

# The Best Wedding Advice Ever

The world's top wedding pros share their 100 best-kept secrets for every detail of your day

CALLIGRAPHY BY FLEUR DE LETTERS EDITED BY KRISTIN KOCH

① Before you start perusing magazines and blogs for inspiration and the latest trends, start by thinking about who you are—what you like to eat and wear and your favorite fashion designers, interior decorators, artists and authors. **VANESSA VAN WIEREN**, *Alchemy Fine Events & Invitations, San Diego, CA*

② To look your best in your pictures, every bride needs plenty of sleep before the wedding (to prevent dark circles and puffy eyes), a good makeup artist, oil blotting papers and a glass of champagne to help her relax. **COURTNEY DE JAUREGUI**, *Erin Hearts Court, Pasadena, CA*

③ Your baker should work hand-in-hand with your wedding planner, invitation designer and florist in order to tie in your cake design with all of your other wedding details for a cohesive look. **MELODY BRANDON**, *Sweet and Saucy Shop, Long Beach, CA*



④ Make lighting a top priority—it can transform even the most mundane room into a stunning, romantic space. **LISA VORCE**, *Lisa Vorce Event Design & Production, Los Angeles*

FROM TOP: MARISA HOLMES PHOTOGRAPHER; AARON DELESE



⑤ Writing your own vows is the ultimate romantic gesture. Those words are so special and thought out. Candles and lighting also create a romantic mood. **BROOKE KEEGAN**, *Brooke Keegan Weddings and Events, Newport Beach, CA*

⑥ Taking too many things on yourself can be overwhelming. It's not easy getting everything right—that's why you hire experts! We've never heard a bride complain about paying for professional help. **JILLIAN CLARK**, *100LayerCake.com*

⑦ Surveys show that not getting a video is one of the most common postwedding regrets. Whether it's an elaborate professional production or something made by a friend, there's a fit for you. **JON GANGWER**, *Well Spun Weddings, Philadelphia*

⑧ Work with local and seasonal flowers for gorgeous, affordable arrangements. If you're set on certain varieties, make sure they'll be in season before setting a date. **DAVID BEAHM**, *David Beahm Design, New York City*

⑨ To trim your budget and still treat guests: Pick seasonal foods; avoid long pauses between courses to minimize labor costs; and offer wine, beer and a specialty cocktail instead of a full bar. **PAULINE PARRY**, *Good Gracious! Events, Los Angeles*

⑩ First, decide the type of wedding you want (country, beach, vintage) and the rest will fall into place. Remember, only your opinion matters—it's your day. **OSCAR DE LA RENTA**, *Oscar de La Renta Ltd., New York City*

⑪ Entertainment is likely what your guests will remember the most. Invest in an experienced pro with vast musical knowledge, expertise mixing genres and the ability to read a crowd. **ROB PRINCIPE**, *Scratch Music Group, New York City* >>

12 To boost style without boosting your budget, break away from the customary 72-inch round tables and traditional seating arrangements. Maximize space and give your reception a fresh look with banquet-style seating or communal high tables and tall barstools. **ELLE CAN**, Taylor Creative Inc., New York City

13 Limit the guest list to people you know. Weddings are intimate, and the memories will be sweeter when you look around the room and know everyone there. **XOCHITL GONZALEZ**, AaB Creates, New York City

14 If you're planning to get married outside of the United States, check if your marriage abroad will be legally recognized back home and verify the documentation necessary to make it legal. Also, don't plan too many activities for guests while they're in town. There's a reason you picked your destination—give your family and friends enough free-time to enjoy it. **MICHELLE RAGO**, Michelle Rago Destinations, New York City



16 When planning food displays, especially dessert stations, approach them as an extension of the wedding's overall theme and of your story. **GLORIA WONG TRITASAVIT**, Gloria Wong Design, San Francisco

17 Have a face-to-face meeting before hiring a photographer and do an engagement shoot. You want a pro you feel comfortable with—they're with you for so much of the day. **HEATHER WARAKSA**, Heather Waraksa Photography, Brooklyn, NY

18 Talk to your cake baker about any traditions, personal details or elements from the wedding (dress, venue, ring) you want represented, as well as your favorite flavors, colors and flowers. It's these details that will make your wedding cake that much more personal and special. **BUDDY VALASTRO**, Carlo's Bakery, Hoboken, NJ

19 Put guests in a flattering light—softer lighting complements everyone's skin tones. Then use colored light to highlight the venue's architecture and give your space a beautiful look. **BENTLEY MEEKER**, Bentley Meeker Lighting & Staging, New York City

20 Do choose a vendor because you love their work, and their style and personality mesh with yours. Don't choose a vendor solely based on price and then ask them to emulate someone else's work. **AMY SQUIRES**, WeddingChicks.com

21 Get your hair and makeup professionally done—it will make you feel confident, and that confidence will radiate! But remember: Less is more—the idea is to keep the focus on you. **CAROLINE TRAN**, Caroline Tran Photography, Los Angeles

22 Branding your wedding—starting with a custom monogram on your invitations—is the perfect way to set the tone for your event. Handwritten calligraphy adds an elegant sophistication to any suite. And don't forget proper etiquette when wording and addressing your invitations! **JULIA SHUMAN**, Lettered Olive, Charleston, SC

FROM TOP: LISA LEFKOWITZ; HAZELNUT PHOTOGRAPHY

23 A good way to find a photographer is through a friend or your planner. If a photographer is trying to sell you too hard, it's a bad sign. **AARON DELESIE**, Aaron Delesie Photographer, New York City



FROM TOP: AARON DELESIE; LIZ BANFIELD

27 Choose a calligraphy style that fits the mood of your event. And don't just stick any old stamp on an envelope addressed with beautiful calligraphy—get pretty ones! **BRYN CHERNOFF**, Paperfinger, Brooklyn, NY

28 Add little twists to your menu, so the standard fare becomes: "OMG—look at that!" For example, you could serve mini caviar rings with mini glasses of champagne during dessert. **PETER CALLAHAN**, Peter Callahan Catering, New York City

29 Though it's good to have an idea of what you do and don't want before you go shopping, keep an open mind. Oftentimes, a bride will fall in love with a style that is very different from what she initially thought she wanted. And bring the right undergarments—Spanx and a low-cut strapless bra—in order to see how different dresses will really look. **TERRY HALL**, Kleinfeld Bridal, New York City

31 A second shooter doubles your chances of getting fantastic shots, allows you to capture more moments (like the cocktail hour while the couple is taking photos) and creates less distraction during poignant moments like the ceremony (so one person isn't running around trying to cover all the angles). **BRIAN DORSEY**, Brian Dorsey Studios, New York City

32 At the very least, every wedding should have pinspotting to highlight big-investment items, like your centerpieces, while adding warmth and drama to your room and depth to your photos. Dance floor lighting is another must. Soft candlelight with a touch of amber works in any venue and gives everyone a post-vacation glow. Above all, lighting should be on dimmers. Without them, a room can look too dark or too bright, which can make your party seem stark, plain and even cheap. **IRA LEVY**, Levy Lighting NYC, New York City >>

30 Crazy, unexpected stuff always happens on the wedding day. The bride that can laugh it off will have happy memories and happy pictures. (Also, get a simple, classic manicure.) **LIZ BANFIELD**, Liz Banfield Photography, Minneapolis

24 It all comes down to experience—it's what enables a videographer to be in the right place at the right time and to capture moments as they happen naturally. **JULIE HILL**, Elysium Productions, Los Angeles

25 The best approach to creating your wedding look is to stay true to your individual style and personality. Monogramming the inside of your wedding dress or your veil adds a personal touch to your attire. **CAROLINA HERRERA**, Carolina Herrera, New York City

26 Use music as both entertainment and as a cue to move guests to the next portion of the evening. Mixing up music styles and genres throughout the night adds an element of surprise and keeps guests on their toes. **DAVID STARK**, David Stark Design and Production, Brooklyn, NY



15 Lighting, carpeting, draping and even decorating the existing chandeliers can transform any space to suit your style. **JEANNIE SAVAGE**, Details Details Wedding & Event Planning, Beverly Hills, CA

33 Hire a wedding planner or at least a day-of coordinator. You don't want to have to worry about anything on your wedding day! **AMANDA NISTOR**, *RuffledBlog.com*

34 The size of your cake should match the scale of your venue. If the reception is taking place in a grand ballroom, a tall cake will fit the space. For smaller gatherings, a modest three-tier structure can be impressive in its good taste. **RON BEN-ISRAEL**, *Ron Ben-Israel Cakes, New York City*

36 Your invitations let guests know what to expect at your wedding. They should reflect the location and the time of year of the event, as well as the couple. **ELLEN BLACK**, *Lehr & Black, Los Angeles*

37 Create a detailed day-of timeline for your ceremony and reception, but be sure to only give vendors the information that pertains to them to keep everyone focused and on track. **LYNN EASTON ANDREWS**, *Easton Events, Charlottesville, VA*

35 When a bride is having her portrait taken, she should be thinking about her life with her new husband. **JOSE VILLA**, *Jose Villa Photography, Solvang, CA*



38 Infuse your day with details that are meaningful to you—a creative playlist, a signature cocktail or a menu inspired by your favorite restaurant. **ABBY LARSON**, *StyleMePretty.com*

39 Think of your wedding as the most fabulous dinner party you've ever hosted. Focus on making the experience meaningful and personal for your family and friends. **MATTHEW ROBBINS**, *Matthew Robbins Design, New York City*

40 Song selection is a critical element of your wedding video, playing an enormous part in evoking emotions every time you watch it. **JOEL SERRATO**, *Joel Serrato Films, Santa Barbara, CA*

41 Rather than just the standard floral centerpieces, think of creating a tablescape when designing your reception tables. Use flowers, found objects and unique elements to tell a story. **BARB SALZMAN**, *Hatch Creative Studio, New York City*

42 Create a color hierarchy by choosing a main color. Then weave unexpected pops of color throughout your stationery. **CHEREE BERRY**, *Cheree Berry Paper, St. Louis*



43 For a cake with beautiful sugar flowers, you need a baker with delicate hands, an eye for detail and a love for flowers. **SYLVIA WEINSTOCK**, *Sylvia Weinstock Cakes, New York City*

44 When choosing a wedding dress, finding the right shape for your body is paramount. Consider which silhouettes tend to be the most flattering on you and what you do and don't want to highlight. And always buy for the body you have now! **AMSALE ABERRA**, *The Amsale Group, New York City*

45 Hire the right people—professionals familiar with the area, other local vendors and your venue. You'll never regret spending money on a great planner. Also, get everything in writing and allow extra time for installation, deliveries and set-up. **BRIAN WORLEY**, *YourBash! Event Productions, Santa Monica, CA*

46 Look for a photographer who gives just the right amount of direction—too much and people get stiff; too little and they worry that they should be doing something. **SARAH YATES**, *Birds of a Feather, Los Angeles*

47 The key to a fun wedding is timing. But there's no set formula—take into account your group's size and your other events. The only rule: Limit your cocktail hour to no more than 60 minutes. **MARCY BLUM**, *Marcy Blum Associates, New York City*

48 The shape of your wedding cake can have a big impact on the overall look. For example, square tiers can make almost any design look modern. **MARK RANDAZZO**, *Mark Joseph Cakes, New York City*

49 Pinterest is great for inspiration, but don't let it overwhelm you. Incorporate ideas you're currently loving, but avoid anything too trendy. **JEN CAMPBELL**, *GreenWeddingShoes.com*

50 Your wedding is not the time to reinvent who you are. Pick a gown that fits your personal style—your groom should recognize you when you come down the aisle! Also, be aware of your venue and the overall formality of your wedding. **MARK INGRAM**, *Mark Ingram Atelier, New York City*

51 Tenting is not just about providing cover from the sun or rain. Your tent should connect with and frame your surroundings while helping to further your wedding theme. **DOMINIC MITCHELL**, *Raj Tents, Los Angeles*

52 Keep your sense of humor, an open mind and your feet on the ground. **MINDY WEISS**, *Mindy Weiss Party Consultants, Beverly Hills, CA*

53 Design your reception menu with your wedding style and season in mind. No one wants a hot, heavy soup in August, but in the middle of winter, a warm dish will hit the spot. And while a five-course plated dinner may feel stuffy at a casual beach reception, it will feel perfectly appropriate in a formal ballroom setting. **MICHAEL STUART STEIFMAN**, *Michael Stuart NY, New York City* >>

54 Leave “room to breathe” in your space. Event design can be beautiful, but if you’re not careful, it can be overwhelming. It’s all about editing and balancing. **TODD FISCUS**, *Todd Events, Dallas*

55 How you display your wedding cake makes a big difference. Spotlighting the confection from above always looks good, and the proper tablecloth can do wonders. The cake table should coordinate with the rest of the décor. **CHERYL KLEINMAN**, *Cheryl Kleinman Cakes, Brooklyn, NY*

56 For the best shot, you need the best lighting. Clothing is also key—don’t be too matchy-matchy! **ALLAN ZEPEDA**, *Allan Zepeda Photography, New York City*

57 Let the location inform your wedding style to keep the overall look cohesive and natural. Use locally sourced décor to give your wedding a unique touch and to help highlight your surroundings. **LYNDESEY HAMILTON**, *Lyndsey Hamilton Events, New York City & San Francisco*

58 Letterpress and engraving are worth the expense, adding elegance and dimension. Combine printing methods like letterpress and foil stamping to highlight specific elements, like your names, and to create depth. **LAURA LEIGH**, *Alpine Creative Group, New York City*

59 Pick a veil that either frames your dress or your face, and make sure it’s the correct color for your gown. **SARA GABRIEL**, *Sara Gabriel Veiling & Headpieces, Denver*

60 Everyone loves a photo booth! It’s a great way to get amazing photos of all your guests—plus, it makes a fun favor. Be sure to look for the same high-quality equipment that your photographer uses. **WHITNEY CHAMBERLIN**, *Smilebooth, Los Angeles*

61 Outside factors like family dynamics and emotional attachments can influence your decisions, so it’s helpful to have a neutral opinion when determining the critical elements of your day. **ALISON HOTCHKISS**, *Alison Events, San Francisco*



62 The invitation design often translates into other visual aspects of the wedding, including flowers, linens and fashion, so think of it as creating a brand for your event. **CECI JOHNSON**, *Ceci New York, New York City*

63 The best favor is an edible one. Personalize it by picking a treat that’s special to you in some way—a mini bundt cake from your favorite childhood bakery, or caramels from the candy store you went to on your first date. Don’t forget to include a note to help guests know the meaning behind it. **SARAH MILLER**, *Caplan Miller Events, Austin, TX*

64 In addition to the pretty wedding shoes you plan to have photographed, pack two backup pairs—worn-in platforms that give you height but are easy to walk in (for outdoor photos and visiting guest tables during dinner) and flats for dancing. Also, a veil—when else are you going to get to wear one? **ANNIE LEE**, *Daughter of Design, New York City & Los Angeles*

**65** For lush centerpieces, use a combination of hydrangeas, roses, peonies, dahlias and phalaenopsis orchids. It's important that the blooms of the flowers are fully developed. **KAREN TRAN**, *Karen Tran Florals, San Diego*



**70** For elegant-yet-natural arrangements, start with a more wild style and blend colors, moving from one variety to the next.

**LIZA LUBELL**, *Peartree Flowers, Brooklyn, NY*

**71** Spend time getting a great full-body shot of the two of you. It's an iconic image you'll cherish the most. **JONATHAN CANLAS**, *Jonathan Canlas Photography, Hauula, HI*

**72** Clean lines and balanced proportions define an elegant cake, and nothing gives a cake presence like a beautiful pedestal stand. **MAGGIE AUSTIN**, *Maggie Austin Cake, Washington, DC*

**73** Scout locations with your photographer beforehand. This will make photo sessions go faster and prevent everyone from losing energy. **CHRISTIAN OTH**, *Christian Oth Studio, New York City*

**66** Play a broad range of music to keep all your guests, from the youngest to the oldest, dancing all night. Motown, R&B and dance music appeal to the widest age demographic. **MELISSA RODNON**, *Élan Artists, New York City*

**67** Mixing styles (modern, glam, classic, vintage) rather than just picking one creates a more authentic and interesting look. **JUNG LEE**, *Fête, New York City*

**68** To find bridesmaid dresses that fit your wedding vision *and* each girl's body type, select a designer, color and fabric that you love and then allow your bridesmaids to select a style that best fits their figure. **ILANA STERN**, *Weddington Way, San Francisco*

**69** Balance classic elements like calligraphy and monograms with bolder typefaces and playful illustrations. **JESSIE CAMDEN PICKREN**, *Mr. Boddington's Studio, New York City*

**74** Hiring a photographer and videographer from the same company (or ones that have worked together before) can take your wedding video to the next level, allowing you to better capture the intimate moments of your special day. **LUKE WALKER**, *Clark + Walker Studio, Guilderland, NY*

**75** Shop together for your wedding rings—it will give your bands a more personal touch. **SCOTT KAY**, *Scott Kay, Teaneck, NJ* >>

76 Start with what you did and didn't like about the music at your friends' weddings. Then, zero in on the music style you want before choosing a band or DJ. **MICHAEL TAYLOR**, *Star Talent Inc., New York City*

77 Calligraphy isn't just for stationery—it lends a special feel to any detail, from escort card displays and signage to stir sticks or food picks (with your initials or wedding catchphrase). **LAURA HOOPER**, *Laura Hooper Calligraphy, Los Angeles & Washington, DC*

78 Share an element of your story to add a fun, humorous touch to your day. **JESI HAACK**, *Jesi Haack Design, Los Angeles*

79 When taking photos, communicate with each other with your eyes to create natural, sweet, happy expressions (without being mid-conversation). **JEN HUANG**, *Jen Huang Photography, New York City & Santa Barbara, CA*

80 Let a design with a sentimental connection—the lace of your grandmother's wedding dress, the waves at the seaside where you spent your childhood—inspire your color palette and lend visual *and* emotional depth to your wedding décor. **BRYAN RAFANELLI**, *Rafanelli Events, New York City*

81 Custom menus and thank-you cards are worthwhile splurges that will get noticed. **ERIKA FIRM**, *Delphine, Charleston, SC*

82 Think about each of your guests' senses—what you want them to smell, taste, feel, hear and see during each part of your wedding. **MARINA BIRCH**, *Birch Design Studio, Chicago*

83 Don't be afraid to wander off property during your portrait session. For great environmental shots, take advantage of local spots with lots of character. **MEL BARLOW**, *Mel Barlow & Co., Brooklyn, NY*

84 If everything on your reception tables is the same height, it falls flat. Small, varied arrangements of flowers and candles of varying heights add depth and create a more interesting look. **SHARON SACKS**, *Sacks Productions, Calabasas, CA*

85 Sometimes, simplicity is glamour. **REEM ACRA**, *Reem Acra, New York City*

86 Consider hiring a film photographer (or someone who shoots both digital and film)—film has a timeless elegance. Regardless of which medium your photographer uses, be sure to ask them to include some black-and-white photos in their edit. **KAREN WISE**, *Karen Wise Photography, New York City & Los Angeles*

88 Stick to just a few design elements to repeat throughout the décor—this ensures they get noticed. Do a test drive to see how your centerpieces, linens, china and other details look together. **LINDSAY LANDMAN**, *Lindsay Landman Events, New York City*

89 For special printing techniques like laser cutting, work with an experienced invitation designer who understands the medium. **MARGOT HALLAC**, *Atelier Isabey, New York City* >>

87 A bride's look should be elegant, tasteful and luxurious with a touch of sexiness. Defining the waist helps enhance the figure and accentuate the female shape. **MONIQUE LHUILLIER**, *Monique Lhuillier, Los Angeles*



90 When you're having your picture taken, you shouldn't feel like you're on a fashion shoot. Take in the moment. Showing natural emotion rather than posing is the best way to seal the memory. **SAMUEL LIPPKE**, *Samuel Lippke Studios, Los Angeles*

91 Flowers with cultural significance are a great way to incorporate your heritage into the décor. **JESSY WOLVEK**, *Fleurs, New York City*

92 If you're on a budget, pare your stationery suite down to the basics and invest in the design and printing process. These details will make a bigger impact than including a pocket folder or direction card. **STACEY MUI & MARINA MARCHISI**, *East Six Invitations, New York City & Los Angeles*

93 Take first look photos! There's no right way to take them—you can include your family and bridal party, or keep it to just the two of you. **JASMINE STAR**, *Jasmine Star Photography, Orange County, CA*

94 Include items in your welcome bags that your guests can enjoy during your wedding weekend, such as snacks, bottles of water, a map of the area and a custom welcome letter and itinerary. Stay away from favors (and containers) that will take up room in their suitcases. **KATE PARKER**, *Kate Parker Designs, Dover, NH*

95 Plan enough time for photos, so you can enjoy being together without feeling rushed. **IRA LIPPKE**, *Ira Lippke Studios, Brooklyn, NY*

96 Use personal items like your grandma's china or your favorite coffee table books to add a fun layer of personality to your reception décor. **NIKI DELACUEVA**, *R. Jack Balthazar, Pasadena, CA*

97 Often, guests are too busy dancing to eat the wedding cake. Instead of throwing it out, hand out to-go containers so guests can take a slice with them as your favor. That way, as the old Southern saying goes, single girls can sleep with a slice of cake under their pillows to dream about the man they'll marry. **TARA GUÉRARD**, *Soirée, Charleston, SC*



98 Before you order anything, schedule a site check with the tent company to determine what size structure will fit the location and to discuss any leveling issues. Also, have an idea of what you plan to put inside. Everything from the number of bars and buffets, the size of the dance floor and stage, and the table shapes and sizes to the room layout can affect the size of the tent needed. **JEN SPERRY**, *Sperry Tents, Wareham, MA*

99 It's normal to feel nervous when having your photo taken. To help you both relax, ease into it. Start by having your photographer shoot the two of you holding hands and walking away from the camera. The more you interact with each other, the more natural you will feel and look. **ELIZABETH MESSINA**, *Elizabeth Messina Photography, Los Angeles*

100 Make your guests' comfort the number one priority—serve delicious food and play awesome music to get everyone on the dance floor and keep them there! **DAVID TUTERA**, *DT Studios, New York City*

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