

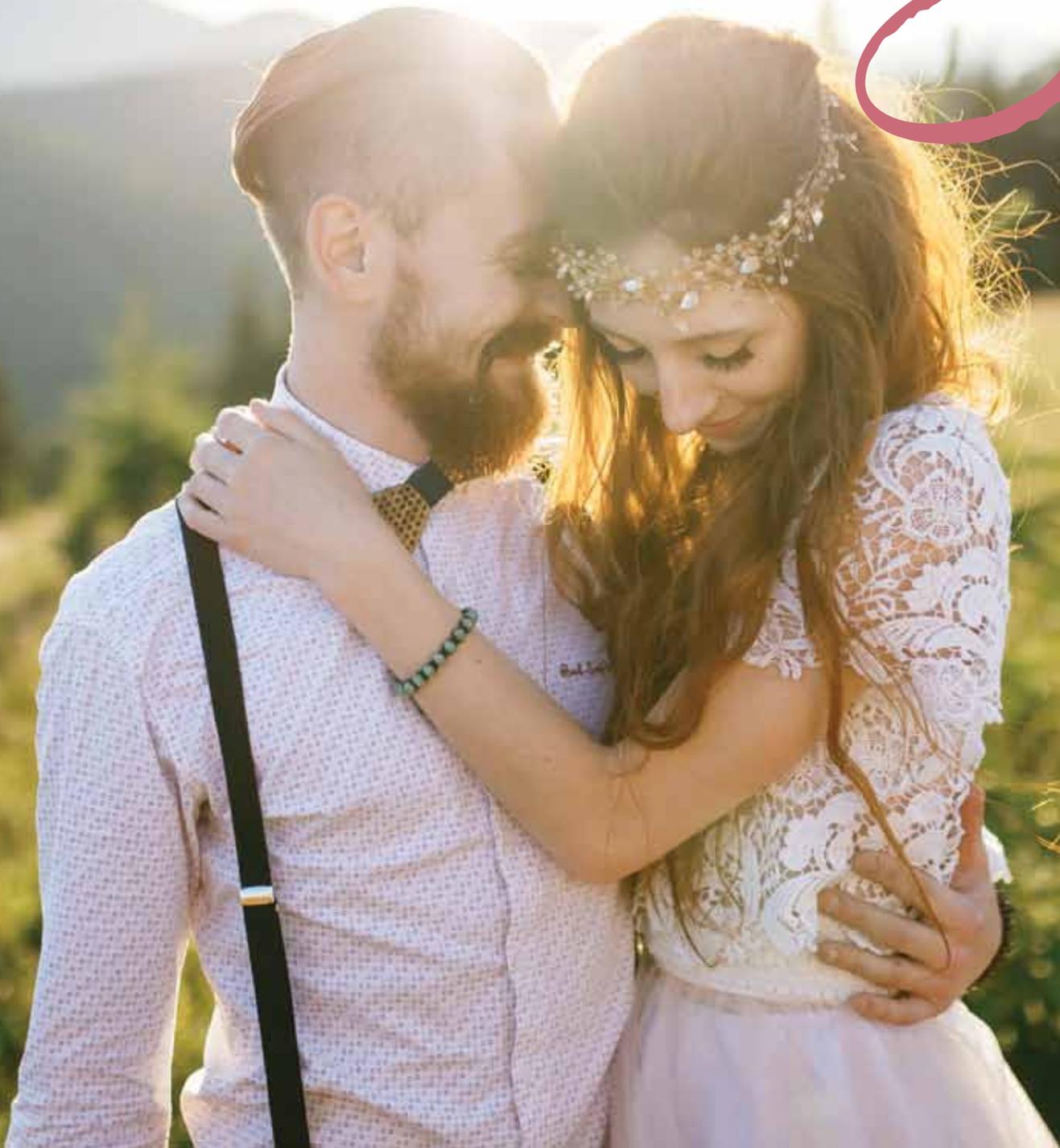
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2017

Weddings



Weddings

- 3 Make proposals special and successful
- 4 Master the wedding save-the-date
- 5 Determining wedding day dress codes
- 6 Treat guests to personalized vows
- 7 Tips for a special mother/son dances
- 8 Successful toasts help shape social events
- 9 Stunning engagement ring alternatives
- 10 Weddings and nontraditional families
- 11 Different roles for the father of the bride
- 12 Jewelry care and cleaning guidelines
- 13 How guests can cut costs and still attend loved ones' weddings
- 14 Wedding transportation tips
- 15 Tips for trimming the wedding guest list
- 16 'I do,' take two: Guide to a second marriage
- 17 7 ways to recycle a wedding gown
- 18 Make every anniversary count



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Make proposals special and successful

A wedding proposal is a special moment in couples' lives together. It can be made even more special by following some guidelines.

A marriage proposal is a couple's first official step toward the altar. Tradition dictates that men pop the question, with their surprised — and hopefully soon-to-be-fiancées — ultimately deciding if wedding bells will be on the horizon.

Proposing marriage can be nerve-racking. However, if the time seems right and love is in the air, popping the question can be exciting. Regardless of who is proposing marriage, the following strategies can help make proposals memorable and successful.

Turn the tides

An old Irish tradition known as "The Lady's Privilege" was established in the fifth century by a nun named St. Brigid. She decided to create an opportunity for women to propose marriage. This day fell on every leap year, February 29. Centuries later, women can still use this tradition as the impetus to take the marriage reins into their own hands. But women need not wait for the next leap year to propose.

Many women view proposing as an empowering action that is tied to the evolving view of independent women. Couples are negotiating more in the marriage process, and



the dissolution of commonly held practices is occurring more often.

Choose a sentimental location

Couples will remember the proposal for the rest of their lives. So choose a proposal location that has sentimental connections. Think about where the first "I love you" was uttered or where

a first date occurred. These can be prime locations to pop the question.

Note her style

Engagement rings play a big role in many couples' proposals. One person's style is not necessarily what his partner will like. Bigger isn't always better. Rather, choose a ring that reflects your partner's preferences and personality. Take your partner jewelry shopping and see which types of jewelry he or she is most drawn to. Certain preferences can serve as a jumping off point for ring designs.

Ask for the family's blessing

Men no longer need to ask their girlfriends' fathers for "permission" to wed their daughters. However, asking your partner's family for their blessing is a sign of respect and can add a romantic and heartfelt touch to the proposal.

Capture the moment

Though we live in an age when every moment of people's lives is documented with videos and photographs posted to social media, proposals still stand out as extra special moments. Hire a professional photographer to discreetly capture the proposal and your partner's reaction so it can be cherished for years to come.



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Master the wedding

Many couples' weddings take more than a year to plan. Couples want all of the special people in their lives to witness their vows, and giving guests advance notice can ensure as many loved ones as possible attend the ceremony.

To be certain that guests have ample notice to clear their schedules, many couples now turn to save-the-date cards, which announce weddings well in advance of the actual wedding day.

Save-the-date cards once were reserved only for weddings that required travel or special circumstances, such as destination weddings. But such cards have now become commonplace for all weddings. That's because many people plan vacations or business trips anywhere from four to six months in advance. Busy people require plenty of notice to include this important date



on their calendars, particularly when wedding dates fall during popular travel seasons or around the holidays.

Kleinfeld Bridal, a premiere New York bridal boutique, says that save-the-date cards are typically mailed six to eight months prior to the wedding, though some are sent as early as a year before the big day. Once a date and a location is secured, save-the-dates can be ordered and mailed.

Save-the-date cards require couples to assemble their guest lists well in advance of the wedding. The leading bridal resource The Knot notes that everyone who will get a wedding invitation should also receive a save-the-date card. There's no turning back once cards are sent, so couples will need to be certain everyone they want to attend is getting advanced notice.

It's acceptable to mail save-the-date cards even if some wedding day details are still up in the air. Guests really only need to know the date and location of the wedding. Couples also can use the save-the-date card to direct invitees to a wedding website where guests can learn the details of the wedding as they unfold.

RSVP information does not need to be included on the save-the-date card.

Save-the-date cards are much less formal than invitations, so couples can have fun with them. They can showcase couples' clever personalities or funny quirks. Keep in mind it is in poor taste to mention gifts or registries on save-the-date cards. There will be plenty of time to direct guests to registries later on.

Couples are increasingly turning to save-the-date cards when planning their weddings to make sure busy friends and family will have enough time to make plans to attend their weddings.

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Determining wedding day dress codes

Wedding invitations do more than merely announce that a celebration is on the horizon. Invitations provide key information about the ceremony and festivities to follow. Many details, including the location, time and date of the wedding, are spelled out on the wedding invitations. However, invitations can sometimes leave guests confused about the appropriate style of attire for the occasion.

Even though wedding invitations rarely offer specific information regarding attire, chances are the wording will provide clues that can help guests interpret the desired dress code.

Casual

If the invitation mentions casual attire, it's important to realize that everyday casual is different from wedding casual. Jeans, shorts and tank tops are unacceptable unless otherwise noted. Err on the side of caution and go with business casual, which includes chinos, slacks, a polo shirt or button-down shirt for men. Women can wear a sundress or slacks or a skirt and an attractive blouse. If the invitation mentions beach casual, shorts and even sandals are likely acceptable.

Semiformal

Semiformal dresswear, sometimes referred to as "dressedy casual," is a step up from casual



clothing. Cocktail dresses or a more elegant skirt and top are the norms. Gentleman generally wear a suit and tie. Coordinate the colors of clothing to the time of day. Fabrics should represent the season. For example, a linen suit will not pass at a winter wedding.

Formal

Formal attire is the default dress code for the majority of weddings. When the invitation does not specify a dress code, it is safe to assume formal attire is expected. Men can choose

among a dark suit and tie or a tuxedo. Women can opt for a formal cocktail-length dress, a classic suit or a long dress. Select among tones that are gray, black or brown.

Black tie

Black tie events also require formal attire. Black tie typically goes hand-in-hand with an evening wedding. Black tie is more rigid for male guests, who should wear a tuxedo, black bow tie, cummerbund, and patent leather shoes. Women have a little more leeway with their attire at such gatherings. A long evening gown might be preferable. However, a chic cocktail dress also can be acceptable, and darker, neutral colors are most appropriate. Some invitations may reference "Black Tie Preferred." While men may opt for a tuxedo, a black suit also can be worn.

White Tie

The most formal of occasions will request white tie attire. Ball gowns and tuxedos with tails are the norm, as are dramatic jewelry and hairstyles. White tie attire is akin to what one might see worn to awards shows.

When attending a wedding, it is always better to be overdressed than underdressed. Guests can consult with fellow guests or the bride and groom if they are unsure of the dress code.

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Treat guests to personalized vows

Couples who choose to write their own wedding vows recognize how special such personal gestures are. Writing one's own vows can impart a personalized and special touch to the ceremony. But as anyone who has stared down a blank piece of paper or blinking cursor can attest, a case of writer's block may encourage couples to abandon the idea of writing their own vows.

Writing vows can be nerve-racking. Many couples are unaccustomed to speaking in front of crowds, and then there is the challenge of turning life-altering feelings into language that will appeal to the masses.

But couples struggling with their vows need not throw in the vow-writing towel. With some practice and guidance, anyone can write cherished vows that will be remembered for all of the right reasons for years to come.

Skip the schtick. Jokes may pop up in speeches throughout the evening, but wedding vows can be your chance to truly speak from the heart. Humor may come across as insincerity. Rather, list the words that describe your feelings for your future spouse, and build on that.

Tell a story. If you need inspiration, look to a moment in your relationship when you really knew this was the person with whom you

wanted to share your life. Relay the story, but keep it brief. Try to be as specific as possible, and recognize that it's acceptable to be playful with your words. When it's really coming from the heart and not the head, you'll know it.

Borrow from traditional words. Take traditional vows and tweak them to make them your own. This works especially well for those who have trouble getting started or are unsure of which format to follow. Incorporate key words, such as "partners," "love," "friends," "joy," and "forever."

Be sure the officiant is on board. Depending on the type of ceremony, the officiant may have final say over what can or cannot be included in your vows. Religious ceremonies, for example, may be limited to certain scripture readings and traditional vows. Before you devote any time to writing vows, ensure that it's alright to include them. Otherwise, save personalized sentiments for a special toast at the wedding reception.

Decide on a mutual structure for the vows. If you and your spouse will not be writing the vows together, agree on a format that you both will follow. Otherwise, you might be writing about your unending love, and he or she may be promising to keep updated on favorite sports teams or television programs. You want the tone and style of the vows to be cohesive.



Dig deeper. Look into the future and project how you hope your life to be in 10 or 20 years. Explain all of the reasons you want to be together for the duration.

Read the vows several times. Read over your work and make sure the language is clear and there are no glaring errors. It may take a few versions to get the final version right where you want it.

Get a second opinion. Ask someone you trust to listen to the vows and offer feedback. This needs to be a person who will be honest and not just tell you what you want to hear.

Personalized vows can add an extra special touch to wedding ceremonies.

Weddings

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Tips for a special mother/son dance



Grooms are the unsung heroes of weddings. They often put others first, including letting their own mothers shine on the dance floor.

daughter dances. Grooms and their mothers can follow suit, particularly if you both have some stellar dance moves.

Let Mom choose the song. Give your mother the opportunity to express her sentiments to you, as mothers of the groom do not typically toast their sons during weddings or even rehearsal dinners.

Invite other son/mother duos up. If the idea of dancing

alone with your mother is a bit intimidating, give other mothers in attendance an opportunity to share the spotlight. Celebrate all mothers in attendance, encouraging any mothers and sons who are present to dance together.

Grooms may not garner the bulk of guests' attention on their wedding days. But they can take steps to make their special dances with their mothers more memorable and unique.

Weddings celebrate the unions of happy couples ready to pledge their lives to each other. In theory, the wedding day spotlight should be shared equally by brides and grooms. But brides often eclipse their grooms, as guests are drawn to stunning bridal gowns.

Though grooms might play second fiddle for much of their wedding days, there is one moment when all eyes are on the groom and a special lady in his life. The mother/son dance is a wedding tradition that many grooms embrace as their opportunity to show their mothers how much they love and appreciate them. The mother/son dance is an ideal time to create a special moment, and the following are some tips to personalize the dance.

Precede the bride and her father. Make your own tradition and switch up the timing of the dances. Be the first to take a spin on the dance floor and set the tone for the other traditional songs to come.

Create a photo montage. Work with an entertainment company or photographer to create a slideshow of images showing you and your mother together and separately. If possible, include some photos that were shot during the wedding ceremony, asking the photographer to capture the look on your mother's face during pivotal moments of the ceremony.

Show off your dance skills. One increasingly popular wedding trend is for fathers and brides to choreograph the father/

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Successful toasts help shape social events

A toast is a drink raised in the health or honor of someone. Such salutes are typically accompanied by some heartfelt words or tokens of advice. Toasts are a common component of social gatherings, including retirement parties, milestone birthdays and weddings.

Toast of the town

It's difficult to pinpoint who originated the practice of toasting. Several ancient societies would raise a glass in honor of deities or special guests. Ancient Greeks offered libations to the gods as a part of ritualistic practices and also as a point to drink to each other's good health. Ancient Romans at one point instituted a practice that all people must drink to Emperor Augustus at each meal.

The term "toast" has an interesting history. Dating back to the 16th century, "toast" refers to a piece of toasted bread. A piece of toast was commonly added to wine during this time

because wine was quite inferior in quality then compared to modern vintages. Stale bread was placed into the jug to soak up acidity and improve the flavor. The wine also improved the palatability of the old or spiced bread. According to *National Geographic* magazine, by the 18th century, the term "toast" had been transferred from the floating piece of bread to the person honored by the toast. Eventually, "toast" represented the drink raised or the words offered with the gesture.

Prepare for a toast

Toasts can be off-the-cuff remarks shared in the moment, but for many special events, they should be prepared well in advance. Nowadays, some toast-givers devote extra time to preparing toasts, particularly because they know these sentiments can live on indefinitely on social media. Giving a toast can induce anxiety, but some nerves can be relieved simply by doing one's homework and not

procrastinating.

Writing tips

A person giving a toast is trying to gain the attention of a group of people who may not be very attentive. These tips can improve the content of the toasts and their delivery.

Keep 'you' out of it. This toast is not about you. It's about the person you are honoring. Therefore, do not put any self-congratulatory messages in the toast. Make it all about the person — even beginning the toast with that person's name.

Hook people in. Open the toast with a good joke or anecdote that will help introduce the person of honor. For example,

Jake is a great guy because he's the type of person who will offer to meet you at your dorm room at 2 a.m. with pizza and beer to get you through a study session. Too bad he has a horrible sense of direction and repeatedly shows up at the wrong door.

Tell a story. Reference the person in the toast, other audience members, and even yourself if you can be painted in a self-deprecating light.

Keep it short. This is a toast, not a monologue. Be brief so that the audience doesn't lose interest. Set a five-minute limit.

Wrap it up. Conclude the toast by tying the story back to the introduction and making sure to include the audience once more. This will help you get the biggest laughs and applause.







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Stunning engagement ring alternatives



White diamonds have been the traditional engagement ring stones for decades. While shoppers have experimented with gold, silver, platinum, and other precious metals for ring bands, the star of the show has long been that twinkling, pristine diamond.

Even though diamonds may be a “girl’s best friend,” they may not fit every woman’s style, particularly the bride who likes to buck tradition and think outside the box. According to *Money* magazine, the average engagement ring costs more than \$5,800. In addition to being one of the most expensive gemstones, diamonds have become quite commonplace. Some women even eschew diamonds for moral reasons.

Whatever the driving force behind shopping for alternative gems, women who want to set themselves apart from others — and men who want to “wow” their significant others with unique and eye-catching rings — may opt for other dazzling stones.

Moissanite: This crystal naturally occurs in meteorites and is nearly as hard, dense and scuff-resistant as a diamond. Some feel moissanite offers more brilliance and fire than diamonds. Moissanite is a white-colored stone, so it can mimic the look of a diamond. And since it can be made in the laboratory at a fraction of the cost of even lab-made diamonds, it’s a frugal option. A nearly flawless one-carat moissanite gem can cost less than \$1,000.



Lemon quartz: This is the trade name for a lemon-yellow stone that is a variety of color-enhanced transparent quartz. Quartz is turned into this sunny hue through an artificial gamma ray irradiation process. Like other quartz gemstones, lemon quartz is considered to be very durable and is therefore suitable for all types of jewelry.

Sapphire: Sapphires tend to be blue stones (of varying intensity), but they also come in peach, pink, yellow, green, and white. Sapphire may not sparkle as much as a diamond or even moissanite. However, with the right cut, it can be hard to distinguish any lack of luster. Sapphires are the third hardest mineral, and at about one-third the price of diamonds, they make an ideal diamond substitute.

Morganite: According to the blog *Bridal Musings*, morganite is currently one of the most popular choices for engagement rings. Its pretty pink hue is romantic and feminine. It also sits at around the same hardness as sapphires, ensuring the rings will endure. Vividly cut rubies, emeralds

and tanzanite — all gems that are rarer yet less expensive than diamonds — can make beautiful engagement rings. Some couples also may opt for rings without gemstones, such as traditional Claddagh or “true lover’s knot” rings to signify their union.

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Weddings and nontraditional families

Families come in all shapes and sizes. During special events — particularly those steeped in tradition, such as weddings — blended families may have to employ certain tactics to ensure the events go off without a hitch.

When planning their weddings, couples must give consideration to the needs of their families. Even though a wedding is about the union of two people, oftentimes couples engaged to be married must contend with the politics of divorce or other familial issues. This includes if and how to incorporate stepparents and stepsiblings into the ceremony and celebration.

There are no traditional rules regarding how to handle blended families, so brides- and grooms-to-be can customize their decisions based on their own unique situations. Even when families have been happy through the years, the unique circumstances and traditions surrounding the nuptials can dredge up former insecurities, and certain aspects may require extra patience and tact. Here's how to navigate the process.

Consider stepparents and stepsiblings VIPs. Brides and grooms who are not particularly close to their stepfamilies still have to recognize the role they play in the family dynamics. These people are still family, so respect and courtesy should be offered. If there is any lingering animosity, extend the olive branch on this day and try not to let anyone be made to feel



as if they are unimportant. A simple announcement of who stepparents are at the wedding reception or inclusion of their names on wedding itineraries can help smooth over any potential bumps.

Put others' needs before your own. While the wedding may be about you and your future spouse, you must consider the feelings of others. Biological parents and stepparents may act defensively if they feel uncomfortable or hurt, and that can create an air of negativity to the day. Try to avoid this by considering potential areas of conflict. For example, mothers might be hurt if their ex-husbands' new girlfriends are asked to be in a group family photo. Instead,

select separate times to have everyone included. Remember to give parents and stepparents priority seating as well, and they each should be seated next to someone they love and someone with whom they can converse comfortably. You may think everyone can play nice, but it's best not to push the issue just to make a point at the wedding.

Recognize that some families break the mold. Recently, a father made waves on the Internet when a video of him pulling the bride's stepfather up to assist in walking her down the aisle went viral. This was a wonderful image of families making it work despite their differences or the awkwardness that can result when

brides or grooms have parents and stepparents in attendance. Although this scenario might not play out for all, find ways to impart a special touch, especially if you're close to both your biological parents and your stepparents. For example, your biological father may walk you down the aisle, while your stepfather may enjoy the first dance.

Order flowers and gifts for all. Purchase flowers and wedding party gifts for all of the special people in your lives, including your stepfamily.

Weddings can be complicated affairs when factoring in blended families. With patience and compassion, such families can enjoy a beautiful and happy day.

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Different roles for the father of the bride

Popular movies and television shows give the impression that the job of the father of the bride in a wedding is ultimately about making sure the festivities are adequately funded. In the movies, fathers fret about the costs of everything from flowers to photos.

But gone are the days when the father of the bride bankrolls his daughter's entire wedding. The Knot's "2014 Real Wedding Survey" reported that, on average, the bride's parents contribute 43 percent of the total cost of a wedding; the bride and groom contribute another 43 percent; the groom's parents spend 12 percent; the remaining 2 percent of the budget is paid for by family members or friends. That frees up Dad for other roles in wedding planning. With some creativity, couples can find ways to incorporate the father of the bride into the festivities in even more productive ways.

Wedding sites: Assign dear old dad the important task of looking at potential wedding reception sites prior to visiting them

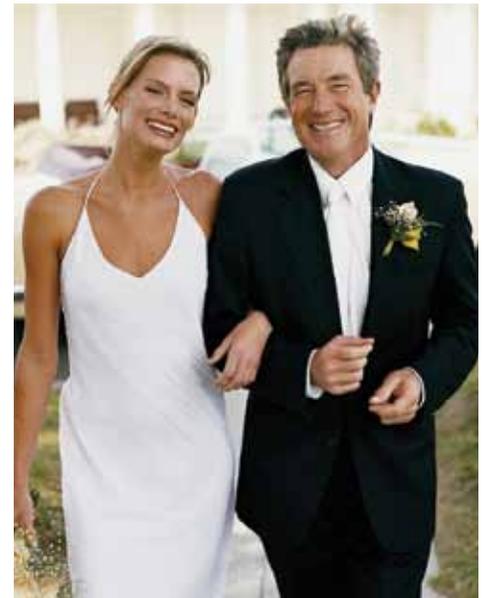
yourself. He may have certain connections through work or attended business or leisure occasions at catering halls and other venues. Dad's connections can pay off. Let him impart his negotiating skills and find the best deals with the ideal backdrop for the festivities.

Wardrobe: Let your father assist the best man and other groomsmen in securing their tuxedos or other wardrobe essentials. Dad also can step in and return rented items following the wedding.

Beverages: Dad may be fitting to keep tabs on what is occurring at the bar during the reception, ensuring that guests' needs are being met. He also can keep an eagle eye trained on anyone who may have overindulged and needs to take a break.

Speech: Give your father an opportunity to shine by letting him make a speech. Remember, this is a momentous day for Dad as well, as he may be trying to come to terms with his daughter starting a new life.

Father-daughter song: Let Dad pick father-



daughter song, and go with his choice even if you had something else in mind.

Ceremony: Even if you prefer a less traditional wedding ceremony, let your father walk you down the aisle. This will likely be a moment he'll remember for years to come.

Expand the father of the bride's role in the wedding by assigning him tasks where he can put his style, experience and excitement to good use.



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Jewelry care and cleaning guidelines

Bridal gowns and tuxedos may get their fair share of attention at weddings, but the subtle details of brides' and grooms' wedding attire also garner guests' attention.

Breathtaking jewelry worn by the bride, groom and members of the bridal party looks great on the day of the wedding and in photos couples will keep for decades to come. Naturally, engagement rings and bridal bands are the shining stars of the celebration. However, other pieces of jewelry also make for cherished accessories for weddings.

Bridal jewelry is an investment worth maintaining. According to a 2013 report by the Jewelers of America, couples spend an average of \$4,000 on engagement rings and more money on wedding bands. Considering several thousands of dollars may adorn the necks, fingers, ears, and wrists of bridal party members, individuals should learn how to keep their jewelry investments

looking pristine.

Remove jewelry during hard work

Exercise caution when wearing jewelry during strenuous activities or when jewelry can be damaged. Also, watch when handling slippery substances such as soaps and oils, as jewelry may fall off and become lost. Instead, remove precious jewelry and store it in a safe location, such as in a jewelry chest or a drawer.

Exercise caution with beauty products

Apply lotion, cosmetics, perfume, cologne, and hairspray before putting on jewelry. These substances can discolor certain metals or even damage stones. Prolonged contact with perspiration and bodily oils also can cause discoloration over time. Gently wipe down jewelry with a soft cloth after wearing it to remove oils and sweat.

Be careful around swimming pools, spas and

the ocean

Couples should remove jewelry before partaking in water-based activities on their honeymoons. According to jewelry retailer Zales, chlorinated water can react with the metals found in jewelry, causing color changes and even structural changes. Don't risk jewelry falling off in the ocean. Store it in a secure location before diving in.

Beware the sun, too

The Gemological Institute of America, Inc. states that sunlight can affect the durability and color of colored gemstones. Over time and in excess, the sun and heat can fade or damage some stones, such as amethyst, topaz and pearls. Other stones can darken with exposure to the sun.

Clean jewelry with care

Rely on mild detergents and a light touch when cleaning jewelry. Use products specifically designed for jewelry care, and read labels to ensure safety. The International

Gemological Institute says seriously soiled jewelry should be professionally cleaned.

Inspect and know your jewelry

Routinely inspect jewelry to test for any structural issues that can result in breakage or lost stones. Make sure any suspected problems are repaired promptly.

Ensure jewelry will last for years to come. Exercise caution when wearing pieces and clean and care for them properly.





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How guests can cut costs and still attend loved ones' weddings

Couples and/or their families can expect to spend tens of thousands of dollars on their weddings before saying "I do," making weddings one of the largest expenses for a couple apart from buying a house or new car.

But brides- and grooms-to-be are not the only ones who may have to invest quite a great deal on wedding days. Guests, including bridal party members, may also be responsible to pay a substantial sum. According to the 2016 American Express Spending & Saving Tracker, Americans expected to spend an average of \$703 per each wedding they attended in 2016.

Few people are willing to miss the wedding of a beloved family member or friend, even when the costs of attending the wedding can be high. Fortunately, there are ways for wedding invitees to attend the festivities without breaking the bank.

Shop around for lodging. Many couples arrange for discounted hotel rooms for their out-of-town wedding guests. But guests might be able to save even more by shopping around for their own discounted rates at hotels and other lodging accommodations. Websites like Orbitz and Hotels.com can compare rates at all the hotels in a given city, letting wedding guests explore all of their alternatives in a single search. Guests who are especially patient can use the Hotel Tonight app, which allows users to book heavily discounted rooms no more than seven days in advance of their expected occupancy. Guest also can try finding affordable lodging on the popular homestay network Airbnb.

Book travel early. Many travelers insist the best flight deals can be found as late as six weeks before the desired departure



date. But there's no guarantee that waiting that long to book flights will benefit wedding guests. If the patient approach does not pan out, guests might be forced to choose between costly flights or not attending the wedding. Budget-conscious travelers may find it less stressful to book flights as early as possible. Doing so allows guests to find flights at the times they most prefer to fly, and it also makes it possible to spread the cost of attending a wedding out over a longer period of time.

Say no to joining the bridal party. While it's an honor when brides or grooms ask certain friends or family members to be in their bridal parties, guests should not feel compelled to accept that invitation if they cannot afford it. If money is tight, explain the situation to the bride and

groom, who might even offer to help cover some of the costs of the wedding. Even if couples cannot afford that gesture, they will understand if friends or family members cannot cover the additional costs associated with being in a bridal party.

Split expenses. Another way for guests to save money is to split certain expenses with fellow guests. Single guests can share hotel rooms with fellow guests attending solo, and even couples can join up with other couples and split the cost of double rooms. Sharing expenses such as rental cars and trips to and from the airport is another way for guests to coordinate their efforts to save money.

The costs of attending a wedding are growing. But savvy guests can save money in various ways.



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Wedding transportation tips

Weddings are momentous events for the couple tying the knot as well as all of the friends and family invited to share in the big day.

Before couples can tie the knot and cut a rug at their receptions, everyone, couple and guests included, must arrive at the location (or locations if the ceremony site differs from the reception area). Though arranging wedding day transportation can be difficult, there are ways to make the process go more smoothly for guests and bridal party members.

Determine your needs

Before a transportation plan can be made, couples must first map out their needs. Everything should be built around the ceremony. Once the ceremony time has been set, the rest of the day can be arranged around that time.

Determine how much time is needed to travel from the ceremony to the reception area. Allocate enough time before the cocktail hour to allow for traffic, photos and any other needs that may take up time. Couples do not want anyone, included themselves, to feel rushed.

Once the timing has been orchestrated, couples can figure out exactly which types of transportation will be required.

Book personal transportation first

Happy couples must make their own transportation their top priority. Arrange for the couples' transportation between five and seven months in advance of the wedding. It could be preferable to book it even further in advance if a couple is getting married around a holiday or during prom season when limousines and party buses are in high demand. Remember, unless the bride-to-be plans to be seen by her groom, couples will need separate transportation to the ceremony site. Factor multiple vehicles into the wedding transportation budget.

Explore your personality

Brides and grooms have many transportation options at their disposal. If a limousine doesn't add the spark of creativity they desire, they can opt for a VW bus or a retro roadster. Outdoor enthusiasts might want to ride off on horseback, while easy riders might prefer to rev up the engine on a Harley-Davidson. Couples should never feel penned in by tradition, especially when something else makes them feel remarkable and the budget allows for it.

Have your getaway car ready

Couples generally opt to arrive to the wedding and reception in style, but take their own vehicles or cabs home afterward. This



requires some advanced planning. Enlist the help of friends to park the return-trip car in a convenient location. Check with the catering hall to see if a vehicle can be left in their lot overnight. Otherwise, arrange to grab a ride home with friends or family.

Consider others' needs

Have the names and phone numbers of taxi or ridesharing services available for those who may not be able to drive after the party. Elderly or disabled guests might appreciate prearranged transportation as well. Although couples can arrange for transportation as a courtesy to others, they don't need to make arrangements for everyone.

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Tips for trimming the wedding guest list

Weddings are a time to celebrate, and many couples hope to invite as many people as possible to share their excitement. A 2014 study by researchers at the University of Denver found that couples who invite at least 150 guests to the wedding may have happier marriages. The study examined 418 people who were single at the beginning of the study and married five years later. It found that 47 percent of those people who had gotten married in front of at least 150 guests had "high-quality marriages," while those with 50 or fewer guests fell short.

While guests make weddings more enjoyable, and may increase the propensity to enjoy a more successful marriage, couples must be practical and consider their wedding budgets when creating their guest lists. The average American wedding includes 120 guests, according to a 2015 Newlywed Survey released by WeddingWire. Couples who are finding it difficult to create and pare down their guest lists can employ the following tips.

Create initial lists. When jotting down potential guests' names, write down everyone you want to invite, regardless of budget. Then list the must-have guests for the wedding. This should include the family and friends with whom you interact on a regular basis. Create



a separate column for guests who don't make the must-have list.

Separate friends from friends' friends.

If you don't see people outside of events set up by mutual friends, you should not feel obligated to invite those people to the wedding. They are more likely friends of your friends and not your close friends.

Know the guest list ceiling. Catering halls or reception rooms often can only accommodate a certain number of people. Know this number before making a final list. The limits of the space may serve as the catalyst for trimming the guest list.

Consider coworkers carefully. Think about whether you'd still be friends with your coworkers if the company dissolved tomorrow. If not, you should not feel obligated to invite them.

Have we met? If you don't remember interacting with a person (your parent's long lost friend from high school) or the person has never met your significant other, then they probably can be cut. If parents insist on inviting someone you barely remember, they should help defray the costs.

Cut out the kids. Even though children's dinner costs may be lower than adults', inviting children can significantly increase the guest list. A no-child policy at the reception can save money.

Avoid uncomfortable situations. Unless you have remained particularly close, keep former boyfriends and girlfriends off of the guest list.

Ask for an unbiased opinion. Give the editing pen to someone else if you cannot make a decision. This person may help weed out extraneous guests.

Paring down a wedding guest list can be a difficult process, but couples should work together and respect each other's concerns when creating their final list.

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'I do,' take two: Guide to a second marriage

Couples are returning to the altar in increasing numbers, as second and third weddings are becoming ever more popular. Pew Research Center indicates that, as of 2014, 64 percent of divorced or widowed men have remarried, compared with 52 percent of previously married women.

Lavish second weddings were once uncommon, but that trend is also shifting. Couples who are taking another crack at marriage are tying the knot with renewed vigor and with weddings that may rival some first-timers'.

Men and women who are remarrying after divorce or being widowed may not know how to approach planning their upcoming nuptials. The following are some guidelines to making the wedding sequel a success.

Wardrobe

Couples who have been married before often find that they have more leeway with regard to their wedding wardrobes than they did when tying the knot for the first time. Brides may choose something less traditional than a long, white dress. In fact, this can be a time to let loose and select something that is festive or even funky. This also may provide a great opportunity to choose clothing styles from different cultures or ties into one's heritage.

This freedom also allows brides to broaden their horizons with regard to where to buy their wedding wardrobes.

Grooms may opt for something more casual than a tuxedo or coordinate with their brides-to-be so they are on the same creative page. Colored tuxedos and vintage suits are acceptable, even though such attire might have raised a few eyebrows the first time around.

Guest list

The guest list doesn't have to be a source of anxiety. Others will understand that there may be a melange of people at a second wedding. Children from previous marriages as well as divorced spouses or former parents-in-law are not out of the question. Even if exes will not be included, make sure they know about the nuptials in advance of others. It's common courtesy, and it can help head off feelings of ill-will.

Some couples choosing to tie the knot again scale back the size of the wedding this time around, feeling something smaller and more intimate — with only the closest of friends and family — is more suitable.

Registries and wedding gifts

Considering couples who have been married previously likely have many of the housewares



and items for daily living that first-timers may not, registering for these gifts is not necessary. What's more, some of the same guests may have been present at first marriages and gifted then. In lieu of gifts, couples may ask guests to donate to a specific charity or forgo gifts altogether.

Vows

Couples can use experience to draft vows that have personal meaning to their unique situations and make the wedding ceremony even more special.

People getting married again can impart their own personalities into the ceremony and party to follow. There are no hard rules governing second weddings, so couples can plan their weddings with good times in mind.

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7 ways to recycle a wedding gown



When planning their weddings, many brides-to-be devote a large portion of their wedding budgets to their wardrobes. Statistics released by The Knot in 2014 indicated the amount the average woman was willing to spend her gown was \$1,281.

Wedding gowns are among the most costly wedding expenditures. Because wedding gowns can be so expensive, many brides elect to have their gowns cleaned and preserved. Reusing a wedding

gown is a cost-effective and earth-friendly idea. Women have many options when it comes time to putting their wedding gowns to use after they have tied the knot. The following are just some of the great ideas couples can explore.

1. Save it for younger generations. One of the primary reasons to preserve a wedding gown is to save the dress for a daughter, granddaughter

or another relative to wear at her own wedding.

2. Transform it into other attire. There are a number of different occasions when wearing white is acceptable. Religious ceremonies such as baptisms and communions qualify, and a wedding gown in the hands of an experienced seamstress or tailor can be transformed into a baby's Christening ensemble or a beautiful dress for a youngster about to receive First Holy Communion.

3. Donate the gown. Brides in need may not have the funds to purchase their own beautiful gowns. Work with an organization that will provide dresses to the less fortunate. Or donate it to an organization that can sell the gown to fund projects for others in need. Another option is the Mary Madeline Project, which uses wedding dress fabrics to create burial outfits for stillborn infants.

4. Cut it up into usable fabric. Wedding gown fabrics can be used in various applications.

Dresses can be transformed into decorative pillows or other wedding mementos. Stretch the fabric across a frame and use it as a blank canvas for a photo keepsake. The fabric also can work for baby cribs and infant basket skirting.

5. Use it as a Halloween costume. Dress as a bride for Halloween. Otherwise, tailor the dress to fit a child and she can use it for any number of dress-up opportunities.

6. Donate it to a costume archive. Theatrical companies may be able to use the fabric to create costumes for their productions.

7. Create a keepsake. Cut a small piece of the fabric and put it into a pendant or locket. A piece of tulle or lace also can be placed inside a clear Christmas ornament and hung on the tree for years to come.

Wedding gowns can be upcycled into many new and innovative items. Doing so eliminates long storage times and can benefit others.



Wedding gowns can be donated or transformed into other uses.



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Make every anniversary count

Wedding anniversaries provide opportunities for couples to reflect and relive the excitement of their wedding days. Anniversaries can easily be forgotten amid the hustle and bustle of daily life, but many couples are making concerted efforts to ensure their anniversaries are celebrated as the special occasions they are.

A first wedding anniversary is a special one. Some couples celebrate their first anniversaries by enjoying a piece of wedding cake that has been properly preserved in the freezer. Couples may also dance to their wedding songs or enjoy a nice dinner at a favorite restaurant. The first anniversary also is a time to pull out the wedding video or photo album and reminisce about the wedding day.

Anniversaries are a great way for couples to celebrate their time together by stepping away from emails, text messages, work obligations, and even mundane everyday tasks to once again remember a day and moment that changed their lives forever. Those who may need a little

inspiration celebrating their anniversaries can consider these suggestions.

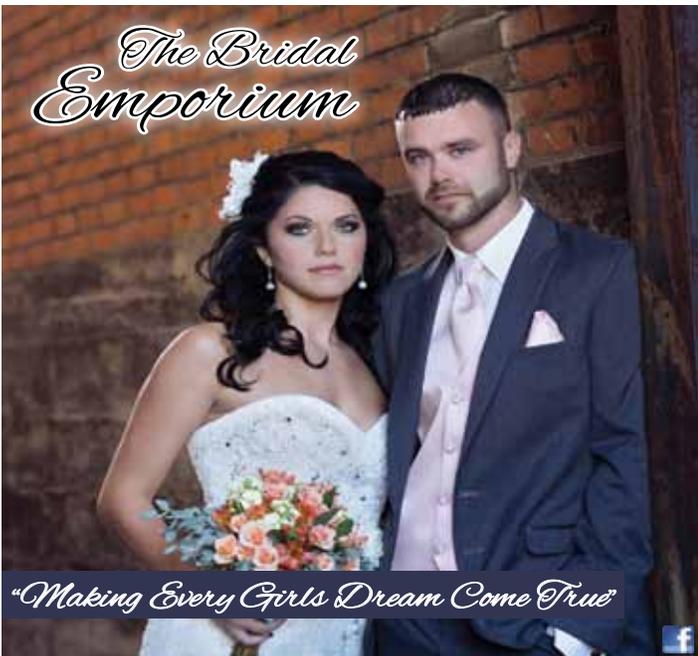
Have dinner at your reception site. Find out if the reception site, which may be a catering hall or restaurant, serves dinner or brunch. Make a reservation and enjoy celebrating in the spot where the memories all began.

Take a second honeymoon. Honor wedding memories by booking a second honeymoon at a special location.

Throw a party. Use your anniversary as an excuse to have friends or family over for a party. Be sure to include your wedding song on the music playlist.

Create a romantic evening. Rekindle the romance by pulling out all the stops, complete with a nice homecooked meal, candles and mood music.

Wedding anniversaries present ideal opportunities for couples to reminisce about their trip down the aisle and all the entertaining moments from the wedding. They're also opportunities to connect as a couple and focus on each other.



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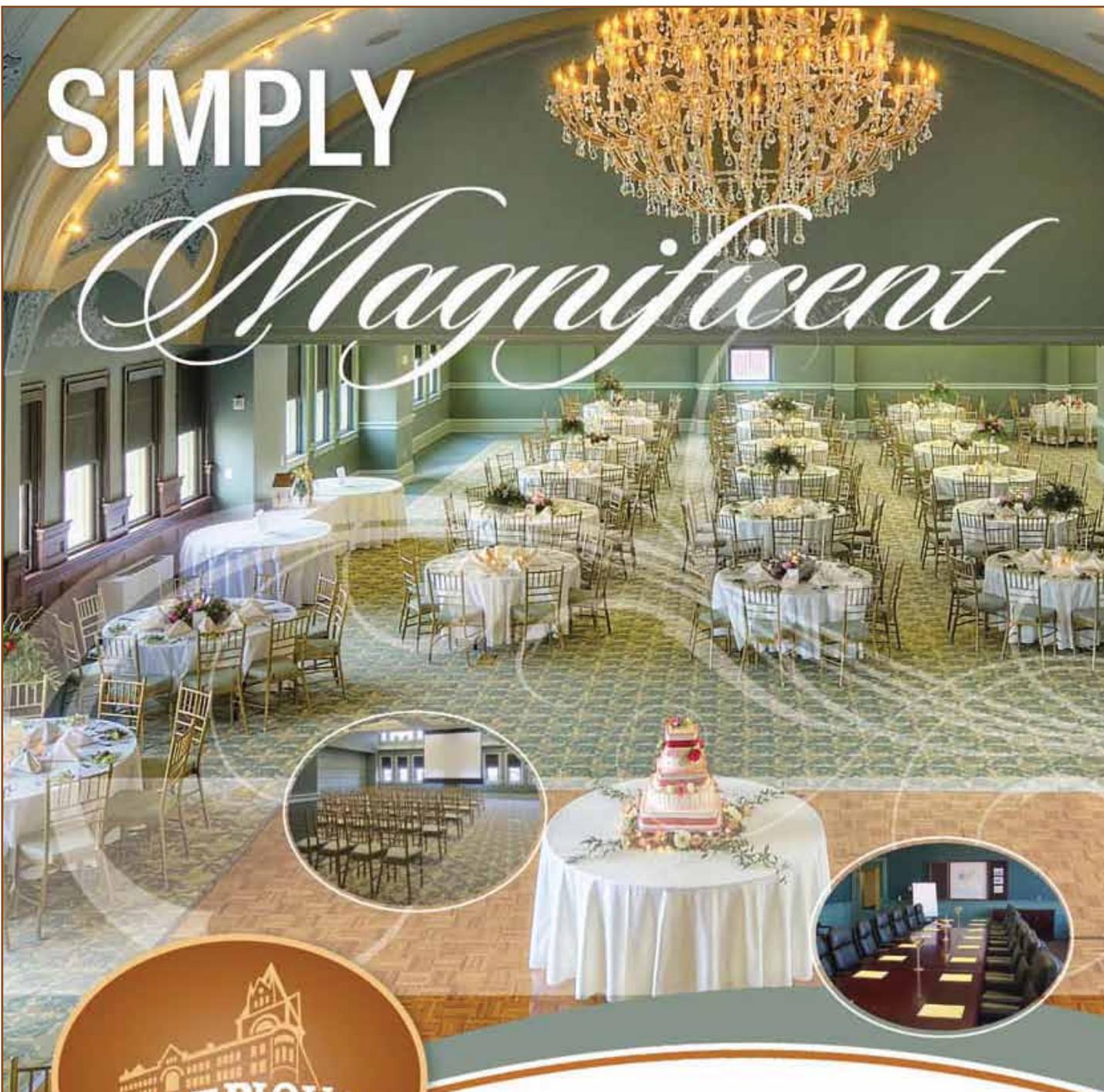
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