



Custom-Designed Dresses - The Dress of *Your Dreams* By Elsie Van Zyl

Elsie van Zyl had her first sewing machine at the early age of four, and considers it her destiny to design and refine the wedding gown. She believes that the designer should be a guide, helping the bride achieve the look she wants by generously sharing her skills and experience.

A hand-sewn, made-to-measure wedding dress is a representation of the highest standards of the couturier. It provides the bride with an opportunity that is rare in the modern world – to indulge in a garment made according to the standards of design, workmanship and service of the past.

Silk, tulle, satin and lace – mere yards of fabric to some, but to every bride these are at the heart of a romantic



dream – her wedding dress. The right dress must evoke emotions of happiness, joy and excitement – this is achieved when the bridal gown is being created, by the couturier who sums up the dreams and desires of the woman who is going to wear it.

The designer has never been afraid of the words 'pretty' and 'love', or mixing 'antique' with 'new', for a lavish "mix of countries and centuries." Many brides desire something simple but feminine, with a hint of nostalgia. A bride must feel good in her dress and her personality must shine through.

The bride must be intimately involved in the creative process of design, as it becomes a thoroughly satisfying, luxurious and not necessarily expensive adventure – without the turmoil of personally labouring over every stitch. Designing and working with exquisite fabrics is a delicate, exacting process that should not be undertaken by a novice. This is a dress that will not only be worn on a very special day but will also become an important memory. Hand-sewn work is a time consuming process; the best

fabrics are not inexpensive, but if a gown is to be a masterpiece, there is simply no other way to produce it.

Should you choose a custom-designed dress, you will need to meet with more than one designer. Based on your conversation and her references, you should leave with a sense of trust that they will be able to handle the workmanship in a timely fashion and that they will respect your ideas and fantasies – after all, it is your wedding gown.

Choosing the right wedding gown is an intensely emotional, personal and sentimental transaction – for even the most matter-of-fact bride, the diversity of choice should not be overwhelming; rather it should be empowering. However, good taste is not dictated by money, but is a manifestation of smart choices. Above all, follow in the tradition of the best custom designers – make a trial garment first to ensure a perfect fit. Then use your savings to splurge on the very best fabrics, trimmings and accessories – it's your wedding gown and you deserve the best.



C O U T U R I E R
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