

World of Color

Navy takes the lead as far as popular shades this season. Pretty colors like coral, aqua, and green are kind to many complexions and hair colors. Jewel tones can brighten up a mature face. Metallics – and gunmetal, especially – work well with nearly all color palettes, as do nudes and softer shades of cream, gray and peach. Tulle and soutache knee-length dress, Montage by Mon Cheri. Price upon request, WhatchamaCallit Fashions.



Lovely in Lace

Today's lace is not the heavy curtain lace of the past. It is delicate and refined. If choosing between a solid and a pattern, the solid fabric is always a safer choice, as solids flatter most body types. The lace overlays don't overpower the elegance of this lapis Tadashi Shoji gown with belt and bateau neck. \$388, Nordstrom.

The Long and Short of it

Whether you wear a long or short dress depends on several things. If it's a day wedding – before 5 p.m. – a short dress, such as this purple plus-size lace overlay sheath dress, is appropriate. For weddings after 5 p.m., the dress gets longer and more formal, with beading, shine or lace. Adriana Papell, \$188. Nordstrom.



Down-the-Aisle Style

BY SUSAN HUSTON

FINDING A BRIDAL GOWN IS EASY COMPARED TO SHOPPING FOR A MOTHER-OF-THE-BRIDE DRESS. AN EXPERT OFFERS TIPS ON FASHION, FIT AND ETIQUETTE.

It's all about the bride.

Yes, moms, many things about weddings have changed since you got married (how, exactly, is a save-the-date different from an invitation?), but this has not. The bride is the star of the day, especially when it comes to style.

But whether you're a mother of the bride, mother of the groom or stepmother or grandmother of either, your walk down the aisle is important, too. And, chances are, you're feeling just as much stress — if not more — than the bride has felt shopping for her gown.

As a stylist, wardrobe consultant and personal shopper for more than 40 years, I've helped more than a few frazzled moms and grandmothers figure out their wedding-day looks. I understand the joy and pain this pursuit involves.

It's usually at the bottom of the wedding "to-do" list, just below "drop 15 pounds." As the nuptials draw near, the hunt becomes frantic, especially if you haven't shopped for a formal gown since you sashayed down the aisle as a svelte young woman decades ago.

It doesn't have to be a chore you dread — no matter your age, shape or fashion sense. Here's a veritable bouquet of trends and tips for moms to look their best on the big day.

Susan Huston is a freelance writer, stylist and owner of Susan Huston Fashion Concepts, www.susanhuston.com.



Flatter the Figure

Be savvy about emphasizing the most flattering parts of your body and camouflaging any imperfections. If your arms are great, for example, look for a halter neckline, which draws attention to the shoulders and up to the face. Fear you might have “bat wings”? Many modern-day “mother” dresses come with jackets. Ruching on the bodice, ruffles or a peplum at the waistline help hide hips and sculpt the midsection, as on this lace gown with removable bolero jacket by Mac Duggal Couture. \$585. J. Saunders Boutique.

Sheer Elegance

Sheer illusion is the “barely there” fabric covering neck, shoulder and arms for a feminine look. Yet the sheer fabric serves a purpose: It gives the skin underneath a taunt and tighter look, as the sleeves of this light gray illusion and bead gown by VM for Mori Lee illustrate. \$549, StarDust Celebrations.

Top 5 tips for mothers of the occasion

1 Start a Look Book. Organizing a look book is my tried-and-true technique for clients. A look book is simply a folder, an album on your smartphone or computer – or, these days, a Pinterest board – where you store photos of dresses you like. It saves precious shopping time if you research current dresses and how those styles relate to your body, budget and wedding. Look through bridal magazines, postings on Pinterest, department store sites or bridal sites to find looks you like. The key, however, is to go into this shopping adventure with an open mind by considering styles you normally would not select. Earmark styles that catch your eye in your look book, and you will find the perfect dress with ease once you get to a fitting room.

2 Color Rules. While many bridal and department stores now have “mother of the occasion” departments rather than “mother of the bride” selections, tradition still rules as to which mom gets shopping priority. The mother of the bride usually chooses her dress color first, and then the groom’s mother chooses her color.

No mom, of course, would choose to match the bride in a white dress. Black is now considered acceptable for more formal weddings. Moms should stay away from the exact hue of the bridesmaids’ dresses, though a different shade of that color (sage green if the maids are in emerald) is a popular way to go. The most important consideration for any mom, though, is that the dress color complement her skin and hair coloring. As we age, some of us need richer, jewel-tone hues to brighten our faces. By contrast, if your hair and skin colors are vibrant, choose cool tones in the pastel range, such as soft pink, sky blue, dove gray and even a metallic shade.

3 Beware of the Shine. Shimmering fabric reflects light, causing objects to appear larger, especially in photos. The same goes for sequins.

The golden rule for shine is to use it strategically. If you’re worried about your shape in general, you may want to avoid shimmery fabrics, such as silk and satin, altogether. At the very least, make sure the shine is not in areas you do not want magnified. If you’re worried about your stomach, hips and rear view, for example, wear your metallic on top and opt for a skirt in a more matte fabric. Beading on the bodice brings the eyes up to the face and away from hips.

Be sure to take pictures of yourself in the fitting room so you can see how you’ll look in wedding-day photos. Do this from all angles, standing up and sitting down.

4 Get a Firm Foundation. Your shopping trip shouldn’t stop when you have found the dress. Invest in a right bra and shapers, too. A new, “uplifting” and supportive bra can make you look like you lost pounds and inches in seconds.

Look for a store with a bra specialist on staff who can give you the best fit. Don’t be surprised if you measure bigger than the size you’re currently wearing, and don’t be afraid of the number. You may be wearing a smaller size bra now, but you look bigger because it doesn’t fit your body right. Shapers – you know those new, more comfortable versions of the old-time girdle – might not change your dress size, but they smooth the lumps and bumps. And they are 100 times more comfortable than the girdle of yesteryear.

5 The Tailor Is Your Friend. Don’t wait until you lose 10 or 15 pounds. Start scouting as soon as the engagement’s announced. It’s far better to find your perfect dress early and head to alterations nearer the wedding date, just as the bride does. Unless you’re having your dress made, when you’re budgeting for your attire, you need to figure in the cost of alterations. Realistically, it is nearly impossible to find a dress on the rack that doesn’t need tailoring.

And, moms, no matter how tempting it is, do not – under any circumstances – purchase a dress a size or two smaller as motivation to diet. Chances are, it’s not going to work, and even the best tailor may not be able to make it fit and flatter your body. And remember: Just because you can zip it up doesn’t mean it fits.

The same goes with shoes. Don’t wait until the last minute to buy them and expect them to work perfectly. Shoes need to be broken in, and the bottoms scuffed. Wear them around for hours before strolling down the aisle. Your feet will thank you on the wedding day.