



Wedding traditions—many are a-changing

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer

FORMAL receiving lines, the traditional tossing of garters, rice and bouquets, the groom's cake and even the late plastic bride and groom atop the wedding cake are fast disappearing in popularity.

Traditionists needn't despair, however. Weddings still make people teary-eyed and brides still choose to walk down the aisle in once-in-a-lifetime dresses, but even the rituals of romance change with the times. Today's brides and grooms are abandoning some of the rigid rigamarole of centuries-old etiquette in favor of greater flexibility. They're changing the cookie-cutter sameness of wedding receptions in favor of parties with individualized touches.

TODAY'S WEDDINGS reflect the busy lifestyles and limited time of modern brides and grooms who are, on the average, older when they marry than

they were a few decades ago. Many modern brides-to-be have finished college and begun their careers when they decide to marry. They simply don't have months to dither over details of their weddings. And there are brides and grooms embarking on second marriages. They want ritual and romance to mark the occasion but they want it to be clearly different and often more sophisticated than the following white dress and veil routine of first weddings.

The staff at the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham, one of Michigan's two four-star hotels, hosts wedding ceremonies and wedding receptions during every season of the year. They make it their business to know the latest trends so they can help prospective brides and grooms make informed decisions. In fact, they offer a complete wedding planning service.

Kitty Adler, marketing director at the hotel, said: "Busy professional people don't always have the time to plan for a wedding, so they come some place that they can do it all — invitations, menu,

flowers, band, music, cake. Someone can literally walk in the door and say 'I'm getting married June 1. Here's my budget. Do for me.' You take care of everything."

Diane Filian, catering manager, says that nowadays, "everybody seems to get in the act (of planning weddings). Grooms included. The father comes along for taste tests. Ten years ago, we didn't even have the bride. Now the bride and groom plan their own wedding and mom gets involved along."

THE STAFF AT THE Townsend knows from experience what's "in" with weddings and receptions, and they also know what is on its way out.

Formal receiving lines are on the way out. "Nobody ever knows what to say anyway," said Adler of receiving lines and responses, where things people say in safety protocol.

Adler said: "Brides and grooms get a kind of 'reimprinting guests' by making them wait in tedious, formal lines. As an alternative, many bridal party members go around and visit every table during the reception. 'It doesn't seem so staged.'"

In the Townsend's Regency Room, many bridal parties forego the traditional head table in favor of an oval table in the center of the room. Adler said that the bride and groom often "don't want to be on display."

Bonnie LePage, managing director at the Townsend, said: That way (with a central table), they're more like part of the party. It's a nice alternative. Plus guests are less likely to feel slighted because they've been seated far from the head table.

Brides and grooms are aware of healthy eating trends and don't want to sabotage the medical diets of their guests. Filian said health trends play a part in the move to offer two entree choices instead of the usual one-for-all. Nearly all invitations now include re-

ceipts for candy and drinks, sometimes a cash bar to check their entries on. On the candy — perhaps, honey, champagne, with artichoke hearts and lemon popovers and beef tenderloin. A menu is interpretable. One bride and groom sampled a Southwest theme just served eggs Benedict with salsa, guacamole and corn bread.

Down it comes, in dessert, LePage said. "Many couples prefer to offer guests a fabulous pastry table or sampler and fresh fruit instead of cake or a wedding cake in addition to cake. Grooms' cakes and fresh fruit groom dolls also wedding cakes have nearly disappeared at Townsend receptions. 'If they do have (have) a plastic bride and groom,' Adler said, "they do it as more of a joke and try to find the ugliest ones they can."

Filian says, "Everybody expects wedding cake to taste lousy," but brides are departing from the traditional bland white cake in favor of fresh fruit and truffle. Mering, chocolate cake or even cheesecake. Napkins and match books personalized with the names of the bride and groom are also disappearing.

LePage said: "People are putting money into the quality of food and for a lot of it. They're eating less and drinking less. Bar bills aren't what they used to be, and if they aren't, they're not. They're not 30 years ago when people got drunk and toasted all night."

RATHER THAN AN open bar during the cocktail hour, many brides choose to have guests served fine wine, champagne and hors d'oeuvres on silver trays.

The old custom of throwing rice at the departing pair is losing ground — and so is tossing the bouquet and garter. But calligraphy on invitations and place cards and videos are "in." So are limos as the means of transportation for the bridal party.

"Limos are very trendy, even if they're only going to go a block," said Adler.

Live music is also "in." "They don't want dead silence, so we see a lot of pianists and harpists." When a dance band plays, musicians try to please everyone by including a multi-generational mix, some music for friends of the parents and some for the younger generation. At Townsend receptions, the bride part almost never leave early. Instead, they stay to enjoy the party until the end, then invite guests to their room at the hotel to continue celebrating.

Even the most deeply rooted traditions, the wedding ring and bridal gown, are changing.

"Rings are more substantial than ever with bigger diamonds and more stylized

'Brides and grooms get tired of regimenting guests by making them wait in tedious, formal lines.'

— Kitty Adler Townsend
marketing director

LePage said: "Eternity rings are popular and more brides are choosing a ring, stylish ring rather than matching heirloom sets. The old-fashioned groom had the groom picking out the ring and surprising the bride with it. The modern scenario has the couple going together to choose rings. None of the Townsend staff can recall a wedding where the groom didn't also order a ring."

LePage said she sees more slim line beaded dresses these days, "fewer big pouffie dresses." They also see fewer neckpieces and veils and more bare shoulders and cleavage in modern bridal gowns than in the past.

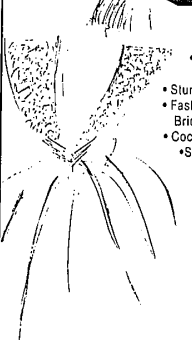
Bouquets are less "arranged." Sometimes brides carry just one elegant, pre-arranged callily or a white orchid. Tossing of the bride and groom seldom wear corsages any more. Instead, they're presented with a single flower to carry. Flowers at the reception reflect the same casual elegance. Popular centerpieces feature long stemmed flowers loosely arranged in a glass vase.

Whatever the planning decision, LePage tells brides and grooms, "Try to get the best quality you can and let your needs be known." She adds that even in the romance and ritual of weddings, "there are no hard and fast rules any more."



Lynne Goodwin (left) of Troy plans for a wedding with Townsend catering manager Diane Filian.

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— Bonnie LePage
Townsend manager

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