Bridal_Shoes.qxd 20/1/09 7:52 am Page 2



The Oboe comes from the collection of Stuart Weitzman, who is credited with drawing new attention to the bridal shoe market.
CREDIT: BELLISSIMA BRIDAL SHOES

Metallics, such as this Gorgeous from Two Lips, mark a new direction for bridal shoes.
CREDIT: BELLISSIMA BRIDAL SHOES

Here comes the bridal shoe

by Shari Shallard

A walk through Charlene Clay's house quickly reveals what's on her mind these days: her youngest daughter, Karen, is getting married. Hanging in one closet is the billowing ivory wedding gown, zipped carefully into a transparent bag; hanging in another is a row of four small ivory dresses and a tiny black tuxedo – each of her five grandchildren will be in the wedding. Sprawled across the dining room table are various versions of homemade programmes; near the computer, pages of names and addresses. A heap of sage fabric covers the sofa, waiting to be transformed into table cloths for the reception. And on the kitchen table sits a box containing the bride-to-be's latest purchase: her bridal shoes.

Ms Clay taps the cardboard lid. "Wedding shoes have come a long way," she laughs. "I spent seven dollars on my wedding shoes. There was no decision to be made really. They were simple white satin pumps with a low heel." Ms Clay married her husband forty years ago, in a wedding that cost – as detailed in a dusty notebook dug out in the excitement of Karen's engagement – less than $500 (€400). "As long as I had a formal wedding, these are the only shoes I would have considered." She adds that her friends who married around the same time invariably wore the same type of shoe.

Today's bride may occasionally long for that simpler time, as she returns from a long day spent browsing through bridal shoe stores only to turn on the computer and browse some more. Now, selecting a bridal shoe – and those for the bridesmaids – requires consideration of a complex set of factors: the style of wedding, comfort needs, colour requirements, budget, dress length, partner height, and even whether one pair of shoes is sufficient. And after each of these factors has narrowed down the choices, the remaining selection is beyond vast. So before we have a peek at the shoes Karen picked for her most important day, let's have a look at the options from which she had to choose.

Bridal_Shoes.qxd 20/1/09 7:52 am Page 3



Quality lining and padding make the Grace wedding shoe from Filippa Scott a more comfortable – yet chic – option.
CREDIT: FILIPPA SCOTT

A wedding staple for many years, Dyeables carries more than 90 dyeable bridal shoes.
CREDIT: DYEABLES

Something old

Estimates vary from country to country and from source to source, but the average cost of western-hemisphere weddings today flitters somewhere between €15,000 and €20,000; how much of that is spent on shoes is far more difficult to pin down. Between eBay auctions and designer lines, brides can spend anywhere from €10 and €10,000 (excluding a few anomalies such as Stuart Weitzman's €1.5 million diamond-covered Cinderella slippers).

It's not always been so easy to spend money on bridal footwear. Ms Clay's 1960s era white pumps continued ruling the market for at least another couple of decades. Even ten years ago, when Ms Clay's son married his now wife Dawn, shoe pickings were slim. Dawn Clay actually chose a $75 Nina cream sling back heel for her big day: "I didn't buy true bridal shoes," she recalls, "because at that time all that was really available in the bridal line were Dyeables and that's not what I wanted."

Dyeables are both a brand name and a broader concept. The eponymous market leader for this bridal niche was launched in 1982 and has since held strong as the leading developer, dyer and marketer of women's dyeable footwear and handbags. Shoes that are dyeable, however, have been around longer than Dyeables: at Ms Clay's 1968 wedding the bridesmaids' shoes were identical in style to hers, except that they were dyed to match their dresses – blue for the matron of honor, yellow for the bridesmaids. (She points out that each pair cost $8 plus and extra $1 for the dye job.) "My mother even wore the same shoes, dyed to match her dress," she says. "That's what everybody did."

And that's what everybody did for years. Rachel Leonard, fashion director for Brides magazine, has been in this industry for more than twenty years; she has witnessed firsthand several stages of the market's delayed evolution: "When we first started, there were a small amount of inexpensive, uncomfortable white satin shoes with very little refinement or style." She credits Stuart Weitzman – famous for his use of unique materials such as cork, wallpaper and 24-carat gold – with uncovering the untapped market lurking beneath those lovely layers of satin and tulle. "Stuart Weitzman was really the first important shoe designer to take this industry seriously," she says. "Now we have a range of fashionable shoes at all price points and directional shoe designers now include a bridal shoe on their lines."

Something new

The last decade has certainly seen an explosion of such lines: Vera Wang, Jimmy Choo, Kenneth Cole and Manolo Blahnik are just a few of the names inspiring brides to spend hundreds – even thousands – on their shoes. But even for those brides who wish to keep their footwear costs closer to the two-digit range, the options are extensive.

Dyeables now must share the aisle

Bridal_Shoes.qxd 20/1/09 7:52 am Page 4



When one shoe isn't enough: after the ceremony, many brides opt to change into a flat (such as the Grace ballet slipper) for a more comfortable reception.
CREDIT: BELLISSIMA BRIDAL SHOES

The Grazia Valentine brings the spirit of the forties to today's weddings.
CREDIT: BELLISSIMA BRIDAL SHOES

with shoes that complement rather than match the bridalwear. "We have also seen a large majority of brides going for the metallic styles instead of the dyeable white satin," says Allison Buytkins, manager of online bridal boutique Bellissima Bridal Shoes and ModelBride.com. "The metallics offer more versatility, and are perfect for the bride who wants to get the most out of the shoe." Bringing metallics to a wedding can mean pairing a silver high heel (such as the crystal embellished Gileyla sandal by Two Lips) with a white gown, or wearing a gold pump with an ivory gown; some shoes even feature a combination of colours, such as the ivory and gold Bridget shoe from Filippa Scott's Luxe collection (€375). All are small yet dramatic moves away from the traditional wedding shoe colours.

Yes, something exciting is happening down there, according to Ms Leonard. "We're seeing a lot of terrific platform and hidden platforms with a jewel accents," she says. The straps of the Christian Louboutin shoe (€710), for example, are covered with multicoloured crystals; the t-strap of the Nina Valeska bridal sandal (€70) features a line of rhinestones. The shoes of old Hollywood in the 1940s are also getting new attention, such as the Grazia Valentine Shoe (€170). Brides are going for what Ms Leonard calls "a personalised style statement."

Something broader

Even shoes for bridesmaids – who have traditionally served as a collective swath of colour for the ceremony rather than individual pieces of flare – are dipping into other options. "You don't have to do dyed to match any more," says Ms Leonard. "There are so many style options, such as using a different colour as an accent – and we're seeing prints and metallics, which allow the girls to wear the shoes again. We also like nudes, grays and beiges in patent leather colours to serve as accents to bright dresses." With so many choices on the market, this is where she feels the bride can really "get creative".

Many brides are leaving the creativity to the bridesmaids themselves, abandoning uniformity and instead allowing the attendants to select their own shoes. Indeed, whereas the last two generations of Clay family brides – Charlene and Dawn – chose a specific shoe for all of their bridesmaids and had the shoes dyed to match the dresses, Karen has set her bridesmaids free with two simple instructions: black and peep-toed.

Ms Buytkins supports this trend: "Allowing a girl to pick something she is most comfortable in makes for a happy bridesmaid, as well as happy bride. Shoes are very important for a long day on your feet, and if you are not comfortable chances are some of the pictures may reflect your scowl." Ms Leonard is equally enthusiastic about this trend, but cautions brides to – as Karen has done – provide some general guidelines regarding colour and style.

Bridal_Shoes.qxd 20/1/09 7:52 am Page 5



The sandal straps of the Daisy from Dyeables are gathered with a rhinestone.
CREDIT: DYEABLES

A rhinestone-studded t-strap distinguishes the Valeska shoe from Nina.
CREDIT: NINA

And why not two?

While colours are getting more liberal, some styles are quietly slipping back towards the comfort zone. "Comfort level is starting to be the most important feature in a shoe for many girls. Even if it means they may have to sacrifice some style for the added comfort," says Ms. Buytkins. "More and more brides are going for the better quality shoes, as opposed to the lesser quality ones."

That last point is particularly important: "This is one of the most important days of a woman's life; why spend it hobbling around?" she says. "Brides should choose a shoe that has internal padding, a brushed leather sole, and perhaps even something made of a silk fabric or silk/satin blend that will stretch and form to the foot better."

Grazie, Fillippa Scott, and Stuart Weitzman are among the brands she feels excel in offering such features. The Grace Wedding Shoe from Filippa Scott (€270) has brushed leather outsole, leather insock and lining, and concentrated padded ball and heel areas for comfort and moisture retention – without sacrificing the requisite style and elegance the day requires. "A sexy sandal may look stunning on your foot when sitting, but chances are once you stand up for a few hours your feet will be less then appealing and so will the shoes."

There are, of course, many brides who will not choose between style and comfort; these are the girls who are asking: Why be limited to one shoe? Ms Buytkins finds that "most brides who buy a 'vampy' high heel for the ceremony also opt to purchase a pair of adorable flats for the reception." Karen Clay's bridesmaids will be the beneficiaries of such pragmatism: the bride-to-be has purchased matching black flip-flops for her wedding party to change into following the ceremony.

And the bride wore...

So what about Karen's shoes? Did she go for the dyeable or the metallic? The bejeweled or the plain? The peep toe or the sandal? The stiletto or the pump? Was she ruled by style or cost or comfort? The answer is none of the above; instead, Karen chose sentimentality. For her wedding and the reception, Karen will be wearing white LaCoste flats with a small lime green alligator (the brand's logo) on one side of each shoe. "I am not sure my shoes will complement my ivory dress, but they are a tribute to my future husband's favourite clothing brand – LaCoste." She adds that the leather shoes are flat and comfortable, with padding inside. And, they fulfill what Miss Clay looks for in her day-to-day footwear choices: "comfortable shoes with a good story behind them".

So while her shoes elude nearly every template presented by wedding fashion experts, Karen's choice illustrates one of Ms Buytkin's descriptions of 2009's bridal shoe trends:"… definitely different from the classic bride we have seen for so many years."