

I do on a dime



In our recent reader poll, nearly 90 percent of you said you are married, thinking of popping the question or hope to be married one day. And since pledging your love at the altar can be an expensive endeavor, we figured we'd offer you a few secrets for planning the big (gay) day. Here are some of our tips and picks for creating your wedding bliss.

A fairy tale romance

There's nothing more beautiful than two women in love. And artist Ara Lucia knows that best—her series of photo-fables (one pictured above) were created in opposition to the passing of Prop. 8 and are for sale at wevow.net. A portion of the proceeds go to benefit HRC's marriage equality campaign.

Have your wedding cake and eat it, too

How to plan your wedding without going broke.
By Serena Freewomyn

So, you've got wedding bells in your future. Let me be the first to congratulate you and offer you and your partner best wishes for a happy future together. Now it's time to get down to business and start planning the actual event. There's a lot of advice out there for straight couples, but hardly any advice available for lesbians. Sticking to a budget is all the more important for same-sex couples, since many of us cannot count on our families to help pick up the tab. You shouldn't have to go into debt to celebrate your commitment. Most couples spend an average of \$17,000 on their wedding. But my partner and I planned ours for under \$2,000. Here's how you can, too.



Wedding Tip #1

"Have your dog or cat be the ring bearer. They don't want to miss your happy day either."

— Mary McGrath, travel writer

1. Skip the wedding planner.

Wedding planners certainly make putting together your event more convenient. They have a lot of experience and

contacts, which can sometimes get you a better deal. But their fees are an added expense, and you and your partner may be the best-qualified people to plan your big day. Shannon and I integrated the wedding planning into our regular pizza date. We'd meet every Friday to go over the checklists, then snuggle up on the couch and watch a movie. Keep the lines of communication open, write everything down and you and your partner can plan the wedding of your dreams. If you think you might need more help, get friends and family involved. People like having specific tasks. Just be sure to check in regularly with everyone involved, so that you know you're on track.

2. Monitor your expenses. There are all kinds of free wedding budget worksheets available on the Internet, but all you really need is an Excel spreadsheet. Decide how much you want to spend on the wedding, the reception and the honeymoon. Then keep track of everything by entering all your receipts into your spreadsheet.

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Wedding Tip #2

"Always the Bridesmaid, Finally the Bride" is a cool theme for a wedding where the guests all wear the bridesmaid dress that they made you wear for their respective weddings. Between me and my girl, we have at least 10 bad dresses that we would love to see some former brides don. We would, of course, save the two worst dresses for us to wear during our own nuptials. It is kitschy, thrifty and a great way to clear out the closet, so to speak."

— Michele Fisher, Dyke Drama columnist



Wedding Tip #3

“Remember: What happens during the bachelorette party does not stay at the bachelorette party.”

— Ainsley Drew, editorial assistant



3. Pick an inexpensive venue. Shannon and I exchanged our vows on the beach. The reception was held in a public park, and the gazebo rental was only \$14. Many couples celebrate in the backyard. Outside weddings have the added benefit of free greenery, which helps you spend less on decorations. If you choose an outdoor location, you will need to consult an almanac to see what the weather is typically like on your wedding date. Hope for sunshine, but plan for some rain. Have a backup plan to avoid a major panic if it starts to drizzle.

4. Plan a morning or afternoon reception. Breakfast and lunch buffets are cheaper to host than an evening reception. People tend to eat less, and they don't drink as much as they do at night.

5. Better yet, go potluck. Shannon and I asked our guests to bring a side dish to the reception in lieu of a gift. Everyone had a great time and felt like they were making a meaningful contribution by bringing something to eat. We provided catered BBQ sandwiches, drinks and two cakes for less than \$500.

6. Cut back on the alcohol. You could omit it altogether and save a big chunk of change on your reception. If you don't want to completely eschew the booze, consider using an expensive wine near the beginning of the reception and then switching to Two Buck Chuck later in the evening. Your guests will hardly notice after they've already begun to wet their whistles.

7. Be your own DJ. Instead of hiring someone, why not make a party mix of all of your favorite songs? Put the iPod on shuffle for the night and that's all there is to it.

8. Have a friend take photos. Many of us have friends who take great photos, so why not enlist them to document your day? They'll feel flattered that you trust them with this responsibility. Try to meet with them at least once before the big day to give them a list of specific photos you want them to get at the wedding.

9. Get a vintage dress. OK, we all know that “vintage” is just a cute word for “used.” But there's no shame in wearing a second-hand dress. I didn't even wear a “wedding” dress for my special day. It was just a white sundress that I bought on Amazon, of all places. I spent \$40 on the dress and \$20 to have it tailored by my dry cleaner. The Internet is teeming with great resources for finding wedding apparel on the cheap.

10. Consider taking your honeymoon during the off-season. Shannon and I took a trip to Holland an entire month before our commitment ceremony. The airplane tickets were about \$600 less in March than they would have been in May. We got a great deal on our hotel this way, too. You don't have to take your honeymoon right after the reception just because everyone else is doing it. To have a fairy tale honeymoon for a fraction of the cost, sign up for email alerts to get great deals on airfare, hotels and rental cars, and be flexible with your travel dates. ■

Wedding Tip #4

“If you're going to break the glass, make absolutely sure one of you leaves the stilettos at home and wears the Doc Martens.”

— Sheryl Kay, contributing editor



Helpful Online Resources



DISCOUNT WEDDING DRESSES

In addition to the usual suspects (Amazon, Craigslist, eBay), check out Bluefly.com, BudgetBridalGowns.com and SellYourWeddingDress.com

for your gown or tux. You can also browse through secondhand shops or hit yard sales to find a bargain.

DIY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sites like Evite.com allow you to send free electronic invitations and keep track of RSVPs for you, and you can also use them to update your guests about any changes in venue, parking info, etc. Create custom announcements with a few keystrokes. Upload a favorite photo of you and your partner, design a layout, then order your cards. Many online companies provide this service, but Snapfish.com is one of the most budget-friendly. You can also print your announcements at home. Usually the computer software is under \$10 and some of them even include the paper. Visit a craft store to pick up your DIY supplies and have an invite party for envelope stuffing.

WEDDING RINGS

We bought our rings on Etsy.com. Not only did we get unique rings, we supported a small, noncommercial artist like fabuluster.etsy.com (right). Just remember that anything called a “wedding ring” is going to be marked up in price. So keep it simple and do a Google search for “rings” instead. This is another area where you could look at secondhand stores or try your luck at a flea market or a yard sale.



WEDDING PLANNING TOOLS

GayWeddings.com or TwoBrides.com can help you find gay-friendly wedding vendors.

LEGAL INFORMATION

Most of us live in states that don't honor same-sex unions, so you'll need to take extra steps to protect yourselves. The National Center for Lesbian Rights has lots of helpful information for lesbian couples. Check out their website at nclrights.org.

Thinking outside the jewelry box

Alternative wedding rings by designers who care.
By Aislinn Clevenger



You're in a committed relationship. You're ready to tie the knot. Your partner wants a flashy diamond ring. Or, maybe she doesn't. Or, maybe she does, but she wants it to be eco-friendly and conflict-free. One thing is for sure: Your union is unique, so it's only natural that you want your ring to be just as singular. You could make the ultimate

commitment and tattoo your dedication onto your ring finger—your partner's name, perhaps, or your wedding date or a custom design. A tattooed symbol of your devotion would definitely last 'til death do you part. But, if tattoos aren't for you, there are still some truly stunning alternatives to mainstream rings. Here are a few innovative designers making jewelry that will express your love and commitment to your gal without defaulting on your devotion to eco and social consciousness.



Wedding Tip #5

"Have someone else in charge of turning on the music—we forgot until it was time to clean up!"

— Sassafras Lowrey, contributing writer



1. Recycled Rainbows

Jude Sharp is a full-service jeweler: A lesbian designer who uses recycled gold, platinum, silver and palladium and conflict-free diamonds. Sharp's partner of 10 years, Sylvia Weaver, runs

their Lancaster business. With over 30 years of experience, Sharp has a collection of pride-centered commitment rings that feature rainbow channels and gemstone triangles, but she offers a wide range of designs, from the traditional to the unusual. And, of course, creating custom-designed rings for lesbian couples is a part of her work that Sharp especially enjoys. (\$200 and up, jasharp.com)

2. Accessorize for Activism

A native of Israel, New York City-based Udi Behr is a high-end jewelry designer committed to promoting peace and equality through his Love and Pride brand. As a commitment to his support of the LGBT community, he donates 10 percent of all his Love and Pride sales to Lambda Legal to support same-sex marriage rights. Behr's selection is extensive, featuring every-

thing from traditional bridal sets and solitaires, to titanium rings with rainbow grooves, to rings that elegantly highlight female and lesbian symbols. After all, Love and Pride is "jewelry that makes a fashion and social statement," according to Behr. Not only are his rings created to reflect your personal style and beliefs, but they also use guaranteed conflict-free diamonds. (\$75 and up, loveandpride.com)

3. Greening the Goddess

"I've been making jewelry since I first took high school classes in 1974," says Oregon-based designer Miche Meizner. Largely self-taught, she began selling gay and lesbian symbols, labryses and custom jewelry in 1976 at festivals and women's bookstores. Her next venture, Sumiche Jewelry,

Wedding Tip #6

"Pay cash for as much as you can. You'd be surprised at how many discounts are available for just about everything. From the flowers to the venue to our clothing—you name it, we got sometimes as much as a 30 percent discount because we said we were paying in cash. Also, on the other end of this tip, we simply asked for cash as gifts from wedding attendees, which more than paid for our honeymoon and some new furniture for our home together!"

— Myra Lavenue, contributing writer



“I strive to create jewelry that enhances a woman’s true and natural beauty while reflecting the harmony of our earth in balance.” — Toby Pomeroy

with her then partner, Susan Onaclea, lasted 20 years. “I’m proud to say we were one of the first jewelers to begin using 100 percent sustainably mined gold and platinum in all our work,” she explains. Today, Meizner continues the green tradition at her new company, Shining Light Jewelry, using 100 percent recycled metals and conflict-free diamonds, and sourcing fair-trade gemstones when possible. (\$95 and up, shininglightjewelry.com)

4. Follow Your Intuition

For distinctive rings that are centered on hand-picked healing gems, turn to Chapel Hill, N.C.-based designer Nadine Zenobi. A lesbian jeweler who has worked in the women’s community for 28 years, Zenobi honors the ability of stones to heal the body, mind and spirit. “I really want to share my work with our women’s community, as it is very special in terms of power and healing, and many women sense this,” she says. Creating intuitive jewelry since 1982, Zenobi has studied with the renowned Hopi silversmith Michael Kabotie, from whom she learned the rare art of the shadow box technique (using multiple layers of metal to create a hollow “box” form), which make her creations truly one-of-a-kind. (\$85 and up, skyridersjewelry.com)

5. Rough and Ready

“I want my work to be worn, no matter what,” says New York City-based designer Sarah Perlis, “Hiking in the mountains, riding the subway or dressing up.” For over 10 years, Perlis, who trained at the Jewelry Arts Institute, has melted and milled her own recycled gold to create pieces that are inspired by their own organic raw materials, giving them a timeless quality. Plus, her latest collection, In the Rough, uses responsibly mined diamonds from Sierra Leone, and keeps the stones in their rough, uncut form. These unique diamonds are sourced from a company that reinvests in the community, pays living wages to its unionized miners and rehabilitates the land. (\$500 and up, sarahperlis.com)

6. Forging a Bond

Growing up in the Himalayan foothills of India instilled Toby Pomeroy with “a passion for the earth and the people in it.” Now based out of Corvallis, Ore., Pomeroy was the first jewelry designer to get the nation’s largest gold refiner and supplier, Hoover and Strong, to provide him with recycled gold and silver. With over 30 years of experience, Pomeroy says, “I strive to create jewelry that enhances a woman’s true and natural beauty while reflecting the harmony of our earth in balance.” His rings, created using ancient forging techniques, will last 2,000 years with proper care—now that’s a commitment. (\$250 and up, tobypomeroy.com)

Wedding Tip #7

“Stay a bridesmaid! And insist on picking your own fabulous outfit. Be brazen with the other guests. The lovely couple aren’t the only ones who deserve to consummate the evening.”

— Queerie Bradshaw, curvemag.com blogger

7. The Forest Through the Trees

If precious metals don’t do it for you, take a look at Simply Wood Rings. Educated at the Art Institute of Chicago, designer Gustav Reyes crafts his rings from repurposed wood and materials like antique furniture, salvaged lumber, reclaimed diamonds—even the ivory from broken piano keys. Reyes allows the defining characteristics of the materials he uses to be the greatest strength of the work. Plus, according to Reyes, “They are created in a way that allows the grain to run around the ring, maintaining the structural integrity of each piece of wood.” (\$185 and up, simplywoodrings.com)

8. A Lasting Impression

Jewelers Jessica and Brent Williams know the term “making your mark.” With their original take on custom jewelry, these metalsmiths make engraving ancient history. Their hand-crafted, individualized fingerprint rings include an impression kit to capture your sweetie’s prints and yours, which are used to cast wax molds to make perfectly personalized keepsakes. The rings can be made in a variety of designs and metals and are available in wedding sets. What a way to let her know that she is one in a million. (\$45 and up, fabuluster.etsy.com) ■

Additional research by Briana Hernandez and Heather Robinson

Wedding Tip #8

“Instead of giving you a toaster or a set of towels, get your friends to bake the cake, or arrange the flowers, take photos, or make a wedding-song mix tape for the reception. The results won’t always be as ‘professional’ (unless your friends are professionals), but they’ll be heartfelt and much more meaningful.”

— Lori Selke, contributing writer



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