

BRIDAL PARTY



The bride, Tessa Meursing, centre, with her bridesmaids, from left, Amber Watkins, Kristen McArter, Andrea Saikely and Yasmin Whyte.

DALLAS KOLOTLYO

Navigating the bridesmaid dress

One fashionista offers advice to ensure both the bride and her attendants are happy

AMBER WATKINS
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

After years spent together, with so many emotional experiences, intimate moments, laughter and sadness, we were not only friends, but also soulmates. Despite life's inevitable setbacks and obstacles, we had only grown stronger over time and distance.

The day had finally come. The parcel arrived in the mail and I read the return address that sent my heart aflutter. I eagerly tore open the protective packaging and there it was: the most exquisite box I had ever laid eyes on. I gingerly opened it to reveal the words I had been waiting for all that time: "Will you... be my bridesmaid?"

My ecstatic reaction was experienced by anyone within a 1.5 km radius, echoing through the streets surrounding my Toronto apartment. My long-distance Vancouver love, Tessa, was going to be married and I was one of The Chosen Ones.

A few weeks later, my girlfriend of more than 10 years, Tami, issued her own invitation to be in her wedding party and planning had already begun for both nuptials. With dates set exactly two weeks apart for the coming August, the adventure had only just begun. It was time to hit the gym, the salon and the bank.

Regardless of how laid back, easygoing and hip-pittur-minded a bride believes herself to be, it's impossible to plan that big of a party — and I don't mean in guest number, but in importance — without developing some type of emotional dysfunction.

The best thing you can do for yourself and for the future of your relationships with your family, friends and fiancé, is to just be honest from the get-go. From cultural traditions to guest accommodation and all the minutiae in between, even the most laissez-faire girl next door is one Lucite candelabra away

The 'Dos' of Bridal Party Fashion

DO start with the bridal gown. This seems obvious but I truly believe that if the wedding is the event, the bride's dress is the centrepiece of the entire vision. Often brides will go shopping with one style in mind and leave with another one entirely, while wedding preparation has already begun. Sometimes this can lead to a mismatched aesthetic and makes the remaining decisions that much more difficult.

DO take into account the various body types and skin tones of your bridesmaids. If the dresses are all going to be the same colour and fabric, then the place you can be flexible is the style. Let the bridesmaids choose a cut that is most flattering to their body shape and they will be that much happier and comfortable for the big day — and can suck it up when it comes to the lilac sateen (Note: nobody looks good in lilac sateen).



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Make a decision at the outset on colour, style, fit and price.

If you have a diverse group of girls in your bridal party, not everyone will look good in that shade of blue you love. For this, consider an ombre palette with lighter to darker shades of the same colour family.

DO just make a decision for the dresses right from the start, and if you are unsure or need help, ask one bridesmaid, not the entire team, for input, preferably the one who understands your vision and has a solid sense of style in general.

al. The other girls will have plenty of opportunity to help with other aspects of the big day, and too many cooks in the kitchen lead to more headache and frustration.

DO keep the dresses under a certain price point. It doesn't matter if your cousin makes six figures and wouldn't blink at a \$500 price tag, don't forget about your friend who is a struggling artist and will be forced to choose between buying the dress and eating. Nobody wants a hungry bridesmaid.

DO go up a size. This goes for both the bride and her maids. It is always advisable to go with the larger size and have it perfectly tailored, not only because of comfort but also because it just looks better. The lines will look cleaner, it limits tearing and bulging, and it actually makes the dress appear more expensive and higher quality.

from a complete meltdown.

This is where the bridal party comes in — well, in theory. Coming from the bridesmaid's perspective, the bride will do whatever she can to not appear as though she is toting the "Bridezilla" line. In both cases from this past summer, the brides attempted to allow their bridal party to choose their own dresses, with only moderate restrictions. However, both are fashion-conscious girls who know their individual styles well and also had clear visions for their weddings, which differed vastly from each other. So, despite the initial message to the entire pack letting us know of the "general idea" of how they wanted the bridesmaid lineup to look, assuring us all that they were "not committed to it whatsoever," and inviting us to provide alternatives if we saw something we absolutely loved, it was inevitably all a ruse.

I watched the conversation over bridesmaid dresses escalate

for months leading up to the Vancouver wedding, with countless links to marginally different styles of frocks, which were a pastel rainbow of Grecian maxi dresses, being emailed back and forth. At the very end of it, we legitimately bought the first dress style that Tessa had chosen from Day 1. We could have saved months of discussion and stress had she just never allowed for flexibility. With Tami's bridesmaid dress process, she had a colour palette in mind, and sent us a series of photos showing various styles in shades of champagne and blush pinks. There were six of us standing up with her, so the effect would be very individualistic, yet tie in beautifully together. As per instruction, we began sending her ideas of what we would possibly like to wear and were consistently met with radio silence. Finally, as expected, Tami broke down and assigned us each our dress. I was frankly relieved AND I happened to love my frock.

The reality of the situation is that not everyone in the bridal party will be content with what they are sporting for the big day, and they will still have to zip it up, smile for the photos and pretend that they will totally wear it again.

As the bride, assuming you're not actually the most superficial human, you probably haven't chosen your bridesmaids based on their fashion senses alone, and whether that means no style, bad style or just different from yours, the point is that you're going to have to lay down the law. As North Americans, we may not be accustomed to dictatorship but you would be surprised at how well it can work in a temporary situation. I knew better than to be tempted by promises of democratic right and wrote back to each bride to say that I would happily wear whatever they chose. (Important to note is that I meant it.)

While doing some light recon work for this article, I was

reminded by Tami that at one point she had called to ask for my opinion and I told her "if you want me to walk down the aisle wearing a basket of fruit on my head, I will start practising now."

My view is that it's not my day so it's not my say. As someone in the fashion industry, I find that there can be some added pressure to deliver either in my personal style or in consultation, and the role of a bridesmaid is no exception. I understood why my brides-to-be would want my opinion or help with fashion-related decisions, and it can be difficult to hold back and recognize when the right thing to do is to simply support their initial instinct. I do, however, have some tips to help any bridal party achieve the closest thing to unanimity as possible while still delivering on what the bride ultimately wants.

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THE RING

When it comes to diamonds, classic style is best

JOANNE SASVARI
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Like anything else in the world of weddings, engagement rings have seen their share of trends since Archduke Maximilian of Austria first popped a diamond onto Mary of Burgundy's finger back in the 15th century.

But this is not an accessory that should be chosen according to fashion's latest whims.

"The trends often come back full circle to the classic elements that work so well," says Mevyn Kirtley, chief gemologist of Tiffany & Co. After all, he points out, "An engagement ring is something that you will have for the rest of your life."



Tiffany diamond engagement rings, all in platinum settings, come in a variety of styles, including, from left, emerald-cut, oval-shaped, the classic round brilliant, pear-shaped and heart-shaped solitaire.

Kirtley was in Vancouver recently to talk diamonds and Tiffany, and that of course led directly to talk of engagement rings.

If you're shopping for an engagement ring, he says, you want to look for beauty,

durability and design elements that allow it to be something that you can wear on a daily basis. "The emphasis being on wearability and longevity," he says. "That's why we don't overdesign our engagement rings."

For one thing, all Tiffany white

diamonds are set in platinum. In the wider world, yellow and rose gold are gaining in popularity, but as far as Tiffany is concerned, they impart unwanted colour that dims the icy fire of the stone. Besides, platinum is much stronger and longer lasting, a precious metal worthy of the most precious of gemstones.

One of Tiffany's most popular rings is the classic brilliant round with the six-prong setting that dates back to 1886. It is designed "in a way that looks like that diamond is floating on the finger," Kirtley says. "The round brilliant is still the one many of our customers gravitate to. It's the quintessential engagement ring. It is the quintessential Tiffany diamond."

That said, different people prefer different cuts. In fact, Tiffany has just released a collection of four fancy shapes that took years of design development to perfect: pear, oval, heart and the elegant emerald cut.

"Different shapes are flattering to different types of fingers," Kirtley says.

"A pear shape, for instance, elongates the finger. Emerald cuts are rectangular shape so they add length and they have a more subtle way of reflecting the light. It really boils down to the person, their style and the things they really gravitate to. It's quite a personal thing, which makes it so special."

Even so, he says, "One can't not like a beautiful round brilliant."