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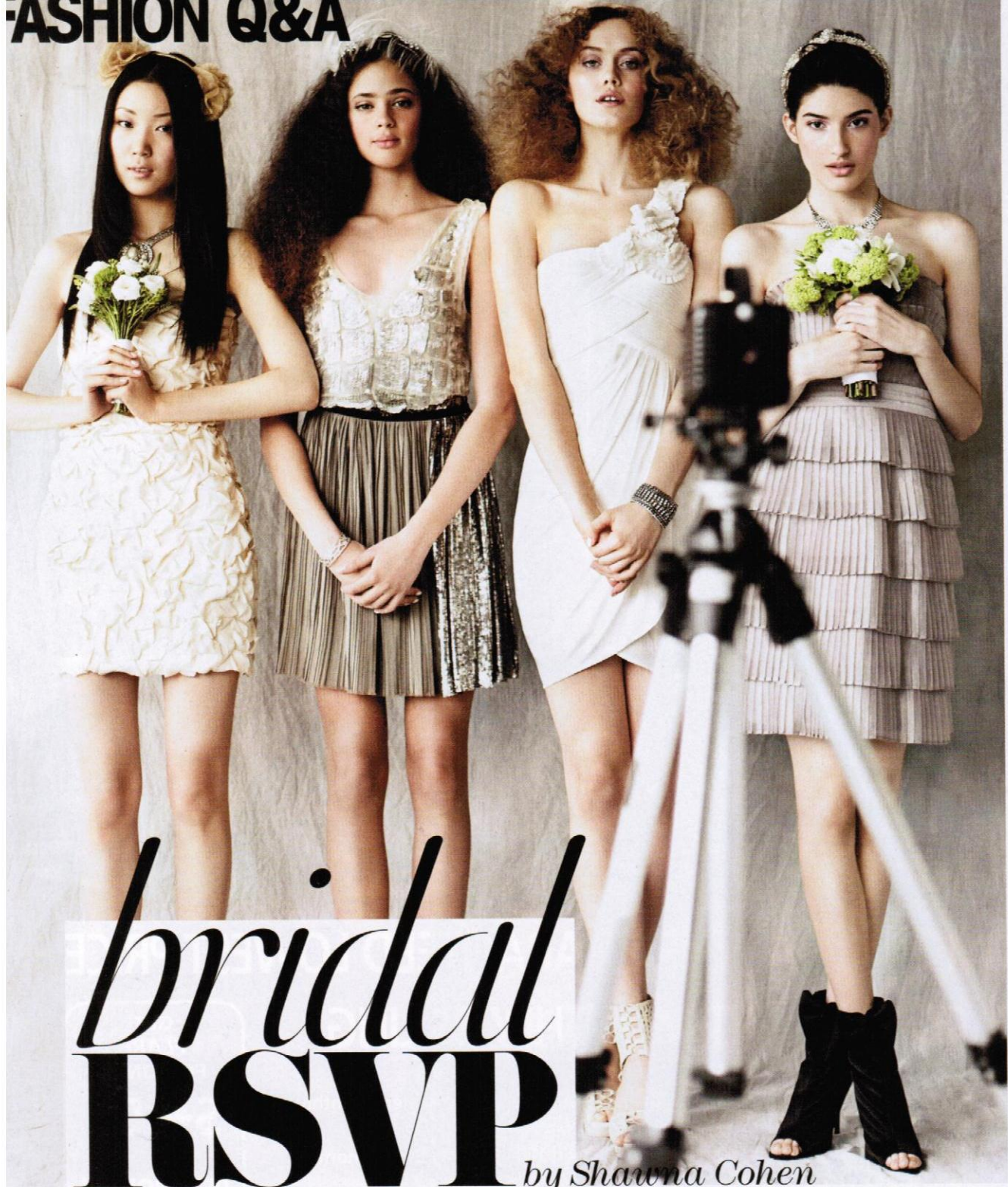
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bridal RSVP

by Shawna Cohen

Q: HOW CAN I CONVINCING THE BRIDE TO GIVE HER BRIDESMAIDS MORE OPTIONS?

A: Bridezillas—unpleasant, control-freak brides who more often than not will subject their BFFs to '80s-style ruffles and tragic colours such as seafoam green—are so last decade. Most brides today just want their bridesmaids to be happy and comfortable, and they're opting for chic pieces that can be worn again and again.

Andrea Anastasiou, owner of upscale bridal boutique

White Toronto, says the biggest trend she's seeing is bridesmaids having a voice in the selection process. "Brides are taking influence from [Vogue contributing editor] Lauren Santo Domingo—her bridal party did multiple colour palettes, from corals to pale lavender," she says. Many of Anastasiou's customers are choosing varying palettes as well, such as violets and grey-purples. Or, in other instances, bridesmaids are given a specific colour or fabric but are free to choose a style that best suits their body type. Black is always in (bridesmaid) fashion but a more modern and increasingly popular >

alternative is charcoal grey, which Anastasiou says is neutral but still gives a hint of colour. (Ditto navy.) And she recommends updating a pashmina or cardigan with a great leather jacket from Rick Owens or Mackage. (Bonus: It can be worn again with jeans—or anything, for that matter.)

Erin Nadler, fashion consultant and owner of Better Styled in Toronto, also suggests putting your own spin on your dress. For example, if the bride supplies full-length strapless dresses, have a seamstress shorten it to knee-length and use the extra fabric as a strap to make it a one-shoulder dress. “Always check with the bride first

to see how much leeway you have,” suggests Nadler, though most brides are happy to have their friends inject personality into a uniform look. In fact, some brides are giving out jewellery as a thank-you gift to their bridesmaids and then asking them to wear it on the big day. Anastasiou says that one client gifted Lanvin-inspired, long-strand pearls wrapped in different coloured ribbon to her bridal party (Toronto jewellery designer Cathy B Jewellery will even customize colours), while another opted for a pretty mix of chunky and thin Alexis Bittar bangles in resin, each infused with a dusting of sparkle. “It can dress up a basic dress and give it flair,” she says.



dancing). And, if you're in the wedding party, there's even more pressure to wear a uniform (a.k.a. bridesmaid's dress) while still conveying your own personal style.

To add to the confusion, couples are personalizing their weddings like never before. Gone are the days when all you had to do was view the invitation for a clear-cut dress code and location. Today, it's all about themed weddings and alternative venues, which could mean anything from restaurants to lofts to lakefront cottages, says Catherine Lash, founder and creative

director of Toronto bridal blog The Wedding Co. (theweddingco.com). In fact, Lash knows of one couple planning a black tie extravaganza in a barn. It's tongue-in-cheek, to be sure, but unless you're wearing leopard-print Manolos, animals and high-end fashion don't quite mix.

So what's a girl to do? First off, know what not to do. Don't wear white. Don't be too provocative. And don't try to outshine the bride. As celebrity stylist Phillip Bloch puts it: “Weddings are not the place to be experimental or too avant-garde with fashion. You're not the star of the show, but you can be a very well-dressed supporting actress.”

While Bloch is not opposed to Middleton's all-black ensemble—even bridal parties are wearing black these days—he offers some chic alternatives, especially for daytime. “Go for a rich jewel tone to avoid what could be construed as a faux pas: deep purple, emerald green, or navy, burgundy, chocolate brown—they all have the same slimming effect [as black],” he says.

The good news is that once-rigid dress codes have loosened over the years. “Cocktail is the new evening,” declares Bloch, whose client list includes Halle Berry and Jennifer Aniston. Nadler agrees that cocktail attire works for all occasions—even black tie—when glamorized with the right accessories. “It doesn't have to be just a great little dress. It could mean a fabulous tuxedo suit or a sequined skirt with a blouse. We're seeing a lot of sparkly tops being popped casually under a blazer,” she says. “Even a bolero thrown over your little black dress is perfect.”

One of the season's hottest trends >



Q: WHAT'S APPROPRIATE FOR A SUMMER WEDDING?

A: Kate Middleton grabbed headlines in the U.K. earlier this year when she wore black to a friend's late-afternoon wedding. Never mind that it was classy and elegant—an above-the-knee dress with a sheer neckline topped with a black velvet Libélula jacket and a pill-box hat—when you're royalty, wearing black to a wedding is a major faux pas. (Apparently it's meant for funerals only.)

Royalty or not, we're all familiar with the dilemma of what to wear to a wedding. Finding the right outfit requires serious planning: You want to look sexy yet appropriate, chic yet comfortable (especially if you plan on



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is colour-block dresses, which Nadler says is an ideal choice for weddings. Plus, it adds a welcome dose of colour. On the spring runways, everyone from Marc Jacobs to Dsquared2 used vibrant hues to break up the blacks and greys. On the other end of the spectrum is simple nude, which is always a safe bet. Bloch is a big fan of what he calls “the party girl dress”—something in a neutral shade with a full skirt and fitted bodice. His favourite designers for pulling off this look? Vera Wang, Badgley Mischka and Sue Wong, who adds a festive touch with beading and feathers. The key is to know your body and what works for you (if you’re an A-cup, for instance, you can wear a plunging neckline), and to be “suggestive” without revealing too much. “You’re going to a wedding, not a video shoot,” says Bloch. “You’re not Rihanna at the Grammys.”

The big question for many style-savvy women is what to wear to a

destination wedding—a huge trend right now—or to a more casual garden party soiree, where a cocktail dress might be too much but jeans would be not enough. For starters, remember that it’s better to be overdressed than underdressed (it’s easier to pull off the bling and hide it in your clutch than the other way around). When it comes to beach weddings, Nadler says you can’t go wrong with a long, breezy maxi dress accessorized with wood or coral bangles, or a printed wrap dress by Diane von Furstenberg. And, for an outdoor garden wedding, she recommends taking inspiration from Middleton and pulling out a hat: “Women don’t wear hats anymore but it’s a very cool thing to do!”

As with any occasion, as important as the dress itself are shoes. Sure, we all gravitate toward five-inch heels that make our legs look instantaneously longer and show off our calf muscles. But the reality is that we’re not sitting down for a leisurely dinner. More often than not, your job as a wedding guest is to dance and have fun. Bloch recommends a kitten heel, which will give you height without the hurt. But if you insist on killer heels, slip a pair of ballet flats into your bag for later in the evening (Lanvin’s slippers roll up in a little pouch). And, whatever you do, don’t go barefoot! □



CAROLINA HERRERA