

the dream dress

By Melody Lesser

Photos by Michael Spain-Smith

MY 13-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER, VICTORIA, HAS A COLLECTION of bride dolls that began when she was two with her first Wedding Barbie. Her collection isn't that extensive, and I admit to being totally shocked upon overhearing her conversation last week with her best friend, Jenna. They were discussing their ideal engagement rings and had found an internet site on which they could design their own. My older daughter, Emily, had joined in the game and the three of them took turns choosing settings and center stones. They called me in to view the final selections. "When I get married, my ring will look like this," Tori said as she pointed to a sparkler on the computer screen with a price tag of \$65,000. "And listen to what my wedding dress is going to look like," she continued. "It will be white silk and fitted to the hip. Then it will flare out in a big pouf of mesh that will be long to the floor. The bottom will have burgundy silk roses, and the train will trail behind me for miles."

"I know exactly what my dress is going to look like," said 16-year-old Emily. "It will be off-white satin and will be very fitted with a low back. It should be simple but elegant. I used to want it to button all the way down the back, but since I want to get married in the spring or early fall, I want an open back." Emily had apparently given this a lot of thought.

I walked away marveling at the fact that what "they" say is true. You really do imagine your wedding day years before it happens. Frankly, when I was a teenager, I wanted to elope, but then I always was something of a rebellious romantic.

WEDDING FACTS AND FIGURES: Every year, for about the past 20 years, an average of 2.4 million marriages take place in the United States. For the year 2000, the average age of the bride was 24; the average groom was 28. Just under three-quarters of brides-to-be receive a diamond engagement ring, with about 60 percent of brides-to-be

involved in its selection. The average engagement lasts 13 months. Eighty percent of couples plan formal weddings, at an average cost of \$19,000, and including roughly 185 members of the happy couple's best friends and family. The average wedding reception lasts four to five hours and, after the last bottle of champagne has been uncorked, the last slice of cake has been eaten and the last dance is done, the wedding dress is lovingly cleaned and packed away, never to be worn by the bride again.

Nothing is more symbolic of the happy bride than her wedding dress. Tastes and styles change, yet always, the bridal market rises to the difficult task of fulfilling each bride's dream. We asked three venerable sources about what's new and noteworthy in bridal fashion. Not surprisingly, customer service, catering to the bride and her family's wishes and ensuring that her wedding dress will be everything she'd dreamed of topped the list. If she doesn't find her ideal dress in a store, bridal couturiers exist to create it for her.

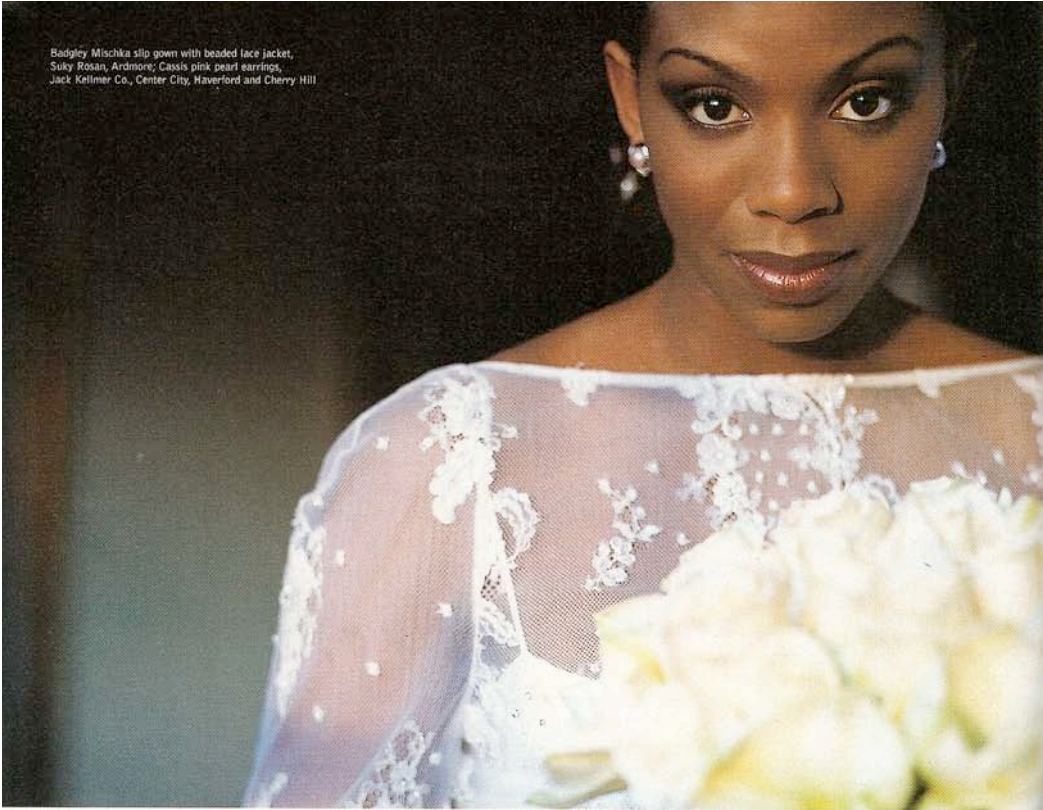
THE PHILADELPHIA STORY: Suky Rosan is the owner of the eponymous upscale bridal store in Ardmore, PA. She's been in the business for almost three decades and she knows her business well. Her sense of humor, coupled with her belief in astrology, make for a very unique twist. I was initially taken aback when she asked my sign. She then asked my husband's sign and deemed our marriage "perfect" and "long lasting." I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Bridal fashion is really back to a touch of romance again," says Pattie Lamantia, manager of Suky Rosan. "It had been more chic and sophisticated in the past, but now it's back to family and celebrating that much more important aspect of the wedding. A dress with a natural waist is very big for the upcoming season, and while strapless is still strong, the body of the dress is very romantic with a more forgiving silhouette." Touches of color, which recently had been important, are taking a backseat this season. "All of the top designers did at least

Domo Adami silk gown with gold netting and iridescent detail, Maria Romia Bridal Couture, Center City; Platinum dangle earrings, platinum chain necklace, Jack Kellmer Co., Center City, Haverford and Cherry Hill



Badgley Mischka slip gown with beaded lace jacket,
Suky Rosan, Ardmore; Cassis pink pearl earrings,
Jack Kellmer Co., Center City, Haverford and Cherry Hill



one halter dress and backs are cut a little lower. The back shows a little more, but it's in a very romantic, not a sexy way," says Lamantia. For bridesmaids, two-piece dressing continues to be important. Look for pastel colors, sweater sets with skirts and a streamlined, soft silhouette. As for the groom, says Rosan, "He should be in a black tuxedo and he has only to show up, smile and tell his bride how gorgeous she looks." Second time brides can also be sexy. "But," says Rosan, "if they marry the right astrological sign, they'll only do it once."

Nicole Miller is known for her sophisticated, timeless designs. She is credited with reinventing the little black dress, creating elegant and classic eveningwear and infusing a sense of whimsy into men's fashions. (We can't think of one man who doesn't own and love at least one Nicole Miller tie.) Her attention to cut, fit and details are evident in her bridal fashions as well. The Nicole Miller bride is the epitome of urban sophistication. As for the bridal party, the bride who chooses Nicole Miller ensures that her entourage will wear their dresses again. "Separates top the charts," says Desiree Padovano of Nicole Miller's public relations. "Nicole is showing really great silhouettes this season. There are sexy cocktail dresses and strapless is still important. The bridesmaid is looking to wear the dress after the wedding." Soft colors, including blush, pale lavender and silver prevail for Spring 2002, along with the usual navy, ivory and black. Padovano sums up the season as one of "classic simplicity."

Charity Brown, bridal specialist, concurs, adding that customer service is ultimately what's important at Nicole Miller. "Once we meet with the bride to find out what she wants for her bridal party, we then handle everything and leave the bride out of it. We contact the bridesmaids and set up appointments. In addition, Nicole Miller caters to sizes 18 to 24, as well as maternity."

"Nicole's silhouettes have gotten sleeker and more sophisticated. She's really trying to be as modern a bridal designer as she can be. She's been doing bridal since 1995, but the original concept came from customers

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wanting to use cocktail and evening dresses as bridesmaid dresses," says Padovano. Mothers-of-the-bride can outfit themselves at Nicole Miller, and wraps, jackets, evening shoes and handbags are available to the bridal party in coordinating colors and fabrics. But please call ahead to book the initial appointment. "That way, we can give the bride and her bridal party our undivided attention," says Brown.

"I want the girls to feel comfortable and pampered," says Maria



Domo Adams two-piece off-the-shoulder gown.
Maria Romia Bridal Couture, Center City, South Sea
pearl necklace, McNeilis & Sherry, Haddonfield, NJ.
Pearl and diamond drop earrings, Jack Kellimer Co.,
Center City, Haverford and Cherry Hill

Romia of Maria Romia Bridal Couture. "We gather all the chairs around and the brides come out on Saturday. It's like being in a living room," says Romia, who not only creates her own bridal designs but is also the exclusive source for European designers Max Chaoul and Suzanne Ermann of Paris. She also carries couture gowns by Domo Adami, Angel Sanchez and Adrianna Orozco. If the bride-to-be can't find the dress of her dreams among Romia's well-chosen selections, Romia, who started out as a lingerie designer, will create it herself. "I like different things. I don't want the bride to look like everybody else. Why bother coming here when you can go anywhere else?"

According to Romia, today's bride is asking for a bit more coverage with shrugs, cover ups and sheer sleeves. Romia agrees that strapless dresses are important, as are halter necklines, and "More and more girls are asking for beading." This is a departure from several seasons back when a lack of embellishment spelled modern. "Today, brides are asking for sparkle. It's not overdone, but is instead smart and classic. It's just enough sparkle to catch the light."

Asymmetrical hemlines and colors such as blush with a white overlay or silvery embroidery are newly important, as are headpieces with genuine pearls. "The bride can restring the pearls and have a beautiful necklace after the wedding." (Elaine Tse, a jewelry designer and owner of Tselaine Designs in Philadelphia is available to work with Romia to customize dresses with her own jewelry designs.) "My dresses are not those of the traditional bride," says Romia. "They're more like Academy Award dresses in white or ivory with beading. I like things that are a little bit different, although if you look at me, I'm very plain. When people see me they think, 'You're the designer?'"

With all the choices available to the Philadelphia-area bride, she'll surely fulfill her wedding dress fantasy. In fact, I guess it's entirely possible that my daughter might someday sashay down the aisle in a poufy mesh dress adorned with burgundy roses. ■

Photo Assistants:
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Hair & Makeup: Jean D'Orazio
Models: Zakiya Atkinson, Reinhard and Kelly Ann, Expressions & Images NYC
All flowers provided by Renaissance Floral Interiors, Center City

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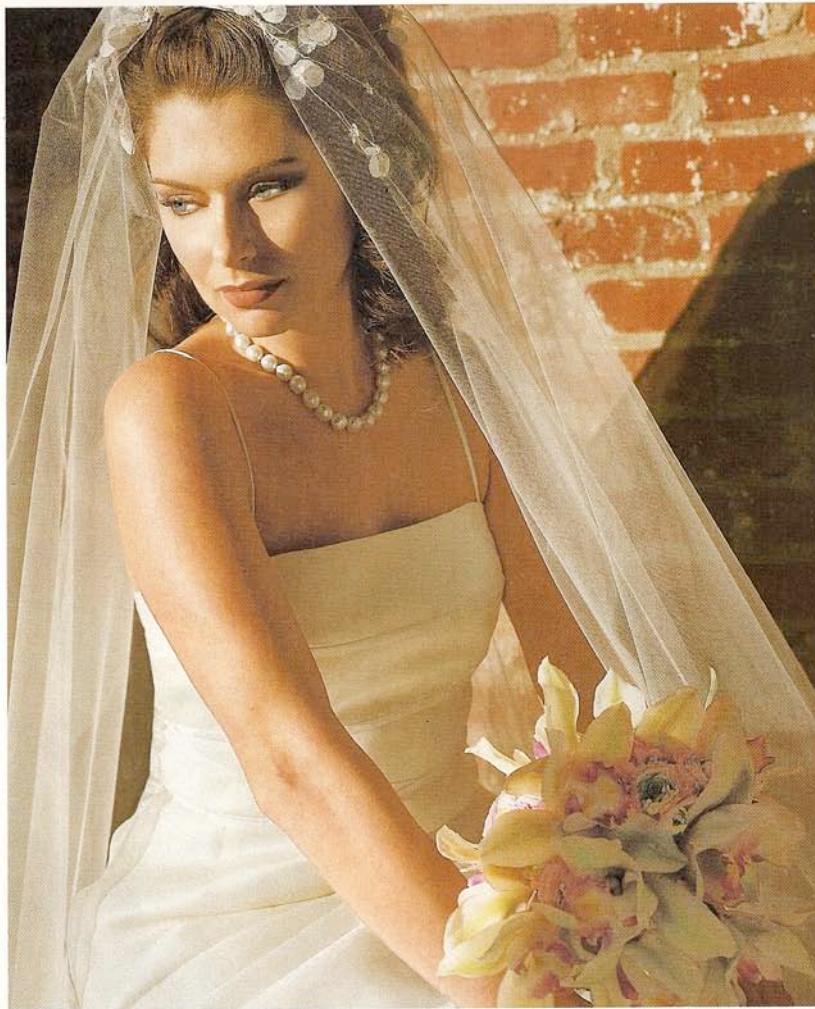
Michael Spahr-Smith

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BRIDAL COUTURE

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215.564.1011



Strapless A-line gown with beaded detail, Nicole Miller, Center City and Manayunk; Two-strand diamond earrings and silver pearls, Jack Kellimer Co., Center City, Haverford and Cherry Hill



Suzanne Elkemann layered gown and veil, Maria Romla Bridal Couture, Center City;
South Sea pearl necklace, McNelis & Sherry, Haddonfield, NJ;
Pearl and diamond drop earrings, Jack Kellmer Co., Center City, Haverford and Cherry Hill



Vera Wang gown with full skirt and lace trim, Suky Rosen, Ardmore; Cassis necklace with pink and black South Sea pearls, earrings with fresh water pearls and diamonds, straight-line diamond bracelet, McNelis & Sherry, Haddonfield, NJ