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CONFESSIONS OF A REAL-LIFE BRIDE

After months of planning the Big Day, one writer remembers the good, the bad and the funny

By Jennifer Fossell O'Sullivan

Just about 30 minutes before I was supposed to be standing at the alter, my parents and I were lost somewhere in West Chester. By the time we arrived at the General Warren Inne in Malvern, where my nervous groom was waiting, I had just 10 minutes to make the transformation from regular me to "the Bride." Never before, or since (as my new husband will attest), have I managed to get ready so quickly.

A total disaster? Not at all. Despite months of planning and sleepless nights spent orchestrating every moment of the Big Day, I took a crash course in the virtues of humor and flexibility on my wedding day. And even though there is much you can do to prepare for the perfect wedding, weddings are about real life. And, even with the flaws, real life is sweeter than any fantasy.



Spreading the Word

Once we found a site and set the date, it was much easier to envision the day and to make the next round of choices. Having spent several months just gathering and researching ideas, we really started planning in earnest about six months before the Big Day.

Selecting our invitations was our first project. Since we hadn't selected a color scheme yet, the invitations were a good starting point. As book and art lovers, we have a special reverence for paper, and we approached our invitations as miniature works of art. We talked with Bill Fitzpatrick, owner and principal designer of Cyrano in West Chester/Exton, who creates custom-made invitations.

With Bill's guidance, it didn't take long for us to pick out an oversized tri-fold design in a heavy white stock with a silver edge, featuring a vellum overlay imprinted with a flowering pattern in pale lavender. To add an extra dash of personality, we chose a favorite quote from French writer Antoine De Saint-Exupery as part of the border. The coordinating response card and direction sheet were tucked into a special pocket inside the invitation.

At first, I worried that the elegance and formality of our invitations weren't in keeping with a small wedding. I soon realized that creating the right invitation helped us define the mood of the event. "The invitation is the one thing that is not actually present at the wedding, but it sets the tone and gives the first impression," says Fitzpatrick. When our guests received our invitations, the positive buzz made our extra effort worthwhile.

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I find that my clients usually orient their invitations around a color, a season or holiday, a geographic region or ethnicity, says Fitzpatrick. For example, one couple planning a long distance wedding in Santa Fe, incorporated the bride's photograph of an adobe mission into the design. Another couple celebrated their African-American heritage by using an African kunta cloth as part of their design.

Along with the creative-design decisions, a few practical points need to be considered. The biggest consideration is knowing how many you need," says Fitzpatrick, who encourages couples to run the guest list past both families before placing their order.

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