



# Brides & Bouquets

Brandon Valley Journal

Wednesday, February 15, 2023

## Stitches by Ardis dresses brides for their big day

**Jill Meier**  
Journal editor

**W**hen it comes to that all-important day in a bride's life, the dress has to be perfect.

And that's where Ardis Moeller steps in.

Moeller, who launched Stitches by Ardis in January of 2018, crafts works of art from a room in her family's home basement in Brandon, with the focus of creating the perfect dress for the bride.

"They are works of art," Moeller confirms. "It definitely takes a lot of time and patience – a lot of patience – and good reading glasses to be able to see everything, for sure," she teases.

The timeline from start to finish is lengthy, she said. Brides who want a custom dress complete from scratch can take up to a year.

The process begins with a consult with Moeller.

"They tell me what they want, the different features that they want in a dress," she explains.

From there, Moeller sketches out the bride's dream dress and together they select fabrics.

"Or they find a dress that they like and we alter it or modify it to make it what they want," she said. "Basically, we go off of what their dream dress is and I try to create that for them."

Moeller not only sews gowns from scratch, she also does alterations on store-purchased dresses to help mold



Ardis Moeller works on a wedding dress in her home studio in Brandon. She formed Stitches by Ardis in 2018 and has helped hundreds of brides look beautiful on their special day.

them into their dream dress. As brides-to-be are shopping for the dress, she encourages them to look for all of the features that are most important to them in a dress.

"Sometimes, bridal shops try to talk them into a dress that maybe it really wasn't what they were wanting and then they come to me and they are wanting it changed. 'I wanted the waist to look like this or I wanted the skirt to be like this,'" she's heard brides share. "Some of those changes are not possible to do, so

I always encourage them to find what's the most important feature in the dress to make sure that is present in the dress when they purchase it. Some of those things can be changed but some of those major features of the dress cannot."

Dress styles for the all-important day haven't changed much.

"You do see the classics are always there," Moeller said. "But there's been some fun things where brides like to have a different look, like a skirt attaches over

another part of their dress and then they wear that for their ceremony and then they remove it for the reception. So, it's the same dress but it gives them a different look, or they remove the train or the skirt of different things, so those are neat."

And while white and off-white are common hues of wedding dresses, even more popular in recent years is champagne-colored fabrics.

"It's very trending," Moeller said, "and it's beautiful on every skin tone, so it's very flattering and a nice option."

Another special feature of wedding dresses that Moeller has crafted is incorporating the bride's mother's wedding dress into their dress.

"That's a really neat, meaningful option. I've made lots of things from mother's dresses, like robes or taken pieces from their mother's dress and put it on their dress or on a robe. It's just neat to be able to help someone make something really special," she said.

Speaking of special, ideas are already circling through Moeller's mind on incorporating her wedding dress into her own daughters' dresses, Courtney and Carmen, for their future 'I do' moments.

"I purchased my dress, but I still have it and I will incorporate it. I've been thinking of ways that I can incorporate it into my daughters' dresses someday," she said.

Her eldest daughter has been dreaming of that day, and her ideas are memorial-

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**STITCHES BY ARDIS** cont. from page 1B



Jill Meier/BV Journal

Ardis Moeller (above) turned her sewing hobby into a home-based business, Stitches by Arids, in January 2018. She relishes in helping bride's feel special on what she terms as the most important day of their life.

ized in an album she has made for that time.

"She has picked out different things that she likes in wedding dresses, so she's already doing some planning on that," she said. "I made their prom dresses, so that is the dream to make their wedding dresses, too."

As for bridesmaid dresses, Moeller is up to the challenge, but said most times after putting pencil to paper, the bride finds it's more

cost-effective to purchase those dresses rather than to have them custom made.

"I do encourage them to find an option, because there are so many different color options that they can find that and purchase that to be more cost-effective for those in their wedding."

Moeller hasn't kept a tally of the number of dresses she's brought from a sketch to the finished prod-

uct, but said her business continues to grow, mostly by word of mouth.

Last June was a very busy month for Moeller, who is a school nurse at Brandon Valley.

"I feel like I had 20 wedding dresses just in June alone," she said. "Then I have several every month. Alterations, I should say, I'm a convenient option for those people that have maybe purchased their dress three or four

hours away and it's not convenient for them to get fittings done. So, then they purchase the dress and bring it to me for alterations."

She's also worked with brides that live out of state but are originally from here and their wedding is going to be here. They will schedule fittings to coincide with when they return for a visit.

"So, we can make that work. They can get their alterations done with mom here and then the dress is also here when they come to have their weddings. That's a great option for brides. It helps with flexibility," she said.

Although never intending to make her hobby a sideline business, Moeller said word of mouth began to fill up her free time schedule.

"It was hard for me to say 'no' to people," she said. "So, then it was, 'If I'm going to do this, then I'm going to make it a business so that everything is legal. I decided then I was going all in.'"

She has had to turn business away.

"I don't like saying 'no.' I do this on the side because I think it's fun, but sometimes when I'm



Submitted photo

Ardis Moeller constructed the wedding dress donned by Ellie (Holmes) Blue for her nuptials to Mason Blue.



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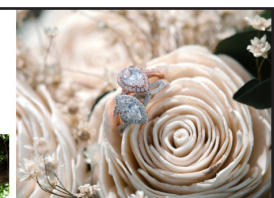
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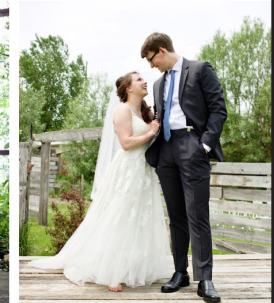
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## STITCHES BY ARDIS cont. from page 2B

super busy, I do have to say no, I can't do it all. I still have to be there for my family," she said.

The look of happiness on a bride's face when she slips on her dress is a rewarding moment for the seamstress.

"It's very rewarding to see a happy bride, for sure," Moeller said. "It's a great feeling knowing that they're wearing the most important dress that they will ever wear, so it's an honor to work on them."

And there have been many occasions where Moeller was a guest at the wedding of a bride she had a part in preparing her dress for, whether that be from scratch or alterations.

"There have been a few, and that is really neat. I get a little nervous because I want to make sure everything goes well with it. I don't want anything to malfunction, so I do get a little nervous but it is wonderful to see them look so happy and know that I had a part in making them feel beautiful that day."

Most importantly, Moeller strives to make every bride's special day, special.

"It's their wedding, it's their dress, so it should be whatever they like. I always say a beautiful dress isn't beautiful unless it fits you, then it looks beautiful on you."

**Submitted photo**

(At right) Ellie (Holmes) Blue's flower girls straighten her gown which was an endeavor of Stitches by Ardis.



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## Create a beautiful wedding on a budget

**H**aving a beautiful wedding does not require spending your entire savings. If you're planning a wedding, learning where to cut costs and how to budget will leave you with money to spare.

"There are many ways to have the wedding of your dreams without the nightmare of huge bills," said Anna Griffin, wedding industry expert and designer of the Wedding Studio line of wedding products. "You just have to be resourceful."

Here are some tips from Griffin on how to create a designer wedding on a budget.

- For something old, wear a vintage wedding dress. You can save hundreds on a wedding gown by shopping in consignment or vintage shops, in newspaper classifieds and on the Internet. You also can update your mother's, grandmother's or aunt's wedding dress with a new neckline or hemline, beading or lace.

- Print your own invitations. There are many wedding accessories that can be made instead of bought – the veil, the centerpieces and even the invitations.



Do-it-yourself kits are available to help you create designer looks without the designer price tags.

The Wedding Studio, for example, is an entire line of paper-related wedding accessories – from invitations to menu cards to guest books and photo albums – designed for brides who want original and elegant paper goods. The invitation kit comes in four styles in three color options and includes envelopes, reply cards and printing instructions.

- Use an antique or classic car instead of a limousine. Contact a local antique or classic car club to rent a luxury vehicle, such as a 1939 Rolls-Royce or a 1952 Cadillac DeVille. Most of the owners will be thrilled to loan out their cars and you'll have more than enough room for the married couple at a much lower price. And, whereas a limousine is rented for a couple of hours, you have the benefit of keeping the antique vehicle for 24 hours or longer.

- Keep the flowers simple. Instead of hiring a florist, contact a floral-design school and hire students to provide you with flower arrangements. You also can create your own flower arrangements. Buy one color of flower in bulk. It creates a visual impact while saving money. Contact a wholesale florist; many will sell flowers directly to the consumer.

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*'I haven't looked back from there'*

## Brandon bachelor doctor is tying the knot

**Tom A. Savage**  
Contributing writer

**W**hen Chase Marso made his way through Brandon Valley High School, he was laser-focused.

The 2013 BV grad was locked in on slinging the football around, all the while making sure his grades were strong enough to possibly get him to medical school.

He was so locked in, that he didn't date in high school. Football and academics – that was his focus.

“Between school and athletics, that took up the vast majority of my time,” he said. “I was happy and content in

having a lot of great friends.”

His stringent schedule of staying focused on football and academics carried over to college where Marso was a pre-med major and also the starting quarterback for the Augustana Vikings in Sioux Falls.

“I guess I was a little more open to it (dating), but between the schedule of being a college athlete and studying pre-med, it was hard,” he said of his days at Augustana. “I just never made the conscience to put forth that time and effort into dating.”

“ I was happy and content in having a lot of great friends.

**- Chase Marso**  
Groom-to-be

latter met his match.

At Harvard, Marso met Kristen Sweeney, a student at the Harvard Dental School. First-year medical students study alongside first-year dental students at Harvard, and Cupid's arrow eventually caught up to Marso.

Although they met right away at Harvard, Sweeney and Marso didn't begin dating until their third year in school.

His discipline paid off.

From Augustana, Marso headed to Harvard Medical School in Boston, and that's where Brandon's most eligible bachelor

“I reached a point in medical school – and in life – where I wanted to take a chance and start dating,” he said. “I haven't looked back from there.”

Sweeney is Marso's first, and only, girlfriend. He made her his fiancé on Oct. 10 of last year while the two were able to sneak away from their busy schedules. Sweeney is now a pediatric dentist near Boston.

On a hike in New Hampshire on the off day, Marso said he dropped to a knee and popped the big question.

“I was a little nervous,” he said. “I was very sure of what the outcome was going to be, but yea, I was a little nervous.”

continued on page 6B



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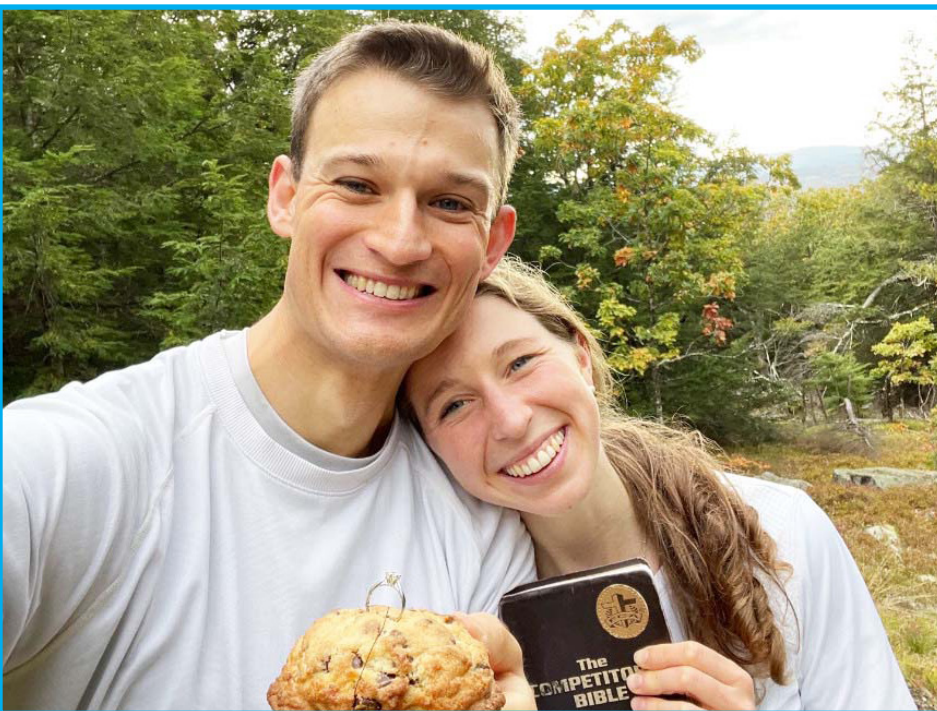
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**BRANDON BACHELOR** cont. from page 5B

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Brandon native Chase Marso met his perfect match, Kristen Sweeney, at Harvard. Marso and Sweeney studied alongside one another.

They had shopped for engagement rings just prior to the hike, so clearly the future was coming together for the two. But part of Marso's clinical approach to dating is likely how he and Sweeney ended up together. Her approach was the same, and when it came to dating, Marso said marriage was always the expected outcome.

"We had talked throughout our relationship about when we were thinking and ready to progress into marriage. We both started dating knowing we are not ever going to date somebody without the intent to potentially marry," Marso said. "There was an open conversation about marriage. So I don't know if she was surprised."

Marso said he talked with his parents, sister and friends before popping the question. He also had a Zoom call with Sweeney's parents back in her hometown of Tallahassee, Fla.

"I offered to fly down and have that conversation in person with them and they said save the money and use it on the ring," he said with a chuckle.

With the wedding date approaching on April 15, the Sweeney-Marso wedding plans are in full gear. The wedding

“ We had talked throughout our relationship about when we were thinking and ready to progress into marriage. We both started dating knowing we are not ever going to date somebody without the intent to potentially marry.

- Chase Marso  
Groom-to-be

will take place in Tallahassee, and Marso said Sweeney's parents have been a huge help in planning.

"Being in Boston makes it a little tricky," he said. "I've been involved in the planning – not in everything – but certainly in the big details as far as picking reception venues, food, DJs, photographers, attire for the groomsmen."

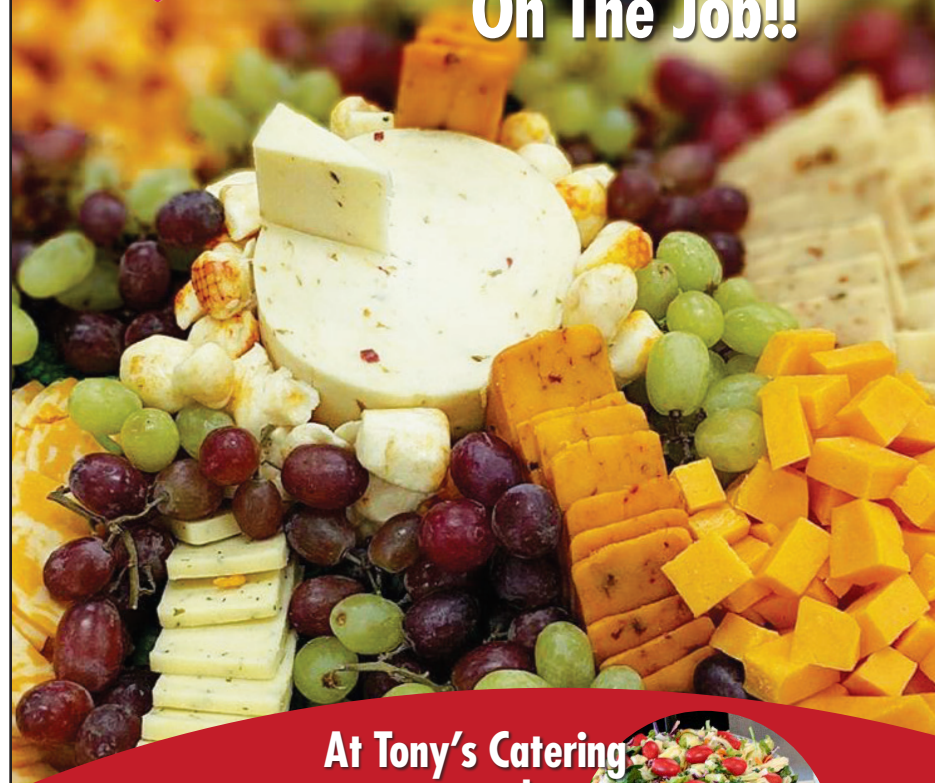
Obviously, there will be friends and family from Brandon in Tallahassee on April 15, but two in particular will be standing with Marso as the once non-dating bachelor ties the knot.

Adam Guthmiller is Marso's best man and Trey Etrheim is one of the groomsmen.

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# Wedding photographer shares advice for 'picture perfect' day

Wedding photographer Gene Elrod with Studio I Do offers a few key pieces of advice in choosing a wedding photographer and what to keep in mind on the big day. Elrod is based in Brandon and has 20 years of experience.

**1. Pick a photographer with experience.** “The biggest thing you want is an experienced photographer. Nowadays everybody and their brother is buying a digital camera and doing it, or a friend of a friend. The problem with that is are you going to get the shots you want and you realize you didn’t get? We capture everything,” Elrod said. “The biggest thing I can stress is outdoor shots are outdoor – there’s always going to be lighting challenges – but for interior, you need high quality, nice colors. Your white balance needs to be on. I’ve shot

in all the churches and venues, and they all look different.”

**2. Make a shot list, but allow the photographer to get creative, too.** “A good photographer is going to give you all the shots you want, but if there are ‘must have’ photos, definitely give us a list. Maybe have your personal attendant check them off to make sure they’re all covered,” Elrod said. “You’re going to get the standard what I call ‘wall pictures,’ and those are great, but you also want some photojournalism in there, too. The more candid shots. A boy sticking his finger in the cake. Don’t do stiff poses. We’ll do those, but we’ll also do some fun poses. Whatever their personalities are, we’ll give you those fun pictures – something different, other than the norm.

“If you want bridges, I know where

all the bridges are. If you want downtown and urban, I can do that. It’s really what they send to me on Pinterest,” Elrod said. “We don’t copy the Pinterest; we make it our own. It’s more about the lighting and the effect and how they’re feeling that day.”

**3. Be punctual and prepared.** “Don’t get stressed out if something happens; just be prepared,” Elrod said. “You want it to be fun and relaxed.”

He typically starts with formal shots, which take two to three hours. He spends another half hour getting more creative photos of the bride and groom before moving on to the bridal party and wrapping up with family shots, which allows relatives to arrive later and avoid waiting around.

Elrod also does “getting ready” photos with the bride and pre-wedding



reveal shots, which tend to be more candid and interesting, he said, than shots of the groom seeing the bride for the first time at the altar, though a handful still opt for the traditional “reveal.”

“We need cooperation from everybody. Be on time, first and foremost,” he added. “We do plan out a timeline to make sure there are no surprises and to keep things flowing.”

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# Wedding planning 101 for your special day

## Staff report

**F**irst comes the proposal, and then comes the wedding planning. There are dozens of decisions that need to be made before it's time to walk down the aisle, which can be overwhelming for brides and grooms.

To help make it less stressful, these tips can help couples through the entire wedding-planning process, from on-trend apparel and accessories for the entire wedding party to all the essentials to create a perfect registry.



## Dressing the Gents

Similar to bridesmaid dresses, groomsmen attire can be dependent on the venue and overall event aesthetic. While a suit can fit the bill for a country club wedding, a city affair may call for the sleek finishes of a tux. Tuxedo accessories, such as cuff links or bow ties, make great groomsmen gifts and are classic pieces they can use time and time again.

## Creating the Perfect Registry

When building a registry, it's never too early to start. People

want to give gifts as soon as they know a couple is engaged. Start by taking inventory of what you already have, what you need and what you want to upgrade. It's also recommended to update the registry regularly so there are enough gifts to choose from, especially if there is an engagement party and bridal shower coming up. To get started, some popular registry items include stand mixers, craft beer glasses, Dutch ovens, bath towels and vacuums.

## Dressing the Ladies

When it comes to bridesmaid dresses, the mix-and-match approach is trending in popularity. Start by deciding on a color palette, such as lilac, champagne and petal pink. Then have

each bridesmaid choose her favorite style within that range of hues. Bring it all together by choosing a uniform look for makeup, shoes and accessories.

There is no better time to thank the ladies than

the morning of the big day. A few thoughtful gifts can go a long way, such as matching robes, tumblers to stay hydrated throughout the day and cosmetic cases to stow makeup essentials.



# PLANNING AN EVENT?

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# Put more you into your wedding day

## Staff report

A wedding day is filled with symbolic tradition, from varied religious customs to the never-ending circle reflected in the rings and the types of flowers accentuating the celebration. Even with all the traditional rituals to consider, nearly every bride and groom can find ways to give their special day some unique touches that reflect their personality and love.

Music sets the mood for every wedding, and it's an easy place to put your own spin on the celebration. Whether you forgo the traditional bridal march entirely or simply look for an arrangement that gives an updated twist to the classic version, let guests know this isn't your average wedding by

continued on page 10B



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I highly recommend Sherry Swift for your wedding photography! She gets to know you and your hopes for your wedding day so she can play her part in making it exactly as you want.

-Kaylee and Brandon F.



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# After the vows have been exchanged: Changing your name

## Staff report

Just because you have a marriage license with your new last name, doesn't mean you've officially changed your name. While there are several options for kits and services that will handle all the details for you, here's the economical, old-school way to change your name post-wedding.

1. Get your marriage license. Before you can change your name, you'll need the original (or certified) marriage license with the raised seal. Call the clerk's office where your license was filed to get copies if one wasn't automatically sent to you.

2. Change your Social Security card. Visit the Social Security Administration's website and fill out the application for a new Social Security card. You'll keep the same number – just your name will be different. Mail in your application to the local Social Security Administration office, or just go through the process while you're there. You should get your new card within 10 business days.

3. Change your license at the DMV. Take a trip to the local Department of Motor Vehicles office to get a new



license with your new last name. Bring every form of identification that your local DMV instructs you to –including your current license, your certified mar-

riage certificate and, most importantly, your new Social Security card.

4. Change your bank accounts. This

one's a biggie, especially if you're setting up a joint bank account, or if you have one already set up. The fastest way to change your name at your bank is to go into a branch location, bringing your new driver's license and your marriage certificate. You should request new checks and debit and credit cards on top of changing the name attached to your accounts.

5. Fill in the blanks. Once you have a Social Security card and driver's license in your married name, other changes should be fairly easy. Some places only require a phone call; others may ask for a copy of your marriage certificate or social security card. Be sure to notify:

- Employers/payroll
- Post office (if your address has changed too)
- Electric and other utility companies
- Credit card companies
- Landlord or mortgage company
- Insurance companies (auto, home, life)
- Doctors' offices
- Voter registration office
- Investment account providers
- Your attorney (to update legal documents, including your will)

## PUT MORE YOU IN YOUR WEDDING DAY cont. from page 9B

setting the festivities against a soundtrack that lets your true character shine.

The wedding party is intended to be a collection of those nearest and dearest to the bride and groom, who help ensure the day goes off without a hitch and who lead fellow revelers in celebrating the start of the new couple's life together. That being said, there's no reason this group must be limited to women on her side and guys on his, or even that it's limited to humans – a beloved pooch can make for an adorable ring-bearer, after all.

**Photography is an essential element** of your big day, but think beyond the images you'll capture throughout the wedding and reception. Photos lend a personal touch, no matter what your color scheme

or theme. Integrate photos of the two of you at various stages of life, together as a couple and with loved ones (perhaps even some you're honoring in memoriam). You can display these at a table with the guest book, as part of the table centerpieces, or even on the gift table. Or take things digital and load all your images into a slide show set to music.

**Make favors meaningful.** Forgo more common items like bubbles and chocolate, and instead send a little of yourself home with your guests. Maybe it's a memento from a place with special meaning to you both, or a bottle opener shaped like a bicycle to represent the way you met. Just think about the moments and things that define you as a couple and do some searching online. You'll probably be

surprised by how quickly the options pile up.

**Serve up a menu** that shows guests more about your life together. Your loved ones can order basic beef or chicken anywhere. Instead, give them a glimpse into you. Make your main course the same food you enjoyed on your first date or during another monumental moment in your courtship. Or plan the entire menu around a region that you hold close to your heart.

Weddings are filled with traditions, but that doesn't mean you can't put your own touches on the day for a special event filled with memories that are uniquely your own.



## Five easy and edible wedding favor ideas

With all the expenses and things to plan, many brides overlook party favors for their guests. But these small tokens of appreciation allow the bride and groom to put their own unique touch on their big soiree, while also leaving a lasting impression with guests.

Here are a couple of easy favors to add a little sparkle to your special day:

**Homemade granola** – The gift of homemade granola is a perfect way to thank guests for attending your big day. Start with mason jars and fill with delicious granola straight from your kitchen. Granola mixes can be savory or sweet. Be sure to craft a cute label with your initials or wedding date as an added touch. Complete the look by tying a raffia bow or ribbon

around each jar.

**Regional goodies** – Chances are you have some guests from out-of-town. Capture the essence of your hometown or wedding venue location with a regional treat. For example, a wedding in Kansas City could send guests home with barbeque sauce, or a peach jelly for a wedding in Atlanta.

**Fresh fruit** – For weddings in the warmer months, nothing is better than a juicy, healthy gift for guests to take home. Decorate paper bags by stamping your initials or wedding on the outside. Then fill with your favorite regional fresh fruit; grapes and cherries make an adorable touch.

**Chocolate-covered coffee beans** – Do you and your spouse-to-be have a favorite local coffee house? Pick your favorite whole bean roast



and cover with melted chocolate bark. This sweet, yet rich treat can be stored in any favorite decorative bag or even a Chinese food take-out box.

**Cookie nibbles** – For the bride who loves to bake, put your skills to the test and create delicious take-home cookies for your guests. Purchase paper CD sleeves with

plastic windows to wrap up the cookie. Then add a finishing touch with personalized labels in your wedding colors.

Creating memorable gifts and party favors for

a wedding doesn't have to break the bank. Add your own unique touch for a lasting memory your guests will cherish long after the party has ended.

## Wedding gift registries: Couples' most common questions

The bakery agreed to make your almond-flavored multi-tiered cake. You found a bridesmaid's dress in just the right shade of robin's-egg blue. Finally, the wedding plans are falling into place. What about your wedding gift registry?

Today, the options for wedding gift registries are endless. To help cut through the clutter, Demetra Bernard of Springmaid home fashions answers these common questions about wedding gift registries.

**Q: Where should brides and grooms look for registries?**

**A:** Virtually every retail outlet offers a registry, making it easy to find everything you need, from pillows to power saws. There is no rule that says all of

your registered items need to come from one place. For example, you can choose Egyptian cotton sheets from Wal-Mart, tools from Lowe's and a retro telephone from Pottery Barn.

**Q: Is it better to register in the store or online?**

**A:** How you register is a personal preference. The benefit to registering in the store is the "touch factor." You can feel the softness of a towel or see if the ecru-colored blender matches your other appliances. On the other hand, registering online means that you don't have to adjust your schedule around store hours. Online registries also are easier for gift-givers, especially far-flung family and friends who might not live near the store.

Most brick-and-mortar stores now have their registries accessible both in the store and online so you can decide which method works best for you.

**Q: What do most people forget to put on their registries?**

**A:** One of the most forgotten items are blankets. For some, it's a utilitarian item that's easy to overlook. For others, it's just too confusing to decide on a fabric. Choosing between cotton, thermal, flannel, acrylic, down-filled, knit, woven or herringbone can make your head spin. But although it may take a few minutes to get educated on the best blanket for you, having one on your bed or in your linen closet is a must, especially when your new spouse turns down the thermostat!

**Q: Should couples register for the "really good stuff"?**

**A:** The tradition of wedding gift-giving started as a way for family and friends to help newlyweds – who were moving out of their parents' homes and into an empty house – set up their new home. Today's brides and grooms are marrying later in life and likely have lived on their own (at college or in an apartment) and have already accumulated some of the basics. So a registry can be the couple's chance to indulge in the really good stuff.

They shouldn't feel guilty, as the good stuff isn't all that expensive anymore. Springmaid, for example, offers high-quality linens – 300-thread count and 100 percent cotton – for about \$50.





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*bride*

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deep down to her soul"*

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