haven't done so already, purchase your wedding rings and let any other people you'd like to participate in your wedding (ushers, readers during the ceremony, etc.) know of your intentions.

2 TO 3 MONTHS BEFORE

Finalize your guest list and mail out your invitations. If your guest list includes a considerable amount of people who are spread out geographically, mail the invitations as close to 12 weeks in advance as possible. This is also a good time to finalize your menu choices for your guests, and find all your wedding accessories such as the ring pillow, candles, etc. Also, since it is tradition to provide gifts for those in the wedding party as well as the parents of the bride and groom, this is a good time to decide on and purchase those gifts. Just to be safe, confirm that all groomsmen have ordered their tuxedos and finalize all transportation, both to and from the wedding and to the airport for your honeymoon.

1 TO 2 MONTHS BEFORE

Schedule the first bridal-gown fitting. Also finalize the readings you'd prefer during the ceremony and mail them out to anyone who has agreed to do a reading. If your family prefers to host a small gathering for close family and friends after the wedding rehearsal, the night before the wedding, this is a good time to order any food or drinks you might want to serve that night, or make a restaurant reservation.

3 TO 4 WEEKS BEFORE

Confirm your honeymoon arrangements and see if your wedding rings are ready. This is also when you should get your marriage license and check the guest list to see who has and hasn't RSVP'd. For those who have yet to RSVP, you might want to contact them so you can get a closer idea of what the head count will be. You should also prepare and order your wedding program around this time.

1 TO 2 WEEKS BEFORE

Get a final attendance count and submit it to the caterer as soon as you know of it, while also providing a final seating chart. Pick up the wedding gown and tuxedo. Make sure the wedding party picks up their attire. Also, finalize your vows and confirm all wedding-day details such as transportation, photo schedules and addresses. And don't forget to pack for your honeymoon.

THE DAY BEFORE

This is mainly when you rehearse for the ceremony and make any final confirmations you might have to make. Also, make sure to get some sleep so you'll look good in all of your wedding-day photos.



WEDDING BUDGET

TOTAL WEDDING BUDGET

\$

CEREMONY

Location fee _____

Officiant fee _____

Marriage license _____

Rings _____

Pillow _____

TOTAL CEREMONY _____

RECEPTION

Reception site _____

Food _____

Drinks _____

Rentals _____

Cake _____

Favors _____

TOTAL RECEPTION _____

ATTIRE

Gown _____

Headpiece/veil _____

Undergarments/hosiery _____

Shoes _____

Accessories _____

Jewelry _____

Makeup _____

Hair _____

Tuxedo _____

Shoes _____

Cuff links _____

Men's grooming _____

TOTAL ATTIRE _____

MUSIC

Ceremony musicians _____

Band/DJ _____

Extra musicians _____

TOTAL MUSIC _____

FLOWERS

Ceremony _____

Bride's bouquet _____

Bridesmaids' bouquets _____

Corsages & boutonnieres _____

Reception centerpieces _____

Flower girl basket _____

Bathroom arrangements _____

TOTAL FLOWERS _____

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographer's fees _____

Videographer's fees _____

TOTAL PHOTOGRAPHY _____

TRANSPORTATION

Limousines _____

Buses/transport for guests _____

TOTAL TRANSPORTATION _____

STATIONERY

Invitations _____

Calligraphy _____

Postage _____

Thank-you cards _____

TOTAL STATIONERY _____

GIFTS

Wedding party _____

Parents _____

Other _____

TOTAL GIFTS _____

HONEYMOON

Accommodations _____

Food _____

TOTAL HONEYMOON _____





culinary

VARIETY

Local catering companies offer personalized experiences

STORY BY LYNDSY WOLFE

One of the most enjoyable and simultaneously stressful parts of a wedding to plan is the food. With so many different guest preferences and dietary restrictions, it's hard to make everyone happy and still stay within budget. Local catering specialists are familiar with recent trends and can provide delicious dining options that meet all your culinary needs.

Chef Chip Huckaby, executive chef and operations manager at Smokehouse Catering Company, said a popular choice for providing a variety of snacks to please many guests is a charcuterie board.

"The charcuterie board puts a lot of options out there. They can pick one appetizer and there's something in it for everyone," he said.

When it comes to accommodating a few guests with specific dietary needs,



Huckaby says it's as simple as determining how many people have specific restrictions and offering a different entree or side for those that need it.

Some of Smokehouse Catering Company's most popular entree options are, of course, barbecue meats, but they also offer more upscale options such as chicken with a lemon and herb sauce, chicken marsala, beef medallion, roast, and numerous others. Their catering options normally consist of two meats, two sides and a salad.

Huckaby said the most popular side is either roasted redskin potatoes or au gratin potatoes and the most popular vegetable is their roast vegetable medley. He added that sliders are really popular for weddings as appetizers or late night snacks. They even offer breaded tenderloin sliders.

Since dessert is such an integral part of a wedding, Smokehouse Catering

Company has options for that, too. Huckaby said with desserts, mini is still big.

"They like the minis because they get multiple options that way. Shooters aren't as popular as before COVID, but we're getting a lot of mini pies, mini cakes, petit fours and cookies," he said.

Jason West, of Grafton Peak Catering, added that a lot of people are opting for a smaller cake for the special cutting event and then offering three or four different cupcake varieties for guests to enjoy. Occasionally, he said they will do something like cheesecake.

Grafton Peak Catering also offers a variety of entrees, though West said barbecue chicken and pork remain very popular in Indiana, as well as barbecue-related sides.

"The most popular items continue to be the old standbys which are roast beef and chicken. We do those two items

very well and people have an opportunity to try those at the tastings we offer," West said.

One trend that seems to have changed a bit, according to West, is drink interests.

"We're seeing people go back to more traditional domestic beers and not be as fired up about craft beers. Vodka and seltzers continue to be popular, but we are seeing more groups encourage signature drinks which are unique to the party," he said.

West and Huckaby both said demand is starting to pick back up again after the past few years of event planning struggles due to COVID-19.

"I would say the average group size is almost back to normal," West said. "Maybe it isn't there yet but it seems to me, at least with the people that I talk with, that people are trying to have a pre-March 2020 wedding day."

He added that they are, of course, continuing certain safety precautions such as keeping sanitizer available and making sure off-site locations have sanitizer on the buffet and drink stations.

"Staff still wear masks and gloves to make people feel comfortable, but beyond that things have gotten pretty well back to normal, at least from what I can see," he said.

Huckaby said planning trends have changed because of worries about last-minute changes.

"I think the turnaround on weddings is not what it used to be. Most people used to plan a year or two years out, and now the bulk of my weddings are normally about six to eight months out. We saw a bit of that going into COVID, and now with COVID we're seeing it even more because they're trying to adjust for health and safety requirements," West said.

West agreed and said, "I would say that people are still concerned about what happens if there is some kind of major COVID outbreak that would

require them to move their date. We let them know in advance that in the event of something happening, we're going to work with them to make sure that their outcome is a good one. Sometimes we return the deposit and sometimes we move the date forward, but as a caterer we want to make the client feel that we're in it with them regardless of what happens."

Julia Stevenson, event coordinator at Garment Factory Events, said they haven't experienced much change in demand lately. Though she echoed the popularity of chicken dishes.

"The three most popular are the seared chicken demi, the cilantro lime grilled chicken and the orange and garlic seared chicken breast with fig and balsamic glaze," Stevenson said. Garment Factory also offers an open beer and wine bar, which Stevenson said is most popular in weddings.

Chicken remains a common choice at weddings catered by Purely Paula Catering, as well, according to owner Paula Watson.

"Chicken dishes are very popular for a buffet, especially lemon chicken or chicken piccata. Roasted potatoes or roasted vegetables are very popular, too, and I offer a salad bar with a lot of options which is also very popular," Watson said.

Watson said one thing that makes her menu unique is that it is very large and wide-reaching with a lot of variety. She even offers specialty cakes.

"I offer many different flavor options and you can have a different flavor on each tier," she said. "I offer lemon ricotta, honey lavender, chocolate and others. I've done pies, cakes, cobblers, and there's just lots of different varieties when you go that route."

Watson said it seems like smaller weddings are getting a little more common, which she's okay with because she focuses on catering events with up to 50 people.

One more thing Watson wanted to add, "Congratulations to all the brides and grooms out there."



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KEEPING IT *casual*

Couple concentrated
on fun and family
when planning
their special day

STORY BY JENN WILLHITE
PHOTOS BY KARLIE JO PHOTOGRAPHY

When it came to planning their summer wedding, Traci and Hunter Hill opted for a minimalist approach. And they couldn't be happier with how it turned out.

In lieu of a theme or fancy décor, the couple kept their ceremony simple, but bursting with personality, family, nature and love.

"We wanted to keep it super casual," Traci says. "We worried more about having a fun wedding than being overly concerned about what other people thought."

The Hills met in 2016 at a mutual friend's birthday party and four years later got engaged. For the majority of their relationship, the pair has spent much of their time together out in nature camping, hiking and fishing.

Hunter knew that when he popped the question he wanted to incorporate their love for the outdoors, but wasn't sure how he was going to make it work.

"I thought, 'You know what, we've spent a lot of our years together outdoors,'" Hunter says. "Fishing is one of our favorite things to do together, so I thought, 'Man, how do I tie it all together?'"

Hunter had heard stories of people who had set the engagement ring adrift in a little



"It was just another day. But he was super nervous, which I didn't know why at the time, I just thought he was being antsy. We went camping and we were fishing and Hunter had the ring in the tackle box."

TRACI HILL

boat that they would then cast their line out to and reel in. However, placing the ring in an unmanned craft on water didn't exactly seem like the right route either.

Then Hunter had an idea.

"I thought, the tackle box," Hunter says. "I thought maybe the next time you go to change your bait you can change your last name. I decided that's what I would do."

On August 14, 2020 Hunter and Traci went camping and fishing like any other time they'd gone before. However, when Traci wasn't looking, Hunter slipped the ring into the tackle box where he knew she would see it.

"It was just another day," Traci says. "But he was super nervous, which I didn't know why at the time, I just thought he was being antsy. We went camping and we were fishing and Hunter

had the ring in the tackle box. I did not expect it at all, especially because we were fishing and we do that all the time together."

Hunter proposed to the couple's song "Better Together" by Luke Combs and the ring he placed on her finger was also engraved on the inside with the words "better together."

Since Traci works in marketing for Discover Downtown Franklin and assists with special projects for the Franklin Chamber of Commerce, planning a wedding was definitely going to be a welcomed creative adventure.

"I really enjoy doing that stuff," 26-year-old Traci says. "It never really stressed me out, I enjoyed doing it so it was a fun process."

Hunter says Traci's love for planning special events made the process, well, painless.

"I was able to enjoy it and put in my input whenever I could," 24-year-old Hunter says. "But since it is almost a passion for her and something she really enjoys doing, I knew it would be a pretty easy process for me."

Opting for a wedding planning checklist and her Pinterest boards, Traci admits she didn't waste any time getting started with making plans. She says she treated the boards more like vision boards and tried to keep them realistic.

"I feel like a lot of brides don't do a realistic version and then the day doesn't turn out as they planned," Traci says. "I budgeted first and then made the board."

To save time and stress, the couple opted to exclude some traditional elements from their big day, they say.

"I wouldn't do a cake cutting because it took up time and you don't realize what a tight itinerary you are on that day with the photographer and such," Traci says. "We didn't even do a bouquet or garter toss, which was nice. The only traditional things we did were the

first dances with the parents and we did a dollar dance in place of the bouquet and garter tosses."

The couple kept with the nature theme that so well defined their dating years and knew they wanted to exchange vows outdoors.

Keeping things simple, Traci opted for a lot of DIY elements for the big day. The wedding colors would be a blend of pinks, purples and blues, but the interpretation of those colors was open. So, for instance, Hunter's nine groomsmen all wore dark blue suits with floral shirts in the wedding colors, while Hunter opted for a white shirt with a floral tie.

Going into the planning and moving forward, Traci admits she was probably the most laid back person among everyone involved.

"I think it probably stressed out my family more than anything even though I wasn't stressed out," Traci says. "I thought if it works, it works."

The couple cautions other couples to expect at least a little something to go wrong on the big day, but try not to

stress about it too much.

"I had a bridesmaid who somehow ordered the wrong dress," Traci says. "But thankfully it was the same color and we had her switch dresses with my maid of honor and she wore it and it worked out fine. We also had a party bus taking us from the ceremony to the reception and we found out a couple hours before that it had broken down. You have to let things not stress you out. The main part of the day is you are getting married."

Even though Traci was quite comfortable at the helm, the couple had plenty of help when it came time to get the ceremony site cleared and prepped for the big day. The couple decided to exchange vows on her brother's spacious property just outside Franklin on the Trafalgar line.

"Our family put so much work into our ceremony area," Traci says.

"We wanted to incorporate our family a little bit on the different elements of building the ceremony area," Hunter adds. "There were many different things that had to come together for it to work."

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In the days leading up to it, I think our whole family worked on the outdoor part, as far as cleaning up and mulch and everything, all the way up to the last day. If there is one thing I would say about it, if we didn't have the family and people we did, it wouldn't have come together at all."

Following the ceremony that was attended by nearly 200 guests, the celebration moved to the upstairs portion of the Elks Lodge in Franklin.

Thankfully, COVID had no impact on the ceremony or reception, the Hills say.

As the couple looks back on their special day on August 14, 2021, they say they were never too concerned about having a set theme or meeting

the expectations of others. The day was about their union and having fun, they say.

"We just wanted to be like, 'We are getting married, so let's have a party!'" Traci says.

Both bride and groom agree that the wedding ceremony itself was their favorite part. And, no, neither would change anything about their big day, they say.

If there is one piece of advice Hunter says he would have for others, it would be to start planning as early as you can and always have a secondary plan.

"With all the uncertainties that could happen, make sure there is a plan B for

certain things or individuals who can't make it," he says. "That way you won't have to reschedule the event or change locations."

And if experience has taught them a valuable nugget of knowledge to pass on, it is to get all alterations done early to save time and stress.

As for the brides-to-be out there, well, Traci says it is important to stay true to your vision regardless.

"Do what you want to do," she says.

"So many people throw their own opinions out and you can leave them or take them. But at the end of the day you only get to plan your wedding once so do it how you want to even if others do not like it."





DON'T GIVE UP ON *honeymoons*

STORY BY GREG SEITER



Pandemic poses
some challenges
for couples,
honeymoons
still possible

Honeymoon planning can be a challenge even in non-pandemic times but now that masks, vaccinations and social distancing are a part of the equation, soon-to-be newlyweds have much to consider as they prepare for a post wedding getaway. However, despite COVID-related hurdles, local industry experts say honeymoon travel is on the rise.

"In the beginning of all this, COVID postponed everything," said Sandra Wick, owner of Four Seasons Travel Agency in Franklin. "Travel has definitely changed but I think most everybody has a feel for what they have to do concerning masks and testing."

Elaine Pesto, owner of Sapphire Seas Travel in Whiteland, agrees. "People are more educated now and they're making better decisions," she said. "A lot are relying on travel advisors because especially now, with so much to consider, it can be

overwhelming to try to book something on your own."

Typically popular destinations like Antigua, Jamaica and Mexico are perfect examples.

"Antigua requires a vaccination for entry while Mexico doesn't have any requirements," Pesto said. "Jamaica, on the other hand, requires you to take a COVID test and you have to fill out a travel authorization form."

While interest in classic destinations such as Maldives and Tahiti continues to grow, Wick and Pesto said resort destinations such as Sandals properties are very popular with honeymooners.

"Some offer free insurance, COVID tests while you're there, quarantining and arrangements for guests to stay up to two weeks if they test positive," Wick said.

But according to Pesto, securing reservations at many Sandals resorts takes advance planning.

“Several Sandals properties are already booked for the next several months,” she said.

“In the past, couples would often plan their honeymoons at the last minute but now, it should be one of the first things you do. We’re seeing popular hotels get booked very quickly. The earlier you book, the better chance you’ll have of being able to get the property and destination you want.”

According to Lori Smith, office manager at Destinations – A Travel Corp. in Columbus, many honeymooners are opting for domestic destinations.

“Key West has been hugely popular, and Gatlinburg is up there, too,” she said. “This past summer, we did a couple of honeymoons to Yellowstone as well as Grand Canyon/Las Vegas combinations. I just think that in many cases, people want to drive rather than fly.”

Flight cancellations are undoubtedly contributing to that trend.

“We’ve had some situations where flights have been rebooked or delayed several times and now, airlines are cancelling flights because they don’t have enough staffing due to sickness. It has definitely been a lot harder to book air travel the last year-and-a-half.”

To combat potential flight cancellations, Smith suggests honeymoon planners search for airlines that offer multiple flights to a given destination rather than primarily focusing on the cheapest options.

Honeymoon cruising is also on the rise.

“It definitely bottomed out for a while, but several are coming back,” Smith said.

“The advantage with cruising is that you’re sailing out of a U.S. port, so you don’t have to go elsewhere for (COVID) testing,” she said. “However, if you’re not vaccinated, you’re not going to be able to go unless you have a medical exemption.”

Vaccination requirements are certainly a concern for anyone planning a honeymoon.

“One of the first questions I get from honeymooners now has to do with whether they have to be vaccinated for wherever they’re hoping to go,” Pesto said. “With those types of questions in mind, providers are generally being very flexible in trying to help clients.”

However, Smith believes that honeymoon travelers who plan to leave the continental U.S. are more concerned about being able to get back into the country than they are with vaccination requirements.

“Since people are testing positive even though they’ve been vaccinated, many are worried they could get stuck outside the country. That means having to pay extra money for longer stays and having to take additional time off work that they weren’t planning on using,” she said.



But Wick, Smith and Pesto agree that COVID-related challenges shouldn’t discourage couples from planning a honeymoon.

“Everybody needs to have a honeymoon, even if it’s just a three-day car trip,” Wick said. “But both need to be involved in the planning process and if budget is important, set something realistic.”

Smith said travelers should consider testing requirements for the destinations they’re looking at and whether or not those destinations have a quarantine policy in place.

“Last year, we didn’t book any resorts that didn’t offer COVID testing on property,” she said.

She also emphasized the importance of

travel insurance.

“Don’t book anything without travel insurance and make sure there’s a COVID policy in place,” she said. “Also, be patient with agents. Many things are out of their control. Everybody realizes you have to be a little more flexible now. Things aren’t always set in stone.”

Pesto agrees.

“Right now, it’s important to be an informed traveler,” she said. “Make decisions off real facts.”

“There is so much regulation now that in many ways, I feel safer traveling now than I did before COVID and honeymooners should feel that way, too.”







circular SENSATION

STORY BY JON SHOULDERS

**Local jewelers offer
personal touches
with custom
rings**



The moment of your engagement, the period leading up to your wedding day, and of course the big day itself, all comprise a truly special time of life. It follows that you and your loved one might want custom wedding rings to reflect such a unique time, and signify your companionship moving forward. But where to start? With so many style, size, shape, carat weight, metal and texture options out there, what's the best approach for a custom ring?

First, let the internet be your friend if you're right in the early stages," suggests Jeff Johnson, owner of Greenwood-based J.L. Johnson Fine Jewelers. "A lot of the time people will walk in with a deer-in-headlights look, and the first thing we do is ask if their significant other has a Pinterest page or something like that. It's a good place to go to be reminded of the person's interests and passions, and find a common theme."

For those with an original idea that they've never seen on a website, in a magazine or elsewhere, simply sketching the rough concept on paper for a jeweler can get the process rolling.

"Drawing a picture can really help us start getting a design together, so it doesn't have to be a design you've necessarily seen anywhere," says Diana Jacobs, owner of J&W Fine Jewelry in Columbus. "It does help though if you have some kind of picture, whether that's something from the internet or somewhere else, representing some form of style that you like."

Johnson says that even after deciding on an idea, it can be tempting to keep researching to make improvements and enhancements to your concept — but once you have a gut feeling, stick with it.

"You could go on adjusting what

you want over and over, but we tell customers that once they have a general theme, pull the trigger and let us move forward," he says.

Many jewelers including J.L. Johnson are able to incorporate a client's ideas into a computer-aided software design program, to render a rotatable image for client review. Customers having trouble formulating a specific custom idea can provide several examples of existing rings they like, and the jeweler can often combine those ideas into a visual rendering to help the process along.

"Typically after that, we can do 3D printing and print a wax model, then lay the center stone in, and the customer can really see if it's what they envisioned," Johnson says. "They can try it out on the finger, although they are a bit fragile because it's wax resin."

Johnson adds that it's common for jewelers to work consistently with designers, whether in-house or outsourced, as the popularity for custom jewelry has steadily increased throughout the years.

"We have a lot of bridal designers we work with, and most of them will modify just about any ring they have because they realize we can't throw chocolate, vanilla and strawberry shakes on the table as the only options, so to speak," he says.

Doug Corbin, sales manager at McGee and Company Fine Jewelers in Greenwood, says couples often have specific reasons they are taking the custom route, such as a diamond that has been passed down as an heirloom.

"If there's something special or significant about why they want to make a ring from scratch, then a good conversation about that reason can get things going for us," Corbin says. "Many times, ideas about what the ring should look like will come from those conversations."

Current trends

What about current trends in both custom and non-custom rings? Although streamlined,

vintage-style pieces remain in demand and likely always will be, local professionals are also seeing clients branch out from traditional styles.

"Recently everyone's going for funky styles, and people like different geometric-shaped diamonds a lot," Jacobs says, adding that colored gemstones have also become popular, in lieu of diamond center stones (à la Kate Middleton). "Vintage is the most popular right now though. Also, a lot of people are setting their diamonds east to west, so the stone is set horizontally on the ring. That's a beautiful look."

Johnson has seen an increased push towards rose gold in recent years, and says demand for halo styles has started to wane somewhat.

"Trends like the rose gold are great, but I always tell people, when it comes to the trends, that your rings will be there in 10 years, 20 years and 30 years, so keep that in mind," he says.

Practicality has played a role in what Corbin has seen in the past two years as a shift toward styles that are simple yet distinctive.

"You've got people who are nurses or teachers and they want something they can work all day in comfortably," Corbin

says. "For the last 20 years there's been an urge to throw as many diamonds into a ring as possible, with as much sparkle as possible. Almost overnight, with help from things like Instagram, the scene changed to a much more conservative solitaire, and then also cool, creative, stackable bands. This year should be very cool to see what folks do with that."

On the men's side, wood-inlay bands and whiskey-barrel bands have started to share the limelight, although traditional, simple bands, whether in gold or alternative metals like titanium or tungsten, remain desirable.

"In the old days everybody got a plain

gold band like their dad wore, and then the alternative metals came out," Johnson says. "We carry a metal called tantalum, and we've seen a huge flux to that."

Ultimately, it's usually best to let your creativity — and your heart — guide you towards that perfect ring, and communicate as much as possible with your jeweler along the way in order to arrive at the desired result.

"It's really about listening to the customer, and them listening to us," Corbin says. "Get as much information to the jeweler as you can and we'll figure it out together."



Relax and enjoy your stay!

Every couple wants their wedding day to be fun and free of stress. You hope your big day will be exactly the way you've planned. Maybe there's a family tradition passed down from generations you want to keep, or cultures brought together in a special way. You may want to break a few rules or combine ideas to make it your own.



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