



The gown, times two

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Wedding gowns have been getting grander and more colorful - and now they're multiplying. Instead of focusing on that one perfect gown, brides are buying two dresses: something grand and traditional for the ceremony, something perhaps a little sexier for the reception.

Marilyn Oliveira, senior editor of WeddingChannel.com, believes the practice was introduced by designer Vera Wang in the late '80s, when she wore three different gowns during her own wedding. "The trend really began to catch on with the general public after it was well publicized that Britney Spears changed into a short, sexy mini-dress for her own wedding reception in 2005," said Oliveira.

Marisa Achtner, a mortgage loan funder originally from Dix Hills, had two gowns for her April 21 wedding to Kyle Carmody of Carle Place. For the ceremony at Our Lady of Hope Church in Carle Place, she walked down the aisle in an ivory strapless corset-back gown with sweeping train, embroidered Swarovski crystals and lace. She called it her "Princess Bride" dress. For the reception at Jericho Terrace in Mineola, she changed to a slimmer gown. It was still very bridal - it was embroidered with Swarovski crystals and lace - but weighed 10 pounds less. "The difference is this one made it easy for me to move around and most importantly, dance," said Achtner, who now lives in Glen Head with her new husband. "I called this my 'sexy bride' dress."

Despite adding significantly to a wedding's bottom line, the two-dress trend seems fueled by brides' desire to look elegant and formal for the ceremony, while having comfort and freedom on the dance floor. Plus, some religious venues often require subdued designs, and brides may want to show a little more skin for their receptions. Destination weddings and casual reception venues also may warrant two dresses. Plus, there's the "wow" factor when a bride changes.

"The bride wants to feel comfortable at the reception and be able to move and not be restrained," said Linda Shaps-Shanin, a vice president at David's Bridal, a national chain of wedding shops. "Wedding gowns have a lot of slips and tulle," she said.

"The bride really doesn't want the day to end, and the party goes on quite long," said Nancy Aucone, owner of the Wedding Salon of Manhasset. "The wedding dress itself is not that comfortable for that many hours. And they like the idea of being on show twice."

As for the additional cost, Oliveira has found that brides who opt for two dresses generally spend the most on their formal gown, and buy a less-expensive gown for the reception. "Reception gowns tend to be simpler and more casual in style, which are less expensive in general," she said. "Plus, brides don't mind buying off-the-rack gowns that are extremely affordable for their 'second' dress."

Having two gowns for her 2005 wedding simply made the day better, said Dominique Galluzi, a former Manhasset resident who now lives in Manhattan and Westhampton. "It was a fairytale wedding to begin with, and to have two dresses just enhanced it," she said. For the ceremony at St. Ignatius Church in Manhattan, she wore a gown with a low V-back and a bustled train with ribbons and bows. "The beauty of the dress was the rear of it," she said. "Coming down that aisle and standing at the altar with all your guests behind you really made a statement."

But when she walked into her reception at the New York Athletic Club with her new husband, Michael Galluzzi, she had changed into an ivory strapless sheath with a flared bottom. As she danced to "Mack the Knife" with her dad, the dress flared dramatically at the bottom. "I was dancing and jumping," said the self-proclaimed party girl. "You never saw me pulling up my dress or being self-conscious. It was the most comfortable dress."

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