

Yes, Virginia

THERE ARE MODEST WEDDING DRESSES

Even before she met the man of her dreams, Anne Booker decided she wanted to make her own wedding dress. "It seemed like a great way to have my dress be exactly what I wanted, completely unique, and I was excited for the challenge," she said.

Booker found a pattern in a fabric shop for her wedding dress before she'd even found a groom. "It was a 1930s vintage pattern," Booker said. "Modesty in general was very important to me. I think it was just so ingrained in me that it affected my decisions about the dress without my even realizing it."

While every bride-to-be may not be as handy with a Singer or needle and thread, there are high-quality options available for brides who are looking for something beyond the strapless or low-cut dresses prevalent in most boutiques and bridal shops.

DressOfALifetime.com is an online company that specializes in custom-made dresses. Owner Meredith Kolod started the company two years ago in reaction to her own wedding dress search. "I was very dissatisfied with what was out there. I wanted to give [brides] the option of having a more customized dress," Kolod said.

Dress of a Lifetime has an online catalog of dresses they can make, or a bride can combine a few patterns or sketch her own and have Dress of a Lifetime make it for her. A bride can also have a designer gown nearly replicated for a fraction of buying designer. "You've got these gorgeous gowns but brides can't afford them," Kolod commented. "We can't completely replicate designer gowns, but we can bring designer style and quality gowns at an affordable price."

Customer service at Dress of a Lifetime also is high priority. It's a small company that works with a few brides at a time and Kolod is available after hours. The average dress is

around \$750; time from approval of the dress design to delivery is six to ten weeks. "We send them the sketches to have them approved, free of charge. Usually we go back and forth several times. From there, after they approve and sign and date sketches, we can start making the gowns and picking the fabrics."

Wedding dresses, continued on page 17

Wedding Dress Tips

- Expect your wedding dress to be at least two sizes larger than your everyday clothes. "In regular clothes like jeans or tops, up one size is about two or three inches in the size," said Naomi Kearns of A Formal Choice. "In bridal gowns, there is only one inch in between sizes. I tell people please don't be alarmed, a bridal gown will be at least two sizes bigger than you wear in regular clothing."
- If a bride is ordering more than six months before the wedding, make the measurements a little bit larger. "It's always easier to alter smaller and we strongly suggest and recommend clients go to a professional seamstress to get measured," Meredith Kolod of DressOfALifetime.com said. "We make it from the measurements they send us. If they're wrong, after the dress is made, there is nothing we can do at that point."
- Almost every wedding dress needs alterations. "I usually recommend, for people who we're mailing dresses to, to inquire at their local dry cleaners," said Kearns. "Many have a seamstress on site. Most work on formal wear fabrics and have pretty good prices, better than going to a formalwear shop and using their seamstress."
- On a tight budget? Shop sample sales. David's Bridal has dresses for sale at \$99 and has a sleeve program where they will add in-set sleeves for \$39. Wear a white bridesmaid's dress. Wear your mom's dress. Consignment and thrift shops, friends' closets, ebay.com and craigslist.com also may have a dress you like. They're also good places to find reasonably priced accessories.