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By Joan Dorem  
special writer

**M**ANY of us have gone through life naively assuming that the bride is the feature attraction of the wedding. But to the 40 or so attendees at the two-hour seminar offered recently at the Detroit Historical Museum, "How to Store Your Wedding Gown," the bride's dress held center stage, and will command attention long after the bubbles have gone out of the champagne.

The prudent bride thinks about preserving her dress even as she shops for it.

"Ask the people at the bridal shop for recommendations as to how to store the dress you're considering," said instructor Vicki Kruckeberg, costume curator at the museum. "Most dresses don't have a 'care' label. A responsible shop will be able to advise you. Eavesdrop... listen to what they're saying to other brides about storing their selections. Don't be afraid to ask questions — it makes you look

like an intelligent consumer. If they seem to resent the questions, or are giving vague answers, find another shop."

Whatever you do, don't wrap the gown in its original plastic bag and put it in the attic. "The key to successful storage is to never subject the dress to any conditions that you would find uncomfortable. If it's too hot, too cold, too damp for your skin, it will be too hot, cold or damp for your dress. Select an area with minimum fluctuations in temperature and humidity, good air circulation and a minimum of light. This usually means an interior wall in the living area of your home."

One woman in the audience reported having a gown that's been under a bed for 70 years. She says it's still in excellent condition. Kruckeberg was impressed: "Re-package the dress, but don't try to dry clean it," she said.

SHOP AROUND for a dry cleaner and ask questions there, too, even if you have to get there at 7

a.m., before the shop opens.

"Find out how often they change solvent," Kruckeberg advised. "Will they clean the dress first thing in the day? (Items in the first load get cleaned.) Do they use pre-sprayers for stains? Do they have a dress in the store now that you can look at? Ask if you can see your dress before it's packed."

"Don't go for the cheapest," she continued. "Fifty to \$100 isn't exorbitant."

"Don't even consider not having the dress cleaned. There's dirt on the train, and perspiration or white wine stains, which may be invisible today,

but will turn brown in a few years."

Some dry cleaners feature blue tissue paper, as if it had some preservative value. In reality, it has no special properties, and the blue dye can bleed off it should become wet. Kruckeberg uses acid-free white tissue paper, and an acid-free box. (The Detroit Historical Society orders such boxes and tissue paper in large quantities and will accept orders from anyone wishing to buy them).

"Acid-free" doesn't mean forever, however. The tissue absorbs acid from the gown, so it should be changed yearly.

**IF YOU'RE PACKING** the gown yourself, you may want to use muslin or cotton sheets instead of tissue paper.

Kruckeberg stressed that new sheets should be washed four to six times and rinsed even more times to be sure sizing and other impurities are removed. Old sheets, too, must be absolutely clean, and patterned sheets should only be used if they are very old. Do not use any fabric softeners, rinses or softening sheets.

Line the box with well-washed and rinsed cotton fabric. Arrange gown to minimize folds to prevent formation of hard creases and line folds with tissue paper or muslin. The heaviest part of the gown goes on the bottom of the box. Cover the top of the gown with tissue or fabric before closing the box. Do not use plastic bags inside the box. Textile fabrics like to breathe.

The following items do not age well and should be removed from the gown and stored separately: plastic and metal buttons, pins, buckles, headpieces and veils with metal parts. Remove rubberized shields and foam padding — they deteriorate with age and may stain the fabric.

"Use your wedding anniversary as a time point to check your gown," suggested Kruckeberg. "Open the box to check for evidence of unrecovered soils darkening — a number of colorless soils or stains turn dark as they age and oxidize. Change the position of the folds, replace all of the tissue paper with new paper. Wash muslin if it was used to line the folds, and wash the cotton used to line the box."

"This inspection," she said, "should be done whether you packaged the gown or it was done commercially. This part of successfully storing wedding gowns cannot be overemphasized. Do not wait 20 years to look at the gown. By then, stains will be permanent, insect, mold and mildew damage may be irreversible, and folds will become permanent creases."

## Do's and don'ts in preserving wedding gown

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Photo courtesy of MODERN BRIDE MAGAZINE

### Romance in the air

All-over pure silk brocade by Blanchi in a field of stemmed roses with a veed neckline that produces bias folds resting on the shoulder and sheltering the grande puffs. The bride's dress is a Renoir rainbow taffeta. Both at Alvin's Bridal Shop, Birmingham.

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