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A softer, silhouette

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Peplums are another point of interest — they're more prominent and architectural than they have been the last few seasons.

Waistlines are slightly higher, and in more fashion-forward gowns may even be Empire.

"The sheath is another gown shape that's enjoying a resurgence," adds McMunn.

And if skirts are full at the hip, they may be pegged at the ankle, creating a dome shape that looks fresh now.

ANOTHER STRONG trend this year is the use of color in bridal gowns. Blush pink and icy gray-blue show up in trims and overskirts, providing options to the classic ecru, ivory and white.

The traditional fabrics are still popular — silks, satins, taffetas — but they are joined by fluid fabrics such as chiffon and georgette and iridescent fibers that create a frosted look.

Bridesmaids, too, are more colorful and florid than before. This is the year of the cabbage rose. While the sil-

houette of bridesmaid dresses, like bridal gowns, is simpler, more ladylike, the fabrics burst into bloom with floral chintzes. Tulips and daisies also appear, as do polka dots.

Off-the-shoulder looks, ornamented with a simple ruffle at the neckline or a bow at the waist complete the English country feel.

As in ready-to-wear, the more classic single or dual-tone attendant dresses are brighter than last year. Pastels are punched up. Look for brighter colors, such as mint and lemon ice, orchid, coral, turquoise blue and jade green.

These brighter gowns may have mini-ruffles on the skirt that create a tiered effect or an insert of matching lace on the bodice or at the bustline to enhance the design.

WHILE THE FLORAL bridesmaids' gowns frequently are cotton or silk this year, the single-color dresses appear in classic taffeta and satin.

And what about the mother of the bride?

"They're in better shape and looking younger than ever," comments Tober. "We love to see them in chiffon dresses and beautiful, floating evening looks."

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