

weddings

that don't break the bank

BY BARBI WALKER

Ring. Check. Dress... maybe. Invites, location, food... maybe, maybe not. Cake, decorations, bridesmaids gifts, photographer...

What's left on your agenda for the big day? Is *everything* else set? So many things to think about for your big day and you want it all to be perfect. It can be, but "perfect" should also include time to enjoy yourself, and focus on you and your fiancé (and well, your money, too.)

It is possible to save money and make a minimal environmental impact on your wedding day, and still have that WOW factor. Fortunately, with so many like-minded, budget-conscious brides out there, options abound on saving green on everything from invitations, food, dresses, locations, and more. Paring down and planning your big day in smaller chunks means you can spend your time (and money) on the things that will make your wedding, and the whole wedding process, more enjoyable.

SIMPLICITY MAKES AN IMPACT

Monochromatic makes an impact and a statement. Choosing only one or two colors for your decorations also simplifies things. One way is to use classic reusable items or fabric to fill space for a dramatic effect and use inexpensive white holiday lights for mood. Tying large, soft bows on the backs of chairs lends an elegant look that shows your attention to detail and style. You can even carry the simple color scheme through to your dessert and cake. Frost cupcakes in one color and set them out on a long table, then create a monogram of the first letter of your new last name in the center using cupcakes frosted in a second color. Simple glass vases filled with sand or marbles topped with a flower or candle in your color make beautiful and inexpensive centerpieces, says Sara Barnes, manager of Brilliant Bridal.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE DRESS

Go local. Go wholesale. Go vintage, but buy off the rack.

Buying off the rack saves money and time, says Barnes. Trying on a dress, loving the way it looks on you, *and* walking out with it in hand: Priceless. Bridal stores and wholesalers that carry designer overstock or discontinued dresses are a great place to save money on your dress since these are often sample gowns, says Barnes. "Our brides that come in with a \$1,000 budget are looking at gowns that were close to \$2,000 retail. We also have dresses that start at \$95," Barnes says. "This allows the bride to have a dress that is high in quality and structure without breaking the bank."

To save on alterations, which can be pricey, use an inexpensive petticoat or "pick-ups" in the dress instead of paying

for an expensive hem. To keep your dress beautiful, ask your local bridal shop or dry cleaners if they do spot treatments and pressing, which costs less than a full dry clean, which can run upwards of \$300, says Barnes.

MAKE IT PERSONAL, KEEP IT FAUX-EVER

Invitations and flowers are big elements of a wedding, but they can also be expensive and decidedly unfriendly to the environment. Big, multiple-paged, heavily printed invitations aren't what's hot for the *chic* eco-friendly bride, but getting personal is always stylish. Save-the-date photo postcards or DIY printed invites give brides the option of showcasing their own flair and personality, as well as cutting down costs instead of trees. Faux flowers are more environmentally friendly than real flowers and can be just as beautiful. "Not all fake flowers have to look like you bought them in a store," says Barnes. One idea is to use clay flowers instead of real ones. Local company, Keepsake Blossoms, makes beautiful arrangements and bouquets that are less expensive than real flowers, lightweight, and best of all, they last a lifetime.

BE A KID – EAT CHOCOLATE & PLAY WITH CRAYONS

Weddings can be a drag for kids, and adults with kids, for that matter. Chocolate and crayons are two things almost every kid loves, so why not pair them together and bring out the kid in everyone. Wrapping crayons in parchment tied with a pretty ribbon and left at place settings means that kids (and kids at heart) can color while adults enjoy a glass of wine, or write their own special note to the bride and groom.

For dessert, try an ice cream sundae bar where kids and adults can make their own sundaes. Going more elegant? How about a S'more bar! Guests and especially the kids will love making their own, and you can send them home with a personalized takeaway S'more kit. Wrap individual S'mores in biodegradable cello bags with a handwritten thank-you note tied with a ribbon, and leave at each place setting or in a cute basket by the entrance.

Getting stressed over finances and planning your big day will inevitably happen, but having fun planning your wedding should be a big part of your wedding. So why not do what Barnes does and schedule a weekly project night. "For great ideas and inspiration or when in doubt, go online," she says. "There are a ton of bridal blogs and websites to help you with DIY projects."

Grab your girlfriends, a few good drinks and snacks, and start poring over the web, blogs, and Pinterest. You'll find great ideas and, better yet, you'll be creating wonderful memories of your wedding even before the big day. ■