

a la mode



Maggie Yelensky, left, and Nancy Halferty of the Sue Gordon Bridal Salon pose in gowns designed by Priscilla of Boston during a recent visit by Priscilla Kidder, the firm's founder. (Staff photos)

Priscilla comes to town to talk about her brides

By DONNA OLENDORF

After 35 years experience as a designer of wedding apparel, Priscilla Kidder believes she knows what brides want. And it's not some far out costume or a simple duty dress.

"Most girls shopping for their wedding are looking for a traditional long dress that suits their figure," said Mrs. Kidder, founder of Priscilla of Boston, during her visit to Sue Gordon's bridal salon in Birmingham.

"Young women may write their own ceremonies and sing modern ballads, but when it comes to their outfits, they usually go out looking like brides."

That's just the way it should be, according to Mrs. Kidder, whose reputation as one of the country's foremost bridal designers is based on her classic approach to bridal wear.

"There will always be a few bohemians who prefer unorthodox gowns," she said, "but the sentimentalism that kids were through for a while is fading."

"I wouldn't let them influence my designing. If I did, I wouldn't be in business today."

PRISCILLA KIDDER, whose visit was a promotional kick off for her latest Priscilla Collection, has designed three lines for brides to choose from.

The Treely line was created for women five feet three inches and under, who want the same selection of styles that tall women have. The Priscilla line combines contemporary sophistication with classic styling, and the boutique line features lower priced dresses.

Each of these lines was created with a specific type of woman in mind," said Mrs. Kidder. "I've spent years getting to

know my customer so I can give her what she wants."

Her gowns, priced from \$225, are timelessly elegant dresses in white or ivory adorned with European lace. "It's so much prettier," and hand beading.

Much of the work is done by hand. "Nobody puts the quality into ready-to-wear that we put into our bridal gowns," she said.

INCLUDED IN HER latest collection is a coat dress with a sheer beaded coat that functions as a train. "Slip this on for us, dear," said Mrs. Kidder as she handed her creation to a nearby model.

"This is one of my favorite outfits. See the coat looks just like a train. Most people think it's part of the dress. Then, when the bride arrives at her reception, presto, the coat comes off and she can move about freely in a simple gown."

Although her styles remain classic, Mrs. Kidder acknowledges subtle changes in wedding attire from season to season.

For fall and winter, ivory is a popular color with brides. Attendees often dress in earth tones of brown or muted green. Then, around the holidays, bright reds are chosen to highlight the festive event. In the spring, the trend turns to pastel colors and softness.

MRS. KIDDER wouldn't dream of tampering with the classic white of a bridal gown, but she wishes that mothers of the bride would be a bit more daring.

"I can understand why mothers stick for floor-length gowns—it's the simplest way to move from an afternoon wedding to an evening reception. And it's hard to find an attractive short dress—but I wish they'd

venture away from pastel colors. I'd like to see mothers-of-the-bride in bright, vibrant colors. It would be lovely, especially at a morning ceremony."

When she's not on the road promoting her designs, Mrs. Kidder divides her time between her retail stores in Boston and overseeing the operation of her company.

Her work takes her many places, including Washington.

Mrs. Kidder has designed bridal gowns for three presidential weddings (Julie and Tricia Nixon and Lynda Byrd Johnson) and, most recently, she did the town for Elizabeth Dole, wife of the Republican vice-presidential nominee, Robert Dole.

ACCORDING TO Mrs. Kidder, politically active women are just like anybody else when it comes to getting married. "The girls are just as nice as any bride—and just as nervous about their weddings."

When Mrs. Kidder first started designing bridal wear, it was traditional for a gown to be handed down from mother to daughter. Not anymore. "Trends have changed," said Mrs. Kidder, "and girls today want their own gowns. It used to be that girls dressed like their mothers had. Today, the mothers dress to look like girls."

Gone, too, are the oversized bouquets that were cherished keepsakes to be carefully pressed after the ceremony. "Girls today haven't the time to press flowers," said Mrs. Kidder.

"Many brides prefer a mixed bouquet with half silk and half real flowers. Then they still have their moments without the fuss of preserving a real bouquet."



Nancy Halferty, bridal consultant at Sue Gordon's Salon, wears a bandeau with a short veil. The Renaissance headpiece is adorned with lace applique and rows of beading.



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