

Project Wedding Gown

Suffice to say your bridal gown is not just a dress, it's a creation. And as a creation it is comprised of several components culminating into one fantastic whole that speaks volumes about your personal style. Perhaps your gown has hung in the closet of your mind from as far back as you can remember and you know exactly how you'd like it to be. Or, maybe you're the type who consistently leans towards a particular style and would like to select something that is clearly different from what you usually wear-meaning if you live in tank tops this may be a good time to at least *try on* something new. You may be pleasantly surprised to learn that your slinky self looks equally as great in a *princess-line* or even an *asymmetrical*. And depending on what you would like to highlight, (you know those random body parts we secretly treasure, but will rarely admit) neck, collarbones, shoulders etc., there is a bodice and neckline made especially for you. You simply have to be willing to get out there and try on!

And once you get started you'll find that the issue of sleeves is a rather important one as well. For example, if your style is to keep things very simple, you may find that the bell sleeve, which is fitted over the bicep and flares slightly outward (like a bell) over the forearm, adds interest and something special to a simpler, classic and unadorned gown. Or, if you're not happy with your arms, you might look to *illusion* sleeves as a way to detract from this area while you highlight something else. For a more casual and natural look you may opt for the *bishop*- slender over the upper arm, the bishop extends into a roomier, puffier look over the forearm and closes at the wrist. Check out the different styles of bodices, necklines and sleeves to see which style would best work for you!

Bodice Styles

The bodice of your dress features your body from chest to waist, so look carefully at what you'd like to accent with these types of bodice styles, and use your pink highlighter pen to circle the types you think would look great on you. Again, be open to something different, since a previously-untried style might be perfect, and exploring the different bodice styles will help you define (and purchase!) your perfect bridal gown style.

- ∞ *Asymmetrical*: The fabric covers one shoulder, or attaches over one shoulder with a strap, leaving the other shoulder bare.
- ∞ *Corset*: Hugs tight against the body with hook, snap or laced back securing. The bodice can be strapless or strapped, criss-cross strapped or braid-strapped.
- ∞ *Empire*: (*pronounced* ahm-peer): Fitted at the chest, then fabric hangs straight down under the bustline for a *Shakespeare in Love* look. A very romantic look, and one favored by pregnant brides and bridesmaids.
- ∞ *Midriff*: Reaches just down to below the ribs, baring your stomach.
- ∞ *Princess-line*: Lined with two vertical seams that angle over the breastline down to the hem.

- ∞ *Surplice*: Fabric is crossed in the front or the back, sometimes twisted for extra effect. You've seen this on *Project Runway*, a very sexy look and an artistic use of fabric.
- ∞ *Tank*: Just like a tank top, this one is sleeveless with thin or thick straps.

Neckline Styles

Look back at your answers in Chapter 1 to assess your personal style answers for your wardrobe. What neckline is your signature style? A rounded neckline? A high neckline? A halter? Define your wedding dress style by highlighting the necklines that look best on you, circling ones you'd like to try on in person, and crossing out the ones that are not your style. Some brides love to show off their great shoulders or collarbones, so it's their style to wear strapless. After each definition, write down the words that come to mind, any memories of favorite tops or dresses that garnered compliments or made you feel terrific, even the type of top you had on when you met your fiancé.

- ∞ *Bateau*: Straps are at mid-shoulders with the fabric reaching in a gentle dip across the chest and back.
- ∞ *Halter*: Like a halter top or bikini top, it ties around the back of the neck. The depth of back bareness is up to you, and it can be worn with a V-neck or rounded neckline.
- ∞ *High collar*: The chest and base of the neck are covered by fabric. Sometimes a high collar is accented with a keyhole cutout at the chest through which a piece of jewelry shows.
- ∞ *Jewel*: A rounded neckline right at the base of the throat
- ∞ *Off-the-shoulder*: The shoulders are bare, with fabric wrapping around the upper arms. Your length can be short, with your arms showing, or full length with fabric to the wrists.
- ∞ *Portrait*: Off-the-shoulder, with the neckline scooping down into a more rounded cut.

- ∞ *Sabrina*: See *bateau*.
- ∞ *Scoop*: A rounded neckline, like the bottom half of a circle.
- ∞ *Strapless*: No straps. Just really good alterations and a good bra. The neckline can go straight across, or dip down in a curved design.
- ∞ *Square*: Your straps come straight down to a vertical line of fabric across your chest, presenting a square shape. Again, sleeves can be short or long.
- ∞ *Sweetheart*: Rounded fabric over each breast, meeting in a V-neck point in the middle. Its heart shape is the basis for its name, and this is a favorite of brides and bridesmaids with larger chests.
- ∞ *V-neck*: Your choice of delicate V-neck like your favorite tee shirt, or a more plunging sexy V-neck in a point downwards at the chest.

Sleeves

Here you'll find the keywords and vocabulary that will allow you to communicate with your gown stylist. As you did with the necklines, highlight those styles that interest you, and write down any notes such as which sleeve styles would accent your arms in the way you desire.

- * *Balloon*: Fitted over the forearm, but puffy and balloon-ish over the upper arm and shoulder. See the image at www.weddingsolutions.com before you picture something cartoonish. It's actually quite pretty and Cinderella-ish.
- * *Bell*: Fitted over the bicep and then flares slightly outward (like a bell) over the forearm. This detail adds interest and something special to a simpler, classic and unadorned gown.
- * *Bishop*: Slender over the upper arm, then extends into a roomier, puffier look over the forearm and closes at the wrist. A very casual and natural look.
- * *Capped*: A short extension to a sleeveless look, with just a narrow band of fabric wrapping above the shoulder. Ideal if you're very happy with the shape of your arms, since the band at the shoulder would bring attention to bigger upper arms.

* *Illusion*: Sheer netting-type material that forms a see-through sleeve yet offers ‘the illusion’ of coverage. If you’re not happy with your upper arms, this type of sleeve may be for you. It’s a delicate, pretty look, and it can be accented with lace at the edges.

* *Juliet*: A full sleeve extending down to the wrist, with a ‘puff’ accent at the shoulder and upper arm. Again, see the illustration.

* *Off the Shoulder*: Wraps across the upper arms, leaving the shoulders bare.

* *Petal*: The short sleeves are made of two to three different panels that overlap to look like a tulip in bloom.

* *Poet*: Fitted close over the upper arm, and then flares out widely from the elbow, with long ruffles at the wrist length. It’s called the ‘poet,’ because it’s reminiscent of the Shakespearean era. This sleeve has a heritage feeling, movement and flow, and is a romantic accent to a traditional gown.

* *Spaghetti straps*: A strapless dress is held up by a skinny strap or fabric band over each shoulder.

* *Tee shirt*: Extending three to four inches below your shoulders, this sleeve type resembles the traditional tee shirt sleeve cut

* *Three-quarter*: Extending from the shoulder to mid-forearm

Remember too that if you are a lover of lace your wedding gown is a perfect place to put it. Lace, romantic and elegant comes in a wide array, so do your homework and become acquainted with all your choices so you can select just the right touch as you endeavor to create your own bridal style.

BEGIN SIDEBAR

All About Lace

Is lace a vision in your wedding dream? Your gown, sleeves or train might be accented by lace, layered over fabric with it, or edged with lace. Sleeves may also be made of lace, and some daring brides cover their midriffs only with a layer of slightly skin-revealing lace. Look at the floral designs of Alençon, Chantilly, and the more 3D Duchesse, the larger and more graphic designs of Guipure, the intricate and refined Schiffli, bolder rose-motif Spanish lace, heavier and more textured Venise with geometrics or leaf patterns.

Using this vocabulary, you'll know what to ask for in the bridal shop or in a fabric store, which combines sight and touch in a way that helps define your bridal style. You might fall in love with a texture.

END SIDEBAR

Ultimately you'll want to become aquatinted with styles and terminology so that you'll be better prepared to communicate with your stylist. The more you know the less likely you will be to end up with something that you really don't want and that doesn't suit you. After all, the idea is to create something that is meaningful to you and that reflects your own unique style.

Sharon Naylor's newest book is *What's Your Bridal Style*, co-written with Casey Cooper of Botanicals Inc. in Chicago. This book outlines the NEW first step in wedding planning, helping you to define your style before you talk to any of your wedding vendors. Look for it at www.sharonnaylor.net and www.botanicalschicago.com.