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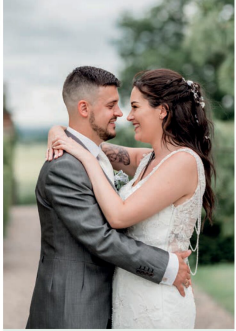

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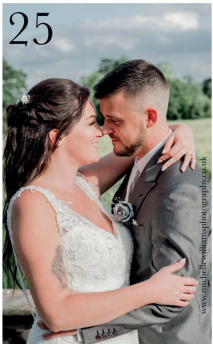

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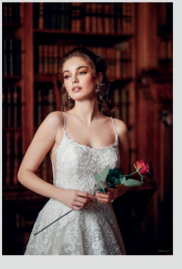

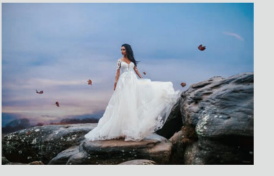

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ISSN 1759-4723

kd EVENTS & PUBLISHING cwe COUNTY WEDDING EVENTS

All I want for Christmas is you

www.chrisblackledgephotography.co.uk

Can you believe it's that time of year again? After everything we've all been through in the last two years, I think we all deserve to relax and what better time than Christmas/New Year? This festive season feels strange to me as it's my last as a Miss. I'm getting married in July 2022, and the countdown is officially on. Everything is booked and I'm starting to get excited and nervous about the idea of walking down the aisle. I love writing about your weddings and sharing your stories with our wonderful region, and it's given me some great ideas for my own big day and is helping keep my nerves in check!

The December/January issue has always been my favourite, and we've gone all out to create an issue full of inspirational weddings, transport ideas, make-up tips and gorgeous venues.

To be featured in the magazine, email me at melissab@kdmediapublishing.com or via our website www.yourwestmidlands.wedding/get-involved-real-wedding

Merry Christmas and happy New Year!

Melissa x

Melissa Barker, Editor

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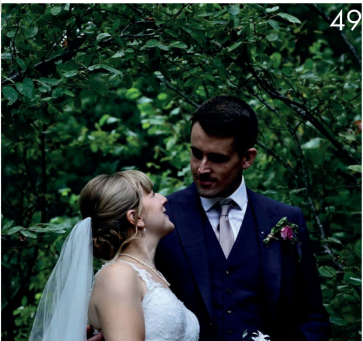

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- If you have children, your ceremony content can include them too
- You can personalise your ceremony as much or as little as you like
- We can provide examples of the above - but the choice is all yours!

Our team will ensure your ceremony runs smoothly including advising on any practical issues, this might include what happens if it's raining on the day and taking care of guest safety. There's also the added reassurance that comes from entrusting a large team of respected and skilled celebrants to organise and officiate at your ceremony.

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ESPECIALLY FOR YOU

Antona At Home, created by *Bake Off: The Professionals* finalist Bharat Chandegra, has launched a range of luxury Michelin starred Christmas hampers. Founded in the wake of Covid when restaurants were unable to trade, Antona At Home fulfilled a new demand for excellent restaurant-quality meals delivered to your home. During lockdown, it flourished, and the chefs' Michelin meal boxes sold out week after week. As restaurants reopened, Antona At Home evolved and now boasts a home delivery service, an artisan chocolate and patisserie company and a soon-to-launch bespoke catering and events business.

The hampers are perfect for a wedding guest who has gone above and beyond or as a gift for the happy couple. Each one contains cherry and chocolate macarons, mince pie bonbons, chocolate and orange cake, praline and milk chocolate spread, nougat, festive cookies and cinnamon candles.

Head over to www.antonaathome.co.uk for more information.

Nearlywed NEWS

All the latest from around the West Midlands

CAKE EXPECTATIONS

To celebrate the wonderful job that the emergency services has done for our country during the Coronavirus pandemic, Cake Fantastique kindly offered all NHS staff a 25 discount during the height of the pandemic. This gorgeous cake pictured was made for an NHS couple who booked their day during the first lockdown.

Based in Worcestershire, Cake Fantastique is a small family-run business run by Samantha, who has a passion for creating cakes. "I endeavour to create fresh bakes with the best ingredients available all within your budget," says Samantha. "I'm fully registered and insured, and orders can be placed online, over the phone or in person. We offer a wide variety of flavours, and all our creations are vegetarian and nut-free unless otherwise specified."

To find out more, visit www.cakefantastique.com

A WINTER GLOW

Hoar Cross Hall, a grand wedding venue in Staffordshire, has launched a limited-edition Winter Glow Spa Day. The Winter Glow Treatments are the perfect antidote to an increasingly fast-paced life. The soothing 60-minute treatment helps to eliminate stress and increases endorphins as you breathe in warming scents of winter spice and exotic citrus and cocoon in a luxurious moisturising wrap infused with sweet mandarin and lime. Leave your winter aches and pains behind as the spa's expert therapists carry out a rejuvenating facial and relaxing scalp massage featuring comforting seasonal aromas. To round off your day, explore the rest of the spa's varied and extensive facilities in a cosy bathrobe, and enjoy a leisurely three-course lunch as you relax the day away.

For the ultimate relaxation escape, Hoar Cross Hall is offering guests the Winter Glow Spa Stay. Guest can opt to experience one of Hoar Cross Hall's luxurious hotel suites. During your stay, you can enjoy full access to the spa and spend the evening dining like royalty in the AA Rosette-awarded Grand Ballroom.

Both experiences are available until the end of January 2022. To find out more, visit www.baronseden.com/hoar-cross-hall

NEW VENUE ALERT!

Oakfield Gardens and Events is new wedding venue in the grounds of Worcester-based The River School.

Pete Graham, the business manager at Oakfield Gardens and Events, said: "We're so delighted to have launched this fabulous initiative. The grounds at The River School are so beautiful and will lend themselves to both wedding and corporate events with both inside and outside spaces available."

Brides and grooms-to-be will benefit from their own wedding co-ordinator and a package – entitled the Honeycomb Package because there are seven on-site beehives – which includes two giant tipis, warm white lighting, bamboo candle lanterns, two flambeaux fires, a dancefloor, tables and chairs, a fully staffed bar and luxury toilets. Extras include personalised honey jars, hay bales and photo booths.

Adrian Parsonage, the headteacher of The River School, said: "Our school grounds have long been cherished and nurtured by our school community. Opening them up to the wider public has always been part of our plans, and we're thrilled that this has come to fruition."

For more information, visit www.oakfieldgardens.co.uk

JUST ONE SLICE

Jackie Diamond Cake Design, based in Warwickshire, is offering all bookings placed before the end of January 2022 free favour cookies for the top table. Jackie creates quirky and traditional handmade wedding and celebration cakes. Each design is made to suit the customer's personality, tastes and budget.

If you'd like to meet Jackie and see more of her work, she'll be exhibiting at The National Wedding Fayre (www.nationalweddingfayre.co.uk) at the CBS Arena in Coventry on 19th and 20th February, 2022.

Check out www.facebook.com/jackiediamondcakes for more.

MUSICAL SAVINGS

Staffordshire-based harpist Helen Barley is running a special discount for couples who book her carbon fibre harp. "The harp sounds amazing and is so easy to transport," says Helen. "It makes my life much easier, so I've decided to offer couples their ceremony music for the special price of £200. This includes music for guests to enter and wait, the bride's entrance, a song as part of the ceremony in place of a reading, during the signing of the register and for the exit of the happy couple. It also includes a free home consultation to help you choose your music.

"I'm a graduate of the Royal Manchester College of music and working with a group of autistic children led me to buy a small harp as an experiment. Both the children and I completely fell in love with the harp, and so a period of intensive training followed, including lessons from some of the country's top harpists. I now play with several local orchestras and enjoy singing at weddings and other functions. I cover many different genres of music and offer a wide range of styles in my repertoire. I also teach the harp and am the director of the successful 12-strong Dudley Harp Ensemble."

Please note the offer is unavailable on bank holidays.

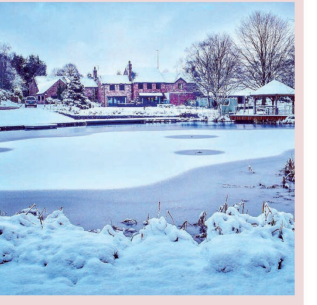
Discover more at www.helenbarley.co.uk

WINTER RELAXATION

Moddershall Oaks Country Spa Retreat in Staffordshire has launched a new Winter Wonders Spa Package. Encouraging guests to take time to chill with loved ones this winter, the seasonal package provides the perfect balance of festivity and relaxation for guests. Available as a spa day and break, the limited-edition package is available throughout December, January and February.

Guests will be spoilt for choice with access to the award-winning indoor and outdoor spa facilities. Whether you prefer to snuggle up in front of the crackling fire in the peaceful relaxation lounge or soak up the crisp winter air in the outdoor vitality spa pool, heated to a toasty 38 degrees, there is something for everyone. Making use of their spa experience, you can also relish in the experience showers, 10m swimming pool, Kelo sauna, hydrotherapy pool, heated loungers, reflexology footbaths and enjoy the new 20-minute Winks of Wonder massage.

Guests on the spa day package can enjoy an indulgent two-course lunch in the newly refurbished restaurant. For those who have chosen to indulge in the Winter Wonders Spa Break, will enjoy the spa facilities and check into a luxurious five-star suite before enjoying a scrumptious two-course evening meal. After a night of deep relaxation, you will awaken to a freshly cooked breakfast in the restaurant before checkout. On the day of departure, the spa facilities are open for guests to enjoy last-minute relaxation until 4:30pm.



Visit www.moddershalloaks.com for more information.

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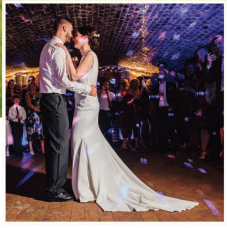

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"You can book in to come and visit my dress suite with your maids where you will have full access," says owner Katie. "We will provide you with one-on-one tutorials on how to wrap your gowns, and I will find a style to suit everyone. Our service works on an appointment-only basis, so to book, get in touch via Facebook or email me at sales@katesdresses.co.uk"

We've teamed up with Kates Dresses to offer our readers an exclusive 10% discount. To receive this fab offer, simply enter the code 'YWMW' on the website when purchasing. Valid until 28th February, 2022.

To find out more about Kates Dresses and to see the full range of dresses, visit www.katesdresses.co.uk

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The team at hampers.com is giving County Wedding Magazines readers the chance to win a Luxury Food & Wine Basket worth £115. The beautiful wicker basket is packed full of tasty snacks and moreish treats for nearlyweds to share together. The stars of the show are an excellent bottle of Prosecco, and a full-bodied Argentinian Malbec from the Gauchezco Estate, paired with award-winning cheese, hand-baked biscuits, and luxury Belgian chocolates.

For your chance to win enter via our website, and for more details about hampers.com and it's range of delecatble gifts for the wedding day and beyond visit www.hampers.com

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For more information on celebrating your wedding at Lilleshall House & Gardens, please contact us on 01952 603003 or enquiries.lilleshall@serco.co.uk

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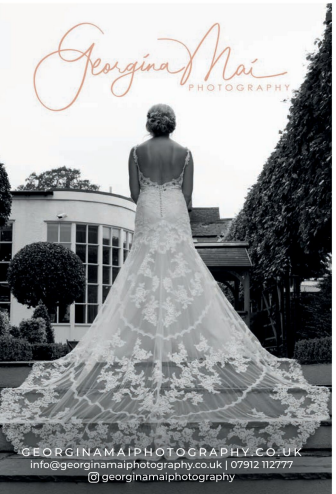

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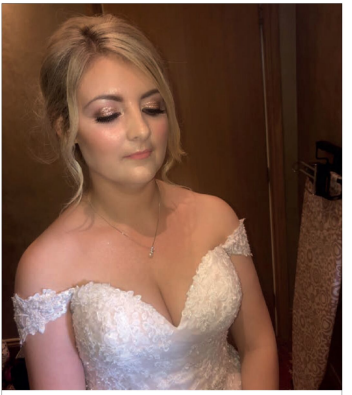

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MAKE-UP ARTIST

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Spotlight on...

HEREFORDSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE & SHROPSHIRE

SAFARI VENUES, DY12 1LF

01299 406 460 | www.safarivenues.co.uk

Set within the grounds of West Midland Safari Park, Safari Venues is home to three gorgeous wedding locations, each one lavish and filled with traditional decorations. Experience animal encounters, special safari-inspired gifts and a four-mile safari drive-through, which can be incorporated into wedding celebrations.

Celebrate in style

Spring Grove House, a Georgian manor, is the perfect location for an elegant wedding. Set within the scenic grounds of the Safari Park, it has built its well-deserved reputation on impeccable service, luxury menu selections and attention to detail. There are a variety of rooms to cater for all numbers, including the use of a private bar and lounge facilities. Equally impressive are the grounds, comprising of beautifully landscaped gardens and a spacious private terrace.

For large wedding celebrations, Treetops Pavilion is big, bold and beautiful. As one of the most exclusive wedding venues in Worcestershire, it will create a magical atmosphere. Its vast proportions and capacity make it one of the largest entertainment facilities in the county, perfect for civil ceremonies, wedding breakfasts and evening receptions.

Nestled beneath the grandness of Spring Grove House is Cellarz, a intimate, brick-vaulted venue with an impressive atmosphere. Rich in character with a current and contemporary style, Cellarz has its own chic bar area, dancefloor and cosy alcoves, which can be hired as part of Spring Grove House or separately.

We love...

The wedding team offer bespoke wedding packages and the opportunity to work directly with the on-site chefs to create the perfect menu.

LILLESHALL HOUSE AND GARDENS, TF10 9AT

01952 603 003 | www.lilleshallhouse.co.uk/weddings

Nestled in secluded surroundings in the Shropshire countryside, Lilleshall House and Gardens were built in 1831. It was the former home and hunting lodge of the Duke of Sutherland and overlooks the Grade II listed Capability Brown-inspired gardens. There are plenty of places to take photographs, including the Golden Gates, which are the exact replicas of those adorning Buckingham Palace and the 70-foot high obelisk. This grand stately heritage site boasts historical features with oak-panelled walls in the reception area, original fireplaces and decorative ceilings in the 29 newly refurbished bedrooms.

Celebrate in style

The Duke of Sutherland Room is a traditional oak-panelled space that's formerly the dining room of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland. It has a feature fireplace and bay windows overlooking the beautiful gardens with room for 60 guests.

After the ceremony, receptions are held in Chapters, the Duke of Sutherland's former library, which features oak-panelled walls and a fireplace.

We love...

W-day couples will receive a complimentary bridal suite on the night of the wedding, and friends and family can relax in one of the newly-renovated bedrooms.

THE ORCHARD AT MUNSLEY, HR8 2SQ

07974 249 656 | www.theorchardatmunsley.co.uk

The owners of The Orchard at Munsley tied the knot at the property in 2010 and launched it as a wedding venue in September 2019. Situated in an apple orchard in the heart of Herefordshire, the venue overlooks a beautiful old church and duck pool. It oozes rustic charm, scenery and peaceful surroundings that are perfect for taking photographs.

Celebrate in style

Bespoke packages can be tailored to suit couples ideas and budgets or there are three set options available. The team provide a stocked and manned bar as well as organise the basics, including the tipi/marquee, the generator for power supply and toilets. Lovebirds will work closely with a wedding planner who offers a planning option or on-the-day coordination. Couples who wish to have a church wedding can get married at Munsley Church and then stroll down the drive to The Orchard.

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KARMA SALFORD HALL, WR11 8UT

01386 871 300 | www.karmagroup.com

Karma Salford Hall is a beautiful Grade I listed manor house that retains its Tudor charm with stained-glass windows, a bell tower and historic engraving into Cotswold stone. Set in manicured gardens and nestled amid rolling hills and farmland, the property has a quintessentially English feel with new and period furnishings creating a traditional yet contemporary setting. Once the guest home for the monks of Evesham Abbey and later owned by King Henry VIII, the building is steeped in history and old-world charm with grand fireplaces, wood panelling and oil paintings.

When Charles Stanford married Elenor Alderford, he marked the occasion by gifting her a bell that hung in the belfry for four centuries before being stolen in the 1980s. It later turned up, being offered at auction. The owners of the hall at that time bought it back and returned it to the tower, where it remains today.

Celebrate in style

There are several spaces available for weddings, including the Walled Garden, which can accommodate 100 loved ones for the service and the Tudor Court Lawn with room for 60.

Large receptions are held in the Marquee, which has space for 100 friends and family. Intimate celebrations take place in either the Tempest Restaurant, that can hold 40 nearest and dearest, or the Palm Court Conservatory with room for 16.

We love...

The happy couple will have access to the bridal suite on the night of the wedding and receive a menu tasting.

HAWKSTONE HALL & GARDENS, SY4 5UZ

01630 685 242 | www.hawkstonehall.co.uk

Hawkstone Hall & Gardens is a Grade I listed 18th-century mansion that's a vision of Georgian elegance. The venue encompasses 88 acres of countryside, rolling hills and ancient trees. At the front of the property are breathtaking views of the Shropshire countryside and to the rear are gardens featuring a lily pond, rose garden, apple orchard, trees and stew pond with waterfalls.

Inside is a collection of historic features, beautifully complemented by modern touches. There are plush fabrics throughout, the ceilings are gilded with gold, and original artwork adorns the walls, all with an Art Deco twist.

Guests can enjoy a private film screening in the cave, which boasts a flat-screen TV, PlayStation 4, pool table, darts board and arcade game with its own lounge area.

Celebrate in style

There are several spaces available for the ceremony. The Chapel, a grand room, can accommodate 170 guests while The Ballroom can hold 150.

The Tapestry has a period marble arch and stunning views with room for 100 loved ones, and The Saloon has gold gilded ceilings, original artworks and space for 150 people.

Receptions are held in The Refectory. Boasting a glittering dancefloor, personalised lighting and a private bar, it can accommodate 200 nearest and dearest.

We love...

The Bridal Preparation Wing is complimentary the night before the wedding, with individual make-up stations, a personal butler, 15 large sash windows and beds for everyone. Couples will also receive a menu tasting and exclusive use of the venue.

DOVECLIFF HALL

COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL

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Dovecliff Hall Hotel is a Grade II listed property situated in Burton on Trent, Staffordshire which offers the perfect backdrop for weddings all year round.

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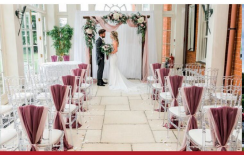

DOVECLIFF ROAD, STRETTON, BURTON UPON TRENT, STAFFORDSHIRE, D13 0DJ
www.dovecliffhallhotel.co.uk | enquiries@dovecliffhallhotel.co.uk | 01283 531818 | Facebook & Instagram @dovecliffhall

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www.lovethatphotographic.co.uk

BOURTON HALL, CV23 9QZ

01926 940 900 | www.bourton-hall.co.uk

Bourton Hall is an Italianate mansion set within 15 acres of lawns, gardens and woodland. Offering extensive views across Warwickshire's countryside, the property has all the charm, elegance and grandeur needed to create the perfect wedding. Outside is a sandstone ashlar, a romantic balcony, and two large three-story canted bays that give the notion of a fairytale castle. Guests will be impressed as they step foot in the door and see the large reception hall with the original feature grand staircase set underneath two stunning glass cupolas that fill the space with natural light.

Perched on a ridge above the Leam Valley, the main terrace is perfect for enjoying cocktails in the afternoon sun while appreciating the expansive views. Those that venture out into the grounds will find hidden gems around every turn, including an original feature Italianate pond. Just 10 miles South East of Coventry and 25 miles North West of Northampton, Bourton Hall offers a secluded country setting in an easily accessible position.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

For an unforgettable ceremony, choose between the former Catholic chapel, the grand Italian Room or under The Portico.

The Italianate former Catholic chapel provides an idyllic backdrop for your civil ceremony, complete with an ornately carved wood and gold leaf ceiling, and seating for up to 120 guests.

Alternatively, choose to wed in the Italian Room, with a crystal chandelier, ornate ceiling and double-height sash windows, it's the perfect choice for a more intimate affair.

On sunnier days, The Portico, which adjoins the Italian Room, provides the perfect outdoor ceremony setting for couples to exchange their vows.

The Banqueting Hall seats up to 120 guests and is ideal for the wedding reception. Boasting extensive views across rolling countryside to the Draycote Water beyond, guests can enjoy a cocktail in the Chandelier Bar, relax in the Lounge or dance the night away in the Draycote Bar & Disco. Both bars are fully stocked with draft lagers, ales and ciders.

WE LOVE...

Throughout the year, Bourton Hall holds exclusive dinner dates as well as a winter ball. This allows couples to come and enjoy a three-course meal and stay overnight in one of the delightful main house bedrooms.

www.lovethatphotographic.co.uk

BLITHFIELD LAKESIDE BARNS, WS15 3NY

07508 194 992 | www.blithfieldlakesidebarns.co.uk

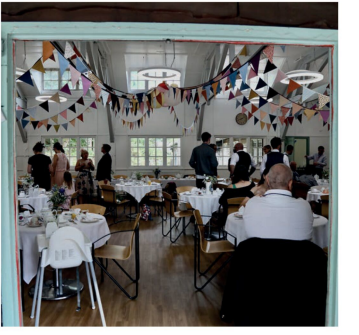
Accessible via a 1km long driveway, Blithfield Lakeside Barns is a working farm with plenty of privacy and luscious grounds. Overlooking the Blithfield Reservoir, the glass-fronted property has a large patio, wood cladding to the side of the barn and a large car park to the rear.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

Couples tie the knot in the Lakeside Wedding Barn. Finished with whitewash walls, exposed beams and a neutral décor throughout, it can accommodate 180 seated guests, but there is also a marquee available for larger celebrations.

WE LOVE...

Accommodation for 32 friends and family is included in the wedding packages, and couples will also receive exclusive use of the property between Friday and Monday.



BOUNDLESS WEDDINGS, BELL HEATH, DY9 9UU

01684 574 546 | www.boundlessevents.co.uk

Situated within an area of natural beauty, Boundless Weddings, Bell Heath is the perfect location for a private countryside celebration whilst remaining within easy reach of transport networks. Set amidst 20 acres of beautiful woodland there are endless areas to explore and take photographs. This property is a blank canvas that's ideal for couples looking to add their own touch to the big day.

Accommodation for up to 80 guests is included in the hire price, and there is a range of on-site activities to keep everyone entertained, including zip wires, climbing, archery and more.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

Blessings can take place at any location within the centre or grounds. With rolling countryside and wooded areas, couples can create their own magical space in which to say their vows or use the main hall before it's transformed for the reception.

WE LOVE...

The woodlands are perfect for an outdoor wedding, evening campfires and roasting marshmallows under a starlit sky.

Discover Your Perfect Day

Set in the heart of historic Lichfield, The George Hotel is a charming 18th century coaching inn which offers a delightful setting for civil ceremonies and wedding receptions of up to 110 guests.

All Inclusive Wedding Package

Our All Inclusive Wedding Package starts at £3,750 in 2022 and £4,000 in 2023 and includes a welcome drink, a three course meal with a glass of sparkling wine for the toasts, an evening finger buffet, room hire, complimentary overnight stay for the couple and much more!

Based on 50 adult day guests and 80 adult evening guests.

Wedding Open Day

Sunday 20th February 2022

11am to 2pm | Free Entry

See just how lovely your wedding day could be

★★★

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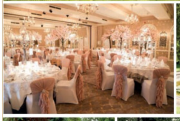
www.thegeorgelichfield.co.uk



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Moor Hall Hotel & Spa is a 4* country house hotel, full of character and set in beautiful grounds.
Our family-owned venue is the perfect venue for your civil ceremony, outdoor wedding and wedding reception for up to 180 guests.

Our Silver Wedding Package starts at £114 per person in 2022 and £125 per person in 2023 and includes a welcome drink, a four course meal with half a bottle of wine per person, a glass of sparkling wine for the toasts, an evening finger buffet, room hire, complimentary overnight stay for the couple and much more!

Wedding Open Day

Sunday 2nd January 2022
11am to 2pm | Free Entry
See what how lovely your wedding day could be

Wedding Fair

Sunday 27th February 2022
11am to 3pm with a fashion show at 1pm | Free Entry
Be inspired with ideas from our wedding suppliers

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MOOR HALL HOTEL & SPA, B75 6LN

0121 308 3751 | www.moorhallhotel.co.uk

Moor Hall Hotel & Spa is a country house hotel set at the end of a long tree-lined drive. The sunken garden is a magical setting with a double-stone staircase, fountain feature centrepiece, Victorian grottos and space for 180 guests for the vows. There are plenty of places to take photographs, including the sweeping lawns, natural woodlands and beautiful gardens.

The venue's new wedding preparation suite is an elegant space, ideal as a base for the bride or groom as they prepare for their big day. The room has a double bed and sofa bed, large mirrors with lots of lighting and plenty of dressing table space for a make-up artist. There's also a connection room so the bridesmaids can sleepover too.

There's also a modern and relaxing spa that can be used for pre-wedding treatments. The facilities include an indoor pool with a spa bath, a sauna and steam room, a refurbished gym and four treatment rooms.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

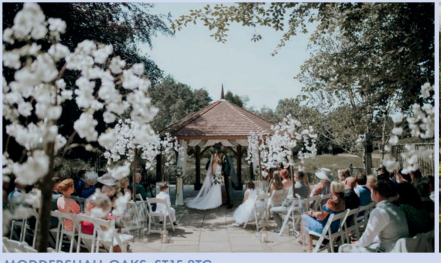
The Charter Suite is an elegant and spacious ground-floor room with its own direct entrance from the car park, a separate bar and views of the gardens. It can cater for up to 180 loved ones for the service and breakfast and 250 for the evening reception.

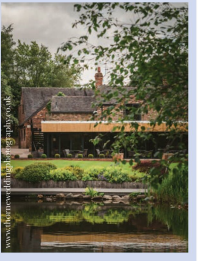
Alternatively, The Bracebridge Room and Longmoor Room are located on the first floor and can both hold up to 60 friends and family.

Receptions can take place in The Charter Suite or The Oak Room Restaurant, both offer sweeping views over the surrounding parkland and can accommodate 60 nearest and dearest.

WE LOVE...

The bride and groom will receive an overnight stay and menu tasting.





MODDERSHALL OAKS, ST15 8TG

01782 399 000 | www.moddershalloaks.com

Designed with a contemporary feel in mind, Moddershall Oaks has a state-of-the-art sound system, Swarovski crystal lighting, hand-made Italian glass chandeliers, a glass bar and moveable walls. Situated in the heart of Staffordshire, the venue sits on the water's edge and is surrounded by acres of stunning countryside. This warm and inviting property has a fresh and neutral décor throughout that's ideal for couples looking to add personal touches.

CELEBRATE IN STYLE

Weddings take place outside by the water's edge under the handmade gazebo or indoors in a space that will wow guests. The Courtyard, adjacent to the venue, is often used in the evening as a lovely break out space for guests to retreat to should they need to rest their dancing feet. It features a wishing well, a fish pond with a waterfall, seating, umbrellas and heaters.

WE LOVE...

Included in all wedding packages is a luxurious spa retreat on the night of the wedding. The happy couple will enjoy a bottle of champagne after a delicious cooked breakfast while relaxing in the heated outdoor vitality pool or the private hot tub (available exclusively to overnight guests only).

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CHILDHOOD *sweethearts*

Sarah and Matt have been together for 10 years and celebrated their love with a romantic celebration at Hoar Cross Hall

Images courtesy of Michelle Williams Photography

Sarah and Matt met when they were 15 and 16 years old. "We became boyfriend and girlfriend two years later," says Sarah. "This year we have been together for 10 years! What attracted me to Matt and still does is his sense of humour. He never fails to make me laugh."

Matt proposed at the couple's favourite Indian restaurant in July 2019. "When he popped the question, he also revealed a tattoo he had dedicated to me on his chest," shares the bride. "It was a massive surprise."

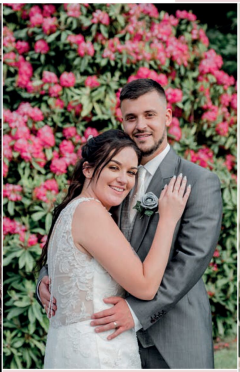
Here the bride shares some of her favourite moments from their big day...

We had visited Hoar Cross Hall for my birthday and fell in love with it and knew when it came to choosing our wedding venue that it was the one.

For our centrepieces, we opted for beautiful bay trees that lined the aisle. The ivory complemented our colour scheme, and as we wanted to keep things simple, they worked perfectly.

Our favours were made by my mum. Together we run a small bath products business from home called L & G Soaps. She made soap and bath bombs in emerald green to match our colour scheme.

The flowers were ivory and grey and tied in with the men's suits.



I chose heart plaques personalised with everyone's names for the place settings so they could take them home as a keepsake.

Frankies Fancies provided a simple cake with cream buttercream and real flowers.

I wore a trumpet-style fitted dress with a sheer back and beading from Heavenly Wedding Belles, a lovely bridal shop near where we live.

The bridesmaids chose emerald green dresses from ASOS.

I was extremely nervous the entire morning, and I felt like I was shaking, but as soon as I saw Matt waiting for me at the end of the aisle, I just felt calm.

The groomsmen and Matt wore steel grey suits with white shirts from Peter Posh Formal Suit Hire.

Matt was calm on the day, and he said as soon as he saw me, he just felt love.

The thing that made the day so special was how small and intimate the wedding was. We were restricted by COVID-19 numbers, but it ended up making the day more intimate, and we were able to share it with those closest to us.

SARAH AND MATT'S CONTACTS

Venue and hair stylist, Hoar Cross Hall, www.baronseden.com/hoar-cross-hall | **Photographer**, Michelle Williams Photography, www.michellewilliamsphotography.co.uk | **Bride's dress**, Heavenly Wedding Belles, www.heavenlyweddingbelles.co.uk | **Groom's suit**, Peter Posh Formal Suit Hire, www.peterposh.co.uk | **Bridesmaids' dresses**, ASOS, www.asos.com | **Make-up artist**, Amal X Beauty, www.instagram.com/amalxbeauty | **Stationery**, Simply Beautiful, www.simplybeautifuloccasions.co.uk | **Cake**, Frankies Fancies, www.facebook.com/frankiesfancieslawley | **Favours**, L & G Soaps, www.facebook.com/landgsoaps

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The one *for me*

Alexandra and Darryl met as children and years later celebrated their love with a gorgeous wedding at Barns and Yard

Images courtesy of Daniella Marinos Photography

Alexandra and Darryl met when they were children. "I was friends with his sister," says Alexandra. "We then met later at a mutual friend's engagement party. We share a love of Formula 1 and have lots of mutual interests."

Darryl popped the question on Christmas Day. "He wrote it on a card and woke me up early as he was so impatient," shares the bride. "He thoughtfully sought the permission of my dad before proposing, and it was wonderful being able to share the day with family. It was definitely a surprise, and I didn't even believe him when I read it!"

SETTING THE SCENE

"The Barns and Yard is a gorgeous setting, and the owners have done an incredible job at renovating the space, giving it a very relaxed yet smart vibe," adds Alexandra. "The shed was an instant draw due to the wonderful combination of modern and rustic décor, and the on-site accommodation gave the day a lovely atmosphere."

Daisy Belle Floral Design provided the flowers. "I chose a waterfall bouquet with sunflowers, gerberas, an abundance of eucalyptus and blue delphiniums to honour our friend Del who is no longer with us," explains the bride. "The bridesmaids carried smaller versions which we then used as decorations for the main tables. We also chose copper pillar candles to emphasise the lighting in the barn."

"We purchased a semi-naked cake from Home Farm Kitchen," recalls Alexandra. "The three-tier design was made up of lemon, elderflower, white chocolate, fresh raspberries and black forest with kirsch and cherry compote. It was beautifully decorated with lots of delicious buttercream and fresh flowers to match our colour scheme. We displayed it on a hoop stand embellished with eucalyptus and blue delphiniums."

The happy couple chose four round tables for their guests and a top table. "We allocated our nearest and dearest with a table but asked them to sit where they liked," says the bride. "For our place names, we printed them on seed paper with everyone's food choices."

"Our favours were tree seeds," shares Alexandra. "We also gave out bags of sweets in biodegradable glassine bags. Darryl and I supplied some of the décor ourselves as we run a stationery company called HiveWeddings. We made a rose gold welcome sign, a seating plan, cards and a gift sign. The Cotswold Vintage Party Hire provided the floral arch, garland and wreaths. It used mainly artificial flowers with a few fresh versions from the owner's garden. This was tailored to fit our theme and was the perfect backdrop for the day."

The food and canapés were provided by Martin Lovell - Professional & Private Chef Services. "He kindly let us choose our food options, so we went for a classic roast option," adds the bride. "The food was amazing, especially the Eton mess! The evening food was provided by Ian at The Old Dough Hook. The pizzas and accompaniments were delicious. We cannot recommend both caterers highly enough!"

DRESSED TO IMPRESS

"I wore an A-line dress from La Boutique, a fantastic shop in Exeter that sells new, used, and sample designer dresses and all of the profits are donated to charity," explains Alexandra. "My gown had a beaded bodice with a lovely V-neck back and long

SARAH RUSSELL
HAIR & MAKEUP ARTIST
HAIR & MAKEUP
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www.sarahrussell.co.uk/yourwm

train. I accessorised with deep red heels and a stunning belt and back necklace made by my best woman, Lucy. She spent days painstakingly making these with tiny beads. After the band's first set, I changed into a short yellow dress from ThePrettyInfinity with rose gold shoes that I could dance easily in. My necklace was a wedding gift from Darryl, my earrings were from MyHartBeading, and I wore two bracelets."

Darryl and the groomsmen opted for grey checked suits with white shirts and yellow ties.

"The bridesmaids chose full length, light grey dresses from ThePrettyInfinity," recalls the bride. "They all picked different styles that suited their tastes and body shapes which looked beautiful. They also had flower crowns provided by Eve at Daisy Belle Floral Design."

TIME TO CELEBRATE

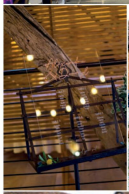
"We hired a band called The Mini Big Band who were absolutely fantastic," says the bride. "We cannot praise them enough! They performed swing and jazz songs, which I love as I used to play the trumpet. Darryl chose this specific band as he liked the magical delivery of the singer as well as the talent of the whole band. They were professional and fun at the same time. It went down really well with all our guests."

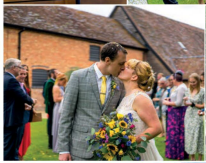
MEMORABLE MOMENTS

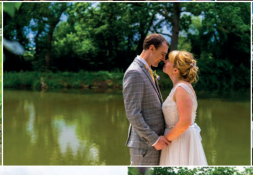
"We were relaxed on the morning of the wedding as the setting was so perfect," shares Alexandra. "I was nervous about standing in front of our friends and family during the ceremony as we're both very shy people, but the day was mostly relaxed and fun. The photos certainly show how the smile never left my face. Having everyone there to celebrate with us meant a lot, especially after a hard year due to COVID-19."

Alexandra and Darryl were nervous about their first dance, but it turned out to be a magical moment. "We weren't sure if we would do the first dance, but I decided to ask my grandparents to join us," adds the bride. "They had a difficult time after my grampa had a stroke the previous year, but his recovery has been wonderful, and it meant so much that they were able to dance with us. Luckily all eyes were on them!"

"One of our favourite moments was the speeches," explains Alexandra. "My best woman, Lucy, wrote a gorgeous poem for us which was so moving. All of the bridesmaids were great at helping me get ready, doing my hair and make-up and generally making the day a lot of fun. I want to thank my parents too as they helped us have the wedding of our dreams. Our close family were incredible with helping us to prepare the venue, and Nicky and Lisa from Barns and Yard were amazing at making sure everything ran smoothly on the day. Our photographer, Daniella Marinos, was also fantastic at making us feel relaxed, and she got so many photos that really showed how fun the day was."







ALEXANDRA AND DARRYL'S CONTACTS

Venue, Barns and Yard, www.barnsandyard.co.uk | **Photographer**, Daniella Marinos Photography, www.daniellamarinosphotography.com **Bride's dress**, La Boutique, www.laboutique.org.uk | **Groom's suit**, Mens Tweed Suits, www.menstweedsuits.com | **Bridesmaids' dresses**, ThePrettyInFinity, www.theprettyinfinity.co.uk | **Jewellery**, MyHartBeading, www.myhartbeading.com | **Cake**, Home Farm Kitchen, www.homefarmkitchen.com | **Flowers**, Daisy Belle Floral Design, www.daisybellefloraldesign.co.uk | **Stationery**, HiveWeddings, www.etsy.com/uk/shop/hiveweddings | **Entertainment**, The Mini Big Band, www.theminibigband.co.uk | **Décor**, Cotswold Vintage Party Hire, www.cotswoldvintagepartyhire.co.uk | **Catering**, Martin Lovell - Professional & Private Chef Services, www.prochefservices.co.uk | **Evening catering**, The Old Dough Hook, www.theolddoughhook.co.uk | **Bar**, The Watering Hole Event Bars Ltd, www.thewateringholeeventbars.co.uk **Confetti**, The Real Flower Petal Confetti Company, www.confettidirect.co.uk | **Furniture**, Valley Furniture Hire, www.valleyfurniturehire.com

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RUSTIC *romance*

Laura and Sam fell in love with Barnutopia and knew it was the perfect wedding venue for them

Images courtesy of Andy Boyle Photography

Laura and Sam first laid eyes on each other at a bar. "I liked how nice he was and that we had lots in common," says Laura. "I was in university at the time, and Sam would come to see me, and we would watch the rugby in Cardiff. When I moved back home, we moved in together."

Sam proposed in May 2016. "It was a few months after my dad and brother had passed away," shares the bride. "We had booked a couple of nights away in Treardur Bay in Anglesey. We walked to the shop, and I was quite surprised that Sam had bought a bottle of prosecco because he doesn't really drink it. We went for a walk along the coast and sat down in a lovely spot. The sun was shining, and there was nobody else around. Sam started to unload his bag, and he pulled a ring out of a pair of socks and asked me to marry him. I said yes, of course, and was so happy that he had asked. It's nice knowing that someone wants to spend the rest of their life with you. After the trauma of the previous months, it was lovely having something positive to look forward to. Everyone was pleased. I loved the ring because he had designed it himself from Clogau Welsh gold. I was definitely not expecting it on that day. I had been to see a psychic who said he was going to propose in Cornwall during a holiday we had planned. I had told Sam this and it turns out he was going to, but after I told him, he changed his mind."

Here she shares some of her favourite moments from their big day...

As soon as we saw Barnutopia, we just knew it was perfect for us. It's in the countryside with beautiful views, lots of space and accommodation so our guests could stay over. We booked a weekend date and had the venue from Friday to Sunday, and I really liked that we could put our own stamp on the space. I'm an artistic person and loved the DIY wedding option, but the fact Barnutopia had the main things we needed, such as tables, covers, fairylights and cutlery was a big help. The owner, Katrina, and her family were all really helpful and friendly too, so it was an easy choice for us.

I made the centrepieces which were probably our biggest project. I used three parts of an embroidery hoop and stuck them together to make a sphere shape. I wrapped led lights around the sphere and stuck them to some floral foam. I made the stands by screwing cake boards into broomsticks and spraying them gold.

My mother-in-law made the cake. It was a three-tier semi-naked design with chocolate on the bottom, lemon in the middle and jam sponge on the top.

For our table plan, I used an old ladder from my grandad, painted it and added gin bottles. I printed the names and tea-stained them to look rustic and tied them with string. The bottles were also filled with gypsophila from The Flower Gallery.

Our flowers were done by The Flower Gallery in Oswestry. We went for a loose-style teardrop bouquet with peach and white roses, lavender, greenery, gypsophila and freesias. It was beautiful!

The table names were photos of us at different holiday destinations placed in gold frames.

I made an order of the day and welcome sign out of my daughter's old cot bed. I also made a savoury snack stand from two clothes stands, and a memory stand to remember my dad, brother and nan. It was an old ladder, which I painted and decorated with rose garlands and pictures of them.

We hired Piggin Delicious and had a relaxed barbecue for the reception and Chinese chicken curry for the evening. We used our cake for dessert and had a sweet table.

I wore a Stella York blush and lace dress from Fern Hart Bridalwear. I'm a curvy bride, and it fitted my shape perfectly. My seamstress made some adjustments, added lace off-the-shoulder straps and shortened the length amongst other bits and bobs. As Sam had bought cowboy-style shoes, I bought some white satin lace-up versions for the evening that were so comfy!

Sam and his best men wore Hugo Boss chequered suits and waistcoats, which we hired from Moss Bros. The other groomsmen wore their own navy suits. I wasn't sure about it at first, but it looked really good and was a bit different!

I didn't want the bridesmaids to completely match and wanted them to be able to wear styles they were comfortable in. My friend was also seven months pregnant, so a few dress changes were needed, but they all looked lovely. They all wore silver shoes and had their hair and make-up how they wanted.

We had singer Danny Gruff perform throughout the day. I had grown up watching him sing in local pubs and events, and he has always been a great entertainer. I wanted something lively and fun in the afternoon, and he certainly delivered. I gave him an unusual song for me to walk down the aisle, but he sang it beautifully, which meant a lot to me and Sam. For the evening, we had a DJ from Happy Sounds Mobile Disco who was great and played everything we wanted.

Having everyone chip in and help set up, getting to chill around the campfire, talk to friends and get ready with my girls was lovely.

The most memorable moment for me was walking down the aisle. I didn't have my dad there, but my mum took on the role. I had never seen Sam cry, but to see him cry just made me feel so emotional and I felt so loved at that moment. My friend also did a lovely reading which was really beautiful.

The speeches were so heartfelt and emotional. My sister did a speech for me as my dad is no longer here. She really put everything into it and had everyone crying. It was thoughtful, funny and heartfelt! Sam and his best men's speeches were also amazing

Something that will stand out is when one of the best men joked that a groomsman had put £500 behind the bar for everyone. He hadn't at that point, but then he did!

After the first dance, everyone jumped on the dancefloor and seeing our friends and family having a good time was definitely a highlight for us.

We weren't sure what to do for our honeymoon. We were so drained from the weekend, and with our little girl back in school that week, we felt awful leaving her. We went to Shrewsbury and stayed in the Prince Rupert Hotel. When we got there, they had upgraded us to a lovely suite and arranged a bottle of prosecco. It was nice to just have a few days away relaxing. We will hopefully be booking a big family holiday for the summer.

LAURA AND SAM'S CONTACTS

Venue, Barnutopia, www.barnutopia.com | **Photographer**, Andy Boyle Photography, www.andyboylephotography.com
Bride's dress, Fern Hart Bridalwear, www.facebook.com/bowsbridalwear | **Suits**, Moss Bros, www.moss.co.uk | **Hair stylist**, Gigi Bridal Hair, www.gigibridalhair.wixsite.com/gigi | **Make-up artist**, Just Be-you-tiful Make Up, www.facebook.com/justbeyoutifulbystacey
Flowers, The Flower Gallery, www.facebook.com/theflowergalleryoswestry | **Hay bales**, Kinsale Farm and Stud, www.facebook.com/kinsale-farm-and-stud-176310352482296 | **Catering**, Piggin Delicious, www.piggindelicious.co.uk | **DJ and disco**, Happy Sounds Mobile Disco, www.happysoundsmobilediscо.co.uk | **Singer**, Danny Gruff, www.dannygruff.com | **Mobile bar**, The Five Star Bar Company, www.fivestarbarcompany.co.uk | **Honorary mention**, Oliver Rees Photography, www.oliverreesphotography.com

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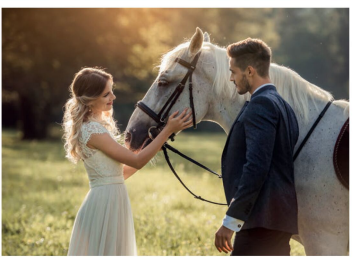
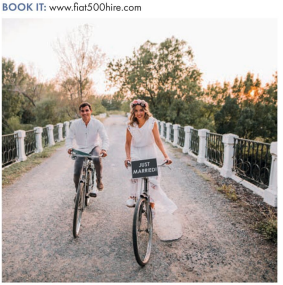


Arrive in style

Surprise your friends and family by arriving on a horse. Not only will it create memorable photographs, but everyone will love interacting with it too.

TOP TIP: Get some riding lessons before the big day.



A bicycle made for two

If you're getting ready near the venue, try to think outside of the box and go for something different, such as a bike.

TOP TIP: Make sure your dress is out of the way before you start riding to avoid any wardrobe malfunctions.

High in the sky

Want to make a dramatic entrance? A helicopter is sure to impress your guests and is perfect for glamorous celebrations.

TOP TIP: Not all properties will be able to cater for a helicopter, so check before booking.

BOOK IT: www.heli-ride.co.uk

An old classic

Look for a vintage car, perfect for a traditional wedding.

TOP TIP: Decorate it with bows and ribbons in your chosen colour scheme.

BOOK IT: www.coventryweddingcars.com

Beep beep

Look for a fun taxi to transport you on the day.

TOP TIP: Ask the driver to decorate the car with a ribbon or bow.

City lovers

Couples wanting to transport all of their wedding guests could hire a double-decker bus.

TOP TIP: With so much space available, you'll be able to fit everyone on board for pictures.

BOOK IT: www.wyvern-omnibus.co.uk

Ride in style

Perfect for unconventional weddings, a tuktuk is sure to keep your loved ones talking and looks great in photographs.

TOP TIP: If you're having a ballgown, make sure it fits inside the vehicle.

BOOK IT: www.tuktuk-hire.co.uk

Take to the sky

Arrive from the sky in a hot air balloon.

TOP TIP: Not all venues will be able to accommodate this.

BOOK IT: www.balloonjourney.co.uk

A touch of vintage

A Volkswagen split-screen Campervan is a groovy way of travelling to the church.

TOP TIP: It's big enough to hold the whole bridal party.

BOOK IT: www.strawberryfieldvdubs.co.uk

Sporty sets of wheels

Treat your partner to a wow-factor sports car.

TOP TIP: If budget allows, hire matching versions for the wedding party.

BOOK IT: www.theweddingcarhirepeople.co.uk

River of dreams

If you're marrying near the water, a boat might be the perfect transportation for you. Not only will you see some beautiful sights, but you could even have some snaps taken as you sail off.

TOP TIP: Be careful you don't get your dress wet.

Country loving

Tractors are far from traditional and offer plenty of photo ops.

TOP TIP: It might be worth booking an alternative transport to take you back to your hotel, as the tractor could take a few hours.

A fairytale feeling

Travel to your venue like a princess in a horse-drawn carriage.

TOP TIP: Have a back-up plan in case it rains.

BOOK IT: www.kccarriages.co.uk

Rail roads

Why not travel by train? Rent a carriage or two and throw a pre-wedding party on board.

TOP TIP: Remember, the journey may be noisy.

Fire starter

For an unforgettable experience, why not hire a fire engine with a television and audio system?

TOP TIP: Avoid wearing red to ensure you don't clash with the vehicle.

BOOK IT: www.citylimos.info

www.chrisbladdeyphotography.co.uk

Memorable moments

County Wedding Magazines editor Melissa Barker shares her wedding planning journey

This year has flown by, can you believe it's nearly Christmas? It's starting to dawn on me that this is my last as a Miss – eek – and July will creep around quickly so the countdown is officially on! My fiancé, Dave, and I have booked most of our suppliers including the venue, photographer and florist and I've even found my dress – but there's still plenty to do! We're getting really excited as the day draws closer, and the more I write about all of your beautiful weddings, the more real it seems that we will have our very own wedding day. In this issue, read all about our pre-wedding shoot and my search for the perfect accessories.

READY, SET, POSE!

Dave and I were unsure if we wanted to book a pre-wedding shoot as we don't like our picture being taken and can be quite awkward in front of the camera. I spoke to a few of our married friends and they all recommended booking a shoot, so we decided to go for it. As we got engaged during the last lockdown, we had only met our photographer once over Skype, so we felt the shoot would also be a good way of getting to know him better ready for our big day.

We'd arranged to meet on a beach in Kent, and as I'm sure you can tell from the pictures, it was extremely blustery and cold, so much so we were convinced we would appear blue in the final shots! Although it wasn't the perfect weather conditions, the combination of our windswept appearence – my hair must have looked like Medusa – onlookers and relaxed nature of our photographer made the shoot fun! I was very nervous beforehand, changing my outfit 10 times much to Dave's annoyance, but once we were there we both felt at ease and had a great time. If you're debating booking a shoot, I'd highly recommend it.

www.chrisbladdeyphotography.co.uk

ACCESSORISE AND SHINE

Wedding planning has been pretty straightforward overall, but when it came to choosing my accessories, I felt very overwhelmed. I wouldn't describe myself as particularly girly, but I wanted something that would make me look beautiful on the day without being overpowering. After hours of shopping, I surprised myself by discovering I have a hidden love for pearls, so when I came across a pearl and floral hair clip, I just knew that I had to have it! I'm planning to finish my look with a pair of pearl earrings and a pendant necklace.

My shoes have also been difficult. I'm 5ft 2ins and Dave is more than 6ft tall, so I was debating whether to wear heels to make the height difference less apparent. All the heels that I loved were really expensive and I was beginning to have nightmares about falling over as I walked down the aisle – I'm not the most gracious person even in flats! So, after looking at countless websites and going into what feels like every shoe shop in Essex, I finally decided to embrace my height and purchased a pair of glittery trainers with satin laces from Kate Spade. Although different to what I had orginally envisaged, I think the look suits my dress and it's made me feel more relaxed knowing I won't be going to A&E on the big day.

Lastly, Dave and I went ring shopping – a traditonal wedding element we still wanted for our nuptials. When we arrived at the jewellers, which was the same branch that Dave purchased my engagement ring from, I was pleasantly surprised to learn they had a matching wedding ring that I, of course, had to have. Luckily we are months ahead of our wedding, however we were made aware that some ring designs can take up to four months to arrive in the store – take note readers that are planning last-minute 'I dos'!

Dave never wears jewellery, so he was unsure of what style he wanted and all of the different types of metal and cuts were quite overwhelming for him. After doing some research and asking our friends for their opinions, he decided on a plain platinum band that looks great.

Make sure you check out the next issue where I'll be discussing our search for the perfect entertainment.

Melissa.
x

www.chrisbladdeyphotography.co.uk

We've ordered wooden cutouts of our guests' names to be used as place names. They look really cute and double up as favours.

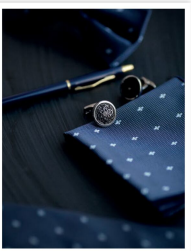
Originally, we didn't want light-up letters, but after seeing a set-up at one of our venue's wedding shows, we loved the look and have hired them.

Dave and I have purchased an oak direction sign that will greet our guests as they enter our venue.

Although I was against the idea of wearing a veil, I tried one on with my dress and fell in love.

We came across a local company that creates personalised cake toppers, so we've decided to order one with figures of us and our cat.

Our venue offers guests a choice of ribbons when they enter the venue, pink if they want people to keep their distance, green if they're comfortable to shake hands and blue if they are happy to hug. I think it's a great way of making sure that everyone feels happy and safe on the day.



We're planning to buy personalised cufflinks for Dave and his best man.

I love this buttonhole wrapped in twine and am going to ask our florist if she can do the same.

For our tables, we're purchased concrete planters that are shaped like characters from our favourite films and tv shows to add a personal touch to the day.

Jackie Diamond

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HOT TOPIC: *wedding worries*

Our experts solve your problems

FESTIVE ROMANCE

How can we incorporate our winter theme into our flowers and décor?

To ensure your flowers look their best, it's important to pick options that are in season. Blooms available in the winter include delicate ranunculus, camellia and anemones. Pair these with berries to create a festive feel. Foliage is also important, use brunia, silver eucalyptus and pine cones, but don't be afraid to use spruce to create a winter wonderland.

Consider colours that would complement the bridesmaids' dresses for your décor and flowers. A cool, snowy feel would look great in any venue where greys and silvers feature. Alternatively, using deep dramatic reds and berries along with dark foliage can add a warm cosy feel to your winter wedding. Both looks scream winter but remember to try and get creative with your florist to create a truly romantic setting.

Kerry Goodyear | Florist and event stylist
www.sorelladecor.co.uk

WALKING IN A WINTER WONDERLAND

My wife-to-be and I would love to incorporate the time of year into our cake. What do you suggest?

Winter wonderland weddings can vary depending on if you're going for a snowy or warm and cosy feel. If you're going for the latter, you might want to introduce a spray of flowers in deep reds, berries and pine cone or pine leaves (artificial for food safety) with accents of gold leaves, rich coloured bases and textures on the cake.

Alternatively, for a snowy look, opt for a snowglobe with personalised figures and create a forest with fairylights for a touch of warmth. This will look amazing with a bark effect wood log as the bottom tier with a flower spray and deer antlers made from chocolate.

Samantha Strecker | Cake expert
www.cakefantastique.com

MUSIC TO MY EARS

We're thinking of booking a harpist for our big day. What should we expect and be aware of before booking?

Consider what type of harp you'd like at your wedding as there are many different styles and sizes available. For example, a grand, golden antique option may be used in a large church or stately home, whereas a smaller, more modern version may suit a contemporary setting.

Ask your harpist for a consultation either in person or online, so you can discuss their available options. I also advise you hear them perform live before booking.

See if they're flexible with timings. Weddings are notoriously difficult to keep to a strict timetable, so if a harpist is booked for two hours, it could be disruptive if they pack up halfway through the dessert. It's best to book by event rather than hourly, so ask for quotes and shop around.

Check whether the harpist has amplification available for larger numbers. All harps can be fitted with electric pick-ups with wireless transmission, so no trailing wires are necessary.

Does your prospective supplier offer any extra services like singing or entertaining children with small harps?

Helen Barley | Harpist
www.helenbarley.co.uk

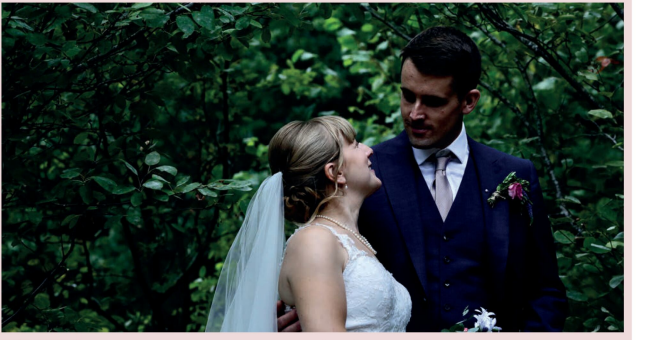
SEASONAL SPICES

We're having a Christmas-themed wedding and would love to incorporate some of the season's flavours into our cake. Do you have any suggestions?

There are many ways you can incorporate seasonal flavours into your cake. Here are some of our ideas:

- Why not indulge in chocolate and spice it up with cinnamon, orange and a hint of cardamom filled with a rich chocolate ganache?
- If you don't like orange, then how about a dark chocolate cake filled with white chocolate and peppermint ganache? Ideal if you're serving your cake as dessert.
- My all-time favourite treat for this time of year is Baileys, so give a traditional vanilla sponge a hit of Baileys and fill it with white chocolate and Bailey's ganache.
- Raspberry red velvet filled with a raspberry liqueur is delectable.
- A spice cake filled with cinnamon, mace, nutmeg and allspice with a white chocolate ganache creates a seasonal feel without the traditional fruitcake.
- Bring back your childhood memories with a light gingerbread sponge filled with a rich chocolate ganache.
- If you're finding it hard to decide, remember you don't have to stick to just one flavour.

Jackie Diamond | Cake expert
www.facebook.com/jackiediamondcakes



LET IT SNOW

Do you have any ideas of how we can create a winter wonderland-themed wedding?

Imagine walking through a wooded glade with a sea of twinkling fairylights and lanterns whilst your guests snuggle under cosy throws and blankets. Creating a winter woodland wedding is all about mixing the beauty of the great outdoors with cosy touches to create an enchanting space for your loved ones. Choosing a venue with a magical outdoor area will give you the blank canvas you need, whilst the trees create a wonderful backdrop for your photographs with lots of soft colours and textures.

Make the most of the space and trees. Use the branches to hang lanterns and small bottles or vases filled with delicate stems in rich burgundies, soft whites and crisp greens. You want the colours to reflect the outdoor space and the natural environment. You can even hang delicate glass or mirrored baubles to catch the light and create magical patterns around you.

Using natural materials throughout your décor, such as a log slice cake stand and hand-painted wooden signage, will help tie the theme together. Name your tables after woodland flora and fauna and create a dressing up area for guests to take fun photos!

Bring out trays of steaming winter Pimms and warm cider with slices of apple, or set up a hot chocolate bar with a myriad of syrups and toppings for your friends and family to choose from.

As the evening ends, gather your nearest and dearest around a roaring campfire for toasted marshmallows under the twinkling stars.

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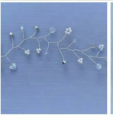

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Stand out FROM THE CROWD

Tips for looking your big-day best

Whether you're the bride, groom or bridesmaid, you will want to look your best on the big day, so to help you choose the perfect look, we've asked local suppliers for their top tips.

MEET LUKE FURNIVAL FROM HOUSE OF CAVANI

01213 596 500 | www.cavani.co.uk

From our experience, some grooms will be very involved from day one while others will leave their suit until the month before the wedding. Choosing your suit up to a year before the big day is quite normal if you know exactly what you're looking for or have a specific theme in mind. It would be wise to leave the final fitting until around six weeks before as you may lose or gain weight since the time you purchased it.

The theme of the day and the time of the year will dictate the cloth you choose. A tweed suit won't be comfortable in the height of summer, just as a linen version will be out of place at a winter wedding. There are plenty of colour and fabric options out there, so take your time to work out exactly what you want and what will work with your day.

Don't forget about the other essentials such as your waistcoat, skirt, shoes, socks and cravat or tie. You'll also need a nice watch and cufflinks, which could be a gift from your partner.

There are a variety of different styles for the modern groom to complete his wedding look. The best tie options are blue, cream and ivory in silk. If you're wearing a waistcoat or cummerbund, then go without a belt.

MEET KATE WARLAND FROM HIZ JEWELLERY

02072 486 414 | www.hizjewellery.com

We know how important it is for you to choose the right wedding ring, and there are many different requirements and preferences that need to be considered before making a decision. The width and weight are important factors when choosing a wedding ring as they affect the durability and comfort. Depending on the content of precious metal, men's wedding rings can vary in width and weight whether they contain diamonds or not. Our wedding rings come in three basic sizes, 5mm, 6mm and 7mm. There are a few rings available in the collection that are wider such as our showcase dress ring at 9.5mm. The wider the ring is, the tighter the fit on your finger, so you may want to go up a size if you're having a wider wedding ring.

You must consider if you'll be wearing rings on the adjacent fingers; it can be uncomfortable if the rings butt up against one another, so a thinner wedding ring might be more appropriate. Also, consider the colour of your other rings and choose a precious metal that will blend in.

If you're not used to wearing jewellery, then you might not want to go for a wide or heavyweight ring as this might feel too 'obvious' on your finger. It might also be worthwhile considering your job and lifestyle. If you work with your hands or play sport frequently, you might not want to continually remove your wedding ring or tape it up if it is a wider band.

MEET KATIE SAUNDERS FROM KATES DRESSES

sales@katesdresses.co.uk | www.katesdresses.co.uk

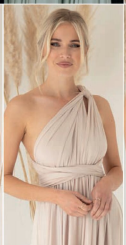
Do your research and find local bridal shops which have good reviews and book appointments well in advance to avoid disappointment. Arrange a suitable date for you and your maids and get your favourite boutiques booked, make it fun, have lunch, Prosecco and treasure the memories.

You will find that high street brands will be seasonal with their bridesmaids' dresses, so if you're planning on buying it there, then you will need to start shopping at least a year in advance.

Women always want to look their best and feel good in their outfits, so if they have asked to be a bridesmaid, they may want to lose weight, which can leave the bride waiting to start shopping. Multiway dresses are a handy option because they have an elasticated waist meaning a weight fluctuation won't affect the dress. However, if you opt for a zip dress, this may need to be altered, so have a seamstress booked in advance to accommodate any last-minute alterations.

Our multiway dresses are perfect for your bridesmaids as they come in different lengths which work for petite and tall maids and have an elasticated waist that will fit most dress sizes - saving you a fortune on alteration fees. It can be wrapped in endless styles allowing each maid to adapt the dress to their preferred style, such as one shoulder/plunge, resulting in everyone feeling incredible and confident on the day.

Ultimately as the bride, you may need to make some firm decisions. Try not to accommodate everyone as this can often be impossible, and too many opinions can confuse things. Focus on your vision and choose what works for you and your partner. Remember this is exciting so shopping should be fun.

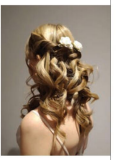


OUR WEDDING DRESS TIPS

- Go against tradition with a coloured wedding dress or add a pastel tulle skirt over the top of your gown. This can then be removed later in the evening to create a completely different style.
- Add a pop of colour through your veil or by adding a belt.
- You obviously want to look your best but try and remember the smaller details. Accessories are a great way of incorporating your chosen colour scheme/theme and complementing your overall appearance.
- Wedding planning is basically a full-time job, and like any other position, you need to take a break from it. Give yourself at least one or two days off a week.
- If you want something unique, a bespoke creation may be the best option for you but take into consideration the time scale and money involved. Most bridal boutiques suggest you visit up to a year before your wedding, but if you're after a tailored creation, it may be worth booking an appointment as soon as possible to ensure you get exactly what you're looking for.

Claire Harmer

Professional Hair & Make-up Artist



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GEORGIA
MAKE-UP ARTIST

My passion is makeup and to make every Bride look and feel amazing, after all a Wedding Day is one of the most important days of your life and it will probably be captured in hundreds of photos.

I use gorgeous skincare products and luxury makeup brands and professionally apply to ensure each of my brides is glowing, confident and ready for her special day.

Bridal trials can be held at home or at my new studio in Halesowen and with a variety of Wedding Packages and bespoke ideas I'm sure I have an option for you.

Georgia x

www.georgiaroundmakeupartist.com
contact@georgiaroundmakeupartist.com | 07870428520

MEET DEAN CARTER FROM CARTER ESQUIRE

07429 570 655 | www.carteresquire.co.uk

Carter Esquire believes that the groom and his VIP's should receive the platinum service they deserve. Here we list the key considerations and questions to ask when deciding on your perfect suit:

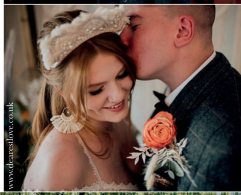
Your wedding theme – Have you agreed on the overall theme for your day? It may be classical, vintage, country, modern, bohemian or even Art Deco. The groom's look should complement the theme, such as a black tux may suit a classical theme, whereas a tweed would work well in a vintage or country style wedding.

Think seasonal – Consider the season that the wedding will take place. Mix things up with a patterned, herringbone, plaid or houndstooth suit to add variation and a sense of personality.

Colours Scheme – Does your wedding have a particular colour scheme? It's important to decide if you want certain things to match, such as the ties and flowers, bridesmaids' dresses, chair covers etc. Here at Carter Esquire, we can colour match fabrics and offer advice. Opting for the same suit in different colours could work well for variation across the party.

Fit matters – The key to pulling off a killer suit is the fit, this means that it's important to wear a suit that complements your body shape. There are three main types of fit: **Regular –** for those who prefer a classic style in a comfortable fit with room for extra movement. It's also ideal for people with a larger build than average. **Slim –** ideal for those with a slimmer physique. **Tailored –** a more streamlined look and a midway option that allows more movement than a regular fit.

Accessorise your look – Accessories can be just as important as the suit when it comes to injecting some personality into an outfit, so take time to find the perfect additions and ensure they match your suit. Cufflinks add a touch of sophistication, whilst a patterned tie can look great against a dark suit. A bright silk tie is ideal for adding a splash of colour to summer events. We stock a multitude of different accessories and can offer advice as to what looks best with what.



OUR TOP TIPS

- Hiring is cheaper and often more convenient, but when you buy, you'll often end up with a better suit. Make the decision based on your budget. You could buy the groom's suit and hire the groomsmen's suits that way you can save money without compromising on quality.
- Trust your supplier, they are there to help and have expert knowledge.
- At the start of your appointment, your consultant will ask about your ideas and plans for the big day. Be descriptive as this will help paint a picture of how you envisage your special day and don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Dress to your taste for the appointment. This will help the consultant recognise your style.
- Look through their collections and choose the designs that stand out to you. Take advantage of the consultant's knowledge, as outfits can look completely different on a hanger and they will know instantly what will suit your shape.

BLITHFIELD
LAKESIDE BARNS

WWW.BLITHFIELDLAKESIDEBARNS.CO.UK
weddings@blithfieldlakesidebarns.co.uk
Instagram & Facebook @blithfieldlakesidebarns

ANGUS BASKERVILLE Magic

I am a professional magician and member of The Magic Circle, based in West Midlands and perform regularly at weddings both large and small across the UK. I offer a wide range of wedding packages including:

TABLE MAGIC IN BETWEEN COURSES | MINGLING DURING RECEPTION | MINGLING DURING PHOTOGRAPHS | CLOSE-UP/MINGLING BEFORE AND AFTER THE SPEECHES BESPOKE PACKAGES TO SUIT INDIVIDUAL REQUIREMENTS

Entertaining at weddings is my favourite part of the job! I perform in many different areas, both on stage and with close up, but there is something so special about being part of a wedding day. I consider it such a privilege to be able to add value to what is already such a joyful event and to be able to establish connections through the medium of magic, between strangers who share a love of the happy couple but who may not be known to each other until that day.

WWW.ANGUSBASKERVILLE.COM | ANGUSBASK@GMAIL.COM | 07854772946
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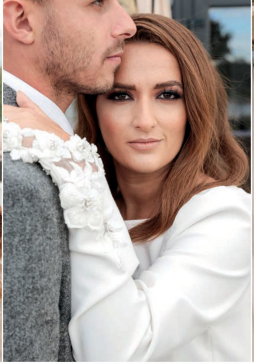
Purple Swan Photography



MODERN romance

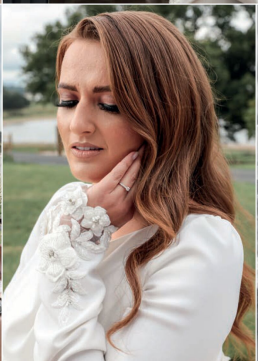
Inspired by autumnal colours, this styled shoot took place at the beautiful Blithfield Lakeside Barns

Images courtesy of Molly Georgia Photography

This styled shoot at Blithfield Lakeside Barns was put together by Molly Georgia Photography. "We wanted to capture elements of an autumnal wedding while adding a modern twist," says Molly. "We had amazing dried flower arrangements throughout the shoot from The Wild Atelier. At both ends of the table, we had cascading florals, and on the main table, we had a selection of dried flowers in separate vases. Every member of the team worked extremely hard to create the shoot, and it ended up being more amazing than I could've imagined. We battled through the crazy wind and rain and ended up with beautiful sunshine and a sunset to end the day."

TABLE
ONE

MENU



CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS SHOOT

Venue, Blithfield Lakeside Barns, www.blithfieldlakesidebarns.co.uk | **Photographer**, Molly Georgia Photography, www.mollygeorgiaphotography.com | **Dresses**, The Bridal Rooms, www.thebridalrooms.co.uk | **Suits**, Brigdens, www.brigdens.com | **Hair stylist**, Holly Cramer Hair, www.instagram.com/hollycramerhair | **Make-up artist**, Chrissie Trattos Makeup Artist, www.chrissietrattos.com | **Cake**, Leanne's Cake House, www.leannescakehouse.co.uk | **Flowers**, The Wild Atelier, www.thewildatelier.co.uk | **Stationery**, Sheaf Design Works Ltd, www.sheafstationery.co.uk | **Stylist**, Rustic Rose Events, www.rusticroseevents.co.uk | **Models**, Rebecca and Sam

SUSTAINABLY CHIC

Grace Loves Lace has unveiled its first eco wedding gown called *Lumi* retailing at £2,200. It's constructed from 96% recycled materials and has been ethically hand-crafted in the brand's Australian studio. Founder and creative director, Megan Ziems, tells us, "We were inspired to take materials that would have been otherwise discarded and use modern technology to create a beautiful wedding gown that holds so much meaning." She continues, "The way the dress hugs and supports the body is flawless. The cup shape and wide straps are perfect for small and large busts, the split on the thigh is elongating, the pearlescent threading is visually flattering and the sheer lace panel on the lower back adds drama."

Launching alongside the gown is the *Lumi* veil retailing at £390 and crafted from 100% recycled tulle and lace.

To shop, visit www.graceloveslace.com

Best-dressed brides

Elbeth Gillis has launched her new collection, Curve. The first capsule collection of 2022 includes five dresses ranging from simple structures with crisp, clean lines to romantic, lavish lace. The gowns feature statement sleeves, beautiful bows and overskirts. To shop, visit www.elbethgillis.com

FASHION *focus*

Fashion editor Claire Ridley reveals the latest bridal news, buys and launches

Something new

Vera Wang Bride and Pronovias Group have joined forces to launch their first collection, Vera Wang Bride. The 60 dresses blend artisanal details with luxury textures using premium fabrics and hand-crafted finishes on exaggerated volumes and new silhouettes. Vera Wang says, "I intended to make sure that certain Vera Wang design codes were identifiable in Vera Wang Bride." She continues, "Through my designs, I want to express respect – respect for the design process. Respect for quality. Respect for imagination and individuality. But most of all respect for women."

Standout designs include this *Carole* style and the wedding gowns will be available in a wide variety of sizes at affordable price points. Sustainable options using eco fabrics and trims also form part of the collection.

To shop, visit www.pronovias.com

EDITOR LOVES

Thank your best girls with this cute lolly necklace, £35, www.tattydevine.com

One dress, multiple looks

The RULABELLE multiway collection for bridesmaids has added special-edition styles and a new Ethereal Tulle collection to its range. The versatile collection allows the wearer to express their individuality, personality and sense of style, whatever their shape or silhouette.

To shop, visit www.rulabelle.com

Baby steps

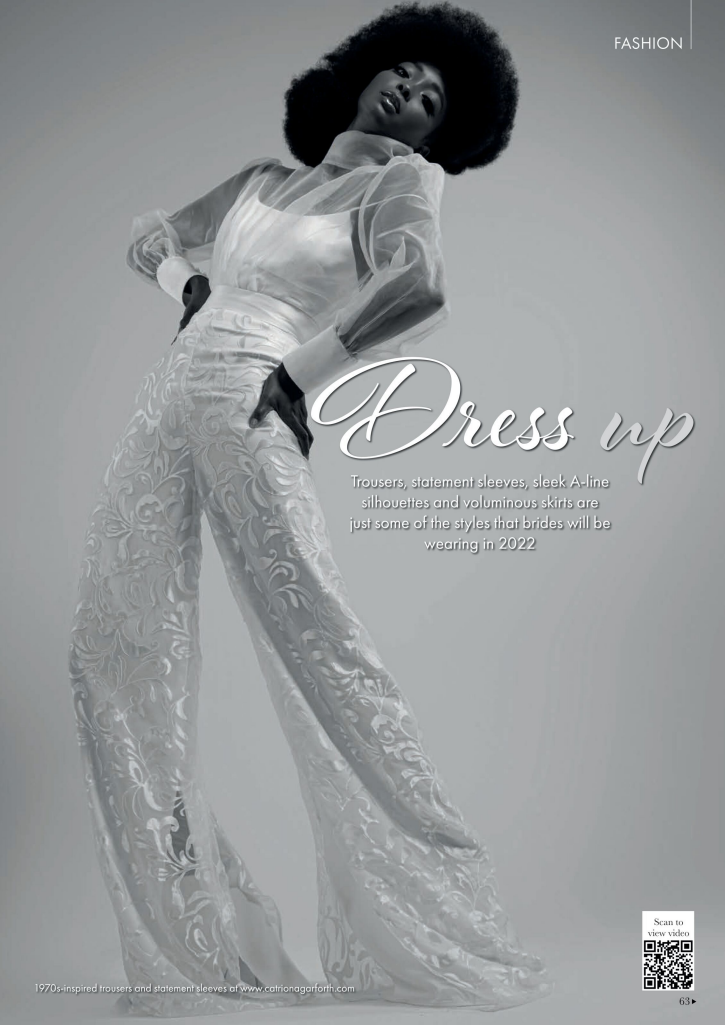
British baby clothing brand Magnet Mouse has designed cute baby grows with magnetic fastenings and ruffle trims perfect for weddings. Prices start from £24.95, https://magnetmouse.co.uk

TWINKLE TOES

These Cinderella-inspired crystal court shoes called *Lovebird*, £119, will take you to the ball! Carvela at www.shoeaholics.com

EAR CANDY

This jewellery advent calendar is a fun way to countdown to a Christmas wedding! Priced at £250, it includes 12 of the brand's best-selling earring and ear cuff designs crafted from sustainable recycled sterling silver and gold-plated recycled sterling silver. To shop, visit www.screampretty.com



Dress up

Trousers, statement sleeves, sleek A-line silhouettes and voluminous skirts are just some of the styles that brides will be wearing in 2022

Scan to view video

1970s-inspired trousers and statement sleeves at www.catrionagarforth.com

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

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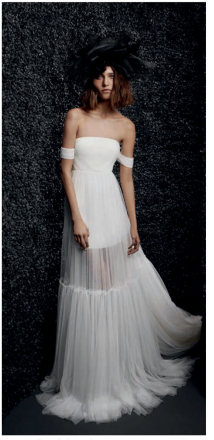


Fantasy free-falling skirt at Vera Wang Bride, www.pronovias.com

Pearly queen-inspired accents at www.christopherkane.com

Knee-length slip dress at https://carmenllaguno.com/collections/bridal

Decadent beading at Madeline Gardner, https://uk.morilee.com/browse/madeline-gardner

Bustier bodices and visible corsetry at https://uk.morilee.com

Statement necklines at www.pronovias.com

Red carpet-inspired illusion necklines at Allison Webb at JLM Couture, www.jlmcouture.com/designer/allison-webb

Chic separates at www.thereformation.com

Off-the-shoulder style at
www.rosaclara.es/en-gb

Dramatic ballgowns at Lillian West,
www.justinalexander.com/lillian-west

Minimalist column dresses at
www.justinalexander.com

Clean lines at Sincerity,
www.justinalexander.com/sincerity-bridal

Short and sweet at Adore,
www.justinalexander.com

Cascading tiers at https://costarellos.com

Padlock necklace, £15, Orelia & Vick collection at www.orelia.co.uk

18-carat gold initial and birthstone necklace, £80, https://harfi.co.uk

Jewellery, from a selection, www.harveynichols.com/brand/rachel-jackson-london

Gold-plated sterling silver Christmas tree stud earrings, £15.95, www.william-may.co.uk

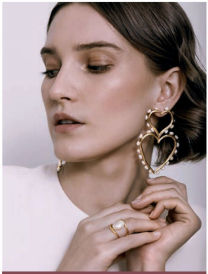
Yellow gold diamond stud comet burst earrings, £895, www.astleyclarke.com

Jewellery case, from a selection, www.accessorize.com/uk

Platinum daisy cluster diamond ring, £1,480, www.lebrusanstudio.com

14-carat solid gold Astrid morganite and diamond ring, £650, https://carrieelizabeth.co.uk

Whether you're choosing an engagement ring for a Christmas proposal or shopping for your big-day jewellery, sparkle in these pieces from the latest winter collections



Earrings, £211 and ring, £122, https://joannalauraconstantine.com

Lightening bolt charm earrings, £35, www.maevery.co.uk

9-carat white gold and 0.25-carat diamond cushion-cut cluster ring, £449, www.hsamuel.co.uk

9-carat gold feather earrings, £299, https://fiyah.com

14-carat yellow gold baguette and marquise ring, £878, https://uk.vrai.com

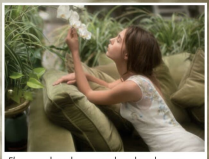
NOT ALL *white*

These pastel and champagne gowns prove that you don't have to wear white

Skye dress by
https://katefearnley.com

Style no 66195 by
www.justinalexander.com/lillian-west

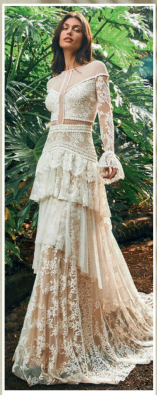
Cleopatra dress by
www.madelinegardnernewyork.com/en



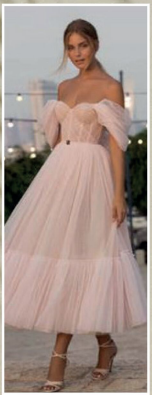
Florence dress by www.olwenbourke.com

Amalia dress
by https://costarellos.com

Pearl rose dress by
www.needleandthread.com



Karlu dress by
www.pronovias.com



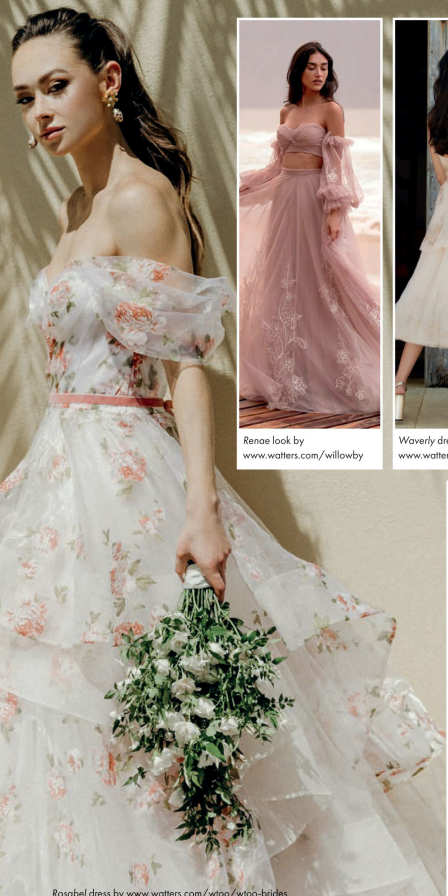
Style no 21-79 by
www.berta.com

Toledo dress by
www.temperleylondon.com

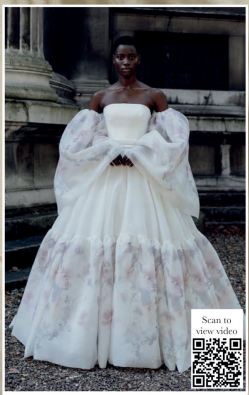
Renae look by
www.watters.com/willowby

Waverly dress by
www.watters.com/willowby

Fable dress by
www.watters.com/willowby

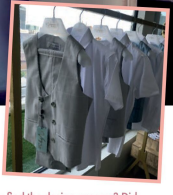


Rosabel dress by www.watters.com/wtoo/wtoo-brides



Hyacinth dress with orchid-print bell sleeves and orchid skirt, www.halfpennylondon.com

Party DRESSING



We chat to model, television presenter and radio DJ Vogue Williams about her latest venture, Vogue x ROCO, a recently launched collaboration with online children's formalwear brand ROCO which is her first collection

Vogue is best known for her presenting roles across mainstream broadcast platforms such as Channel 4's *Steph's Packed Lunch* and Global Player podcast *Spencer & Vogue* as well as the newly released *My Therapist Ghosted Me*. Over the past year, Vogue has also landed a weekend show on Heart radio and has previously fronted her popular reality shows on Channel 4 - *Spencer, Vogue and Baby Too* and *Spencer, Vogue and Wedding Two* with husband, Spencer Matthews.

Regularly showcasing candid family life to her 855k Instagram followers, Vogue is mum to Theodore and Gigi, both of whom inspired the collection with this British brand and have hero items named after them.

How would you summarise your ROCO edit?

This hand-picked edit of high-quality pieces has been two years in the making. I wanted the 15 stylish looks to be affordable, comfortable and easy for children to wear, so the collection offers a contemporary twist on classic styles for party dressing with trend-led silhouettes available in ice-cream pastel hues offering the perfect fit, designed to make special occasions unforgettable.

Who is the collection for?

It's aimed at little ones aged from three months to 14 years. There are cute cotton-mix and linen-style blend dresses, two-piece outfits and suits ideal for celebrations, parties and dressing flowergirls, junior bridesmaids and pageboys at weddings.

How did you find the design process? Did you have a favourite part?

I loved working with Laura (Latif, creative director of ROCO) and the team. I've always wanted to create my own children's wear line so to see the pieces evolve from the initial design meeting is so exciting. I immersed myself

Ewan waistcoat and trouser suit, £50.

in the creative process from start to finish, from designing the items to deciding on the colour palettes and finer details. The team were so easy to work with and it has been so much fun – a dream come true!

If you had to choose, what's your favourite piece from the collection?

I love them all! The *Margaux* pink skirt and white top combination with a statement bow at the back looks so pretty.

Molly pink dress, £55.

It's your little girl's birthday party, what ROCO dress would you choose and why?

I named the pink ruffle-neck *Gigi* babygrow after my daughter so it would have to be this!

To shop, visit www.roco.co.uk

You've got a summer wedding coming up, which ROCO outfit for a boy would you suggest and why?

The *Theodore* blue-check dungarees are so smart teamed with a short-sleeved shirt! I named them after my son.

Gigi babygrow, £35.

Theodore two-piece, £55.

Let's shop, www.roco.co.uk
www.instagram.com/rococlothing
www.facebook.com/rococlothing
www.twitter.com/rococlothing

PERFECT POUT

Recently launched into the UK, the Agave+ collection is BITE's best-selling range and has gained cult-status in the U.S. Its Weekly Lip Scrub (£22) and Nighttime Lip Therapy (£23) provide a luxury experience for your pout, giving lips the TLC they deserve. After all, beauty prep for your big day is about giving your make-up artist the very best canvas to work with and lip treatment is an important part of that. So, renew, replenish and hydrate to the max with this caring, clean, vegan product.

Find it at www.feelunique.co.uk and www.boots.com

FEEL FLAWLESS

Speak to any wedding make-up artist and they'll most likely tell you that primer is a must, which is why I wanted to share with you my latest discovery: Super Facialist Skin Perfecting Primer (£17). This little beauty creates a flawless-looking complexion using trusted skincare ingredients, such as hyaluronic acid, and colour-correcting pigments. It cleverly blurs imperfections by counteracting the three most common concerns of redness, sallowness and dullness, while simultaneously working to bring back skin's natural radiance.

Find out more at www.superfacialist.co.uk

LUXE LIPS

If you're looking for a dramatic shade of lippy to make an impact as you walk down the aisle, check out the four new shades from Victoria Beckham Beauty's Posh Lipstick collection. Fire is a blazing red orange, Jump is a mid-tone cool rose, Spark is a mid-tone warm rose and Twist is a light neutral pink. Each one is inspired by and named in reference to one of Victoria's personal memories.

These lipsticks offer pure luxury with rich colour, deep moisture, soft shine and sophisticated design, all in a supremely clean, vegan formula – everything the 2020s bride needs.

You'll find them at www.victoriabeckhambeauty.com, for £34 each.

Beauty BUZZ

Beauty editor Kelly Andrews shares her latest beauty must-haves for the bride to be

LIGHT AND SHADE

A new addition to the Lush range of perfumes, Shade offers a burst of warmth with comforting sandalwood.

A fragrance with a conscience, each essential oil has its own story to tell including sandalwood from West Timor, which is extracted from protected and sustainable trees. It's also made using a new source of olibanum oil from the Dayaxa region in Somaliland. It has full traceability down to the harvester level, with every step of the process being mapped on blockchain. In fact, Lush is working with its supplier to kickstart a project to train local women in small-scale olibanum oil distillation, a first in the community.

Find it online at www.lush.com, where it's priced at £25 for 30ml.

BACK TO ITS ROOTS

Molton Brown was born in the 1970s as a hair salon based in the heart of London's shopping district on South Molton Street, which was frequented by the Rolling Stones and many other icons of the day. Creators Caroline Bernstein and her husband would hand mix all formulations in the basement, with conscious care for the environment at the forefront of the brand's values even then.

Now, on the brand's 50th anniversary it has re-introduced hair care to its range. The collection contains four tailored collections, each with a botanical at the core of its formulation: balancing, volumising, hydrating and repairing. This approach means you can strategically build a healthy-hair routine into your big-day prep depending on the needs of your locks.

Check out www.moltonbrown.co.uk

SUPER SKIN

Skin Republic has launched an exciting range of new 30ml serums hailed as a more sustainable way to mask. Its award-winning serum-drenched sheet mask range is renowned for high quality on-trend ingredients, so the brand was keen to continue innovating to deliver more environmentally-conscious results.

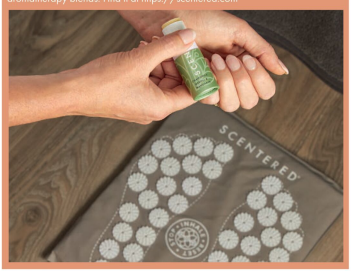
The three superheroes are packed full of high concentration actives – Hyaluronic Acid 1% + Niacinamide Serum, Vitamin C 6% + Alpha Arbutin Serum, and Retinoid Complex 1% + Squalene 15% Serum. Each one has been scientifically formulated to target three primary skin concerns: dryness, pigmentation and ageing.

Priced at £14.99 each, they're available at www.theskinrepublic.co.uk

KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON

At times life can leave us all busy, stressed and unable to switch off, which is where the new 5 Minute Acupressure Foot Mat from 100 per cent natural aromatherapy lifestyle brand Scentered can help. Our feet have 26 bones, 100 ligaments, 20 muscles and a very complex network of nerves and blood supply. But they're often overlooked, despite being the powerhouse of wellbeing for our bodies. So, this innovative offering can help you to relax, release tension and bring calm to your day through it's five-minute therapeutic experience. Equally, if you often find yourself in need of a morning boost, it can be used alongside a supportive aromatherapy balm, allowing you to unblock trapped energy.

Priced at £35 the set is lightweight, washable, portable and super-easy to store. It also comes complete with a choice of one of Scentered's best-selling aromatherapy blends. Find it at https://scentered.com



READY OR KNOT

The Detangling Mist is the newest product in The Hair Boss' award-winning range. The brand, founded by Lisa Shepherd, former British Hairdresser of the Year, simplifies hair care into a four-step routine, and this newbie fits tidily into part three. With life getting busier by the second, this is the quick, on-the-go answer to dry, unruly hair.

Targeted to fix frizzy and damaged locks, it's designed to smooth and strengthen, while protecting your hair and preventing breakage. Lisa says, "In between washes, The Detangling Mist will soften the hair, taming any unruly knots and re-adding the shine that it's lost since the last wash."

Priced at £8.99, it's available at https://thehairboss.co.uk

EDITOR LOVES

In my humble opinion Kristin Ess The One Signature Shampoo and The One Signature Conditioner are nothing short of miraculous! I won't lie, my hair was in an embarrassing state when I decided to give these a go. I'd been swimming three days on the bounce – down water slides, through rapids, the works! My locks were a huge matted, straw-like mess. But with just one application the shampoo lathered like a dream and after leaving the conditioner in for the recommended three minutes, even wet my hair started to feel less knotty.

I usually dread having to drag the brush through my hair after I've washed it, but in no time flat it was knot-free, smooth and ready to dry. Shiny, soft and looking their best, the state of my locks pre-Kristin Ess were a distant memory. This is definitely my new favourite hair routine and at £8 each they won't break the bank. My advice? Head over to www.boots.com and pop them in your basket immediately!

NATURE'S HARVEST

When Estée Lauder created Youth-Dew bath oil in 1953, she revolutionised the fragrance industry and 75 years later, the brand is carrying on her legacy with the introduction of a new luxury fragrance collection. Each of the eight scents is inspired by nature's most breathtaking moments such as the radiance of a sunset and the mystery of a moonlit flower. What's more, Estée Lauder's new ScentCapture Fragrance Extender technology is specially formulated to allow each perfume to last up to 12 hours after a single application – that should get you from vows to dancefloor no problem.

The new Luxury Fragrance Collection (£130 100ml, £68 40ml) is available at Estée Lauder counters nationwide and at www.esteelauder.co.uk

THE EYES HAVE IT

They say the eyes are the window to the soul, so they're for sure a feature to make the most of on the big day. For those looking for longer lashes and full brows, The B Collection has launched its Lash & Brow Serum (£8.99). This all-natural, vegan, cruelty-free product nourishes and stimulates growth in these two key areas for eyes that'll pop as you say "I do."

Use every night before bed following your usual skincare routine and wash off in the morning – super-easy. You can also use it during the day to set your brows in place. We love anything with a dual purpose!

Find it at https://thebcollection.co.uk

NAILED IT!

Team CWM put the latest bridal nail polish shades to the test

Rachel loves... Sahara Dreams

NAILKIND NATURAL NAIL WEAR

£8.95, www.nailkind.com

"This vegan polish went on like a dream, I only needed one coat. Plus, the neutral shades are beautifully subtle and classy for a bride's big day." **– *Rachel Westall***

LEIGHTON DENNY

£12, https://leightondenny.com

"The wide brush makes application as easy as one, two, three; and allows you to get a neat line around the cuticle. Best of all, an impressive 75 per cent of its ingredients are derived from plants replacing the usual chemical concoction so it's good for your nails too." **– *Kelly Andrews***

Kelly loves... My Zen Place

Olivia loves... Sandstorm

CIENNA ROSE ENRICHED NAIL LACQUER

£9, www.ciennarose.com

"After two coats, this cruelty-free polish didn't disappoint. Infused with vitamin E, pro-vitamin B5 and lemongrass oil it strengthens nails and there was no chipping or fading even after swimming, badminton and golf!"

– *Olivia Gibson*

Beth loves... Eden

PEACCI NAIL POLISH

£10, https://peacci.com

"Peacci colours Nude, Eden and Audrey are great go-to choices for a clean and neutral nail that will suit any bride. My nail polish collection finally feels complete!" **– *Beth Morton***

Melissa loves... Sand Dune

EARTHY NAIL POLISH

£7.99, www.earthynailpolish.com

"Each varnish is plant-based, gluten- and cruelty-free and comes complete with an antibacterial bamboo cap. The subtle scent isn't overpowering and it's easy to apply, with a long-lasting finish." **– *Melissa Barker***

Kelly loves... Grace

LADY SHOWBIZ GEL EFFECT NAIL POLISH

£12, www.ladyshowbiz.com

"The high-shine finish is ideal for anyone who loves the idea of a gel mani at home without a UV lamp. Plus, Grace is the perfect go-to bridal shade, girly and indeed, graceful."

– *Kelly Andrews*

Danielle loves... Dolly

BARRY M AIR BREATHABLE NAIL PAINT

£3.99, https://barrym.com

"Wow, these are amazing! Covers in three strokes with a super-hardwearing, gel-like finish. I'll never wear another polish again!"

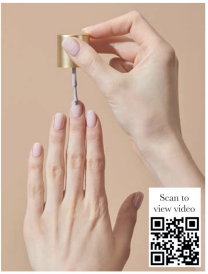
– *Danielle Harvey*

Kelly loves... Hortensia

MAVALA

£5.50, www.nailpolishdirect.co.uk

"I fell in love with these gorgeous shades as soon as I opened the box. Whether you're after a pop of colour or something more traditionally delicate, there's something here for every bride." **– *Kelly Andrews***



WIN

A FUN-FILLED SLEEPOVER FOR EIGHT GUESTS AT WHITLEY HALL, YORKSHIRE

Whitley Hall Hotel may be among the North's most historic and beautiful wedding venue hotels. This stunning Yorkshire stone mansion, where peacocks stroll in the grounds, boasts both Tudor and 18th-century origins – it's rumoured that Mary, Queen of Scots was once a house guest in the West Wing! The two four-poster suites are particularly delightful for a romantic stay but each of the 32 rooms are superbly designed to complement the hotel's rich and important history.

With its new purpose-built Whitley Suite, offering state-of-the-art facilities, including a heated outdoor terrace, (capacity 110/160 guests), along with the original Parker Suite (capacity 110/175), Whitley Hall is perhaps one of the largest venues in the region. Its new exclusive 'Secret Garden Folly' is a real showstopper where you can exchange vows with a natural backdrop, or simply use this space for an outdoor drinks reception which can be spectacular come dusk and into the evening. There's also the option to take over the whole hotel as an exclusive-use venue (capacity 400) and there are semi-exclusive use options also available.

Attention to detail, combined with a warm Yorkshire welcome, make a stay at this four-star hotel a real pleasure. The restaurant serves an array of mouth-watering dishes prepared with the very finest local produce. The hotel, which is close to the motorway yet benefits from the most tranquil rural setting, can be used as a handy base to explore the stunning Chatsworth House estate and its surrounding towns and villages in the Peak District such as Bakewell, Eyam and Buxton; Sheffield and the shopping centre at Meadowhall are also popular attractions.

Visit www.whitleyhall.com | www.instagram.com/whitleyhallhotel

PRIZE:

Our lucky prize winner will enjoy a luxurious overnight with a group of close friends and family at this historic country house hotel. Indulge in a mini dessert selection with tea or coffee upon arrival, a chilled bottle of Prosecco is in each room, plus 'pamper hampers', robes and slippers to make the most of a fun and relaxing stay, which also includes three-course dinner in the evening in the hotel restaurant and full traditional English breakfast the following morning. Early check in (2pm) and late check out (11am) make for a more leisurely stay.

HOW TO ENTER:

For your chance to win, simply answer the following question:
What is the name of the new purpose-built wedding suite?
Enter online at yourwestmidlands.wedding

Closing date 4th February 2022, unless otherwise stated.
Terms and Conditions apply. Please see our website for details.

From the INSIDE OUT

We caught up with owner and founder of Simone Thomas Wellness, Simone herself, to discover how taking care of yourself from the inside out is the ultimate path to wedding wellness

The impact stress and anxiety can have on our bodies should never be underestimated. So, the pandemic has a lot to answer for, even outside of Covid itself. If you're finding that months of lockdown and wedding-related stress have taken their toll, you're certainly not alone. Sadly, anxiety-induced skin concerns and even hair loss can quickly leave you feeling pretty far from your big-day best.

Enter award-winning authority on hair health and wellness Simone Thomas, who's spent her career sharing her expertise in nutrition, hair-loss and bio-energetics. Alongside hair salons and hair-loss clinics, which boast an elite global clientele that includes royalty, celebrities and CEOs; she's also the founder of Simone Thomas Wellness. We asked Simone for her help in guiding you back onto the path of wedding wellness.

Based on your experience, what challenges are nearlyweds facing in the aftermath of the pandemic?

2020 had a huge affect on the wedding industry with 64 per cent of big days being cancelled or postponed, which means stress levels for everyone involved are now at an all-time high. A wedding is an important day that couples have invested a lot of time and money in, it's something they've dreamed of. So, this is all having a negative impact on how we feel and how we sleep, with our skin and hair responding to that. A bad hair or skin day isn't great at any time, let alone when the camera is constantly on you and you want to feel your best.

What the last year has taught us though is

how to take a step back and invest in ourselves, as we often don't listen to what our bodies need. At Simone Thomas Wellness, we've seen a huge increase in clients asking for advice on nutrition and bioenergetics, as well as hair loss. There's also been a rise in skin conditions like psoriasis, acne, dermatitis of the scalp, eczema, telogen effluvium and alopecia areata, which is commonly linked to stress and hormones. In fact, stress has a huge knock on effect on our hormones as women. But men too are experiencing skin complaints and suffering hair loss. So, people preparing for their big days have really been struggling during lockdown.

How can we turn this around – where do we start?

What I always say is that everything starts in the gut. If you look after that, the body will look after you. I call it The Mothership. Poor gut health is the start of disease and can be linked to degenerative disorders, so it really should be the number one priority if you're looking to feel the best version of yourself.

Everyday Wellness, part of the Simone Thomas Wellness range, is a super-strength probiotic supplement containing six types of probiotics to improve gut health by introducing both good and bad bacteria, vital on a day-to-day basis. When I say "bad bacteria" people often ask me, why anyone would want that, but the body needs diversity to become stronger.

These supplements also help to reduce the inflammation that occurs naturally in a body. Food can be a trigger, as can poor sleep patterns, stress, and the environment. Here, we're focusing on removing any nasties so they don't get absorbed into the cells.

What advice would you give to those looking to achieve that natural-looking bridal glow without a face full of make-up?

Skin Quencher is great for anyone wanting to feel youthful or who's keen to avoid wearing lots for make-up. It'll work from the inside out to give you that ultimate bridal glow.

I'm also a huge fan of facials, but it's more about what we put into our body rather than what we put on top of it. You have to work on yourself internally for the outside to glow. Yes, skincare products are going to have an effect, but if the inside isn't right, it won't be long term.

Biotin Brilliance too helps with mild skin irritation caused by stress. You may already have heard about biotins, they're a B vitamin and have been talked about for a number of years as being vital for healthy skin, hair and nails.

What can you suggest for brides, and bridesmaids, looking to grow their hair for a wedding?

Our Ginkgo Biloba B+ plan contains folic acid with essential B vitamins and biotin, but if you don't suffer from tiredness, then the biotin haircare plan is great for maintenance. Alternatively, if you have no specific worries about hair loss, but want to feel the best version of yourself, taking no chances with stress, Skin Quencher is great too. These plans are also great for grooms concerned about hair loss.

What are the benefits of a haircare plan versus a single supplement?

I formulated the plans because I learnt from experience that most people's concept of what's healthy actually isn't. Most of us will happily invest in skincare and clothes, but not in how we feel internally. I think of the plans as a three-step process, much like a garden. To grow beautiful flowers, you need sunlight, amazing soil, and water. So, the probiotics are the ultimate go to, but there's no point if you're a fan of microwave meals or Macdonald's. Unless you cook from scratch, you're throwing away the goodness you're putting into the body with the probiotics. Pairing them with Super Greens and Ginkgo Biloba B+ or Biotin Brilliance is then all about preparing the gut, balancing the body and removing toxins, as well as making sure you create the best environment for vitamin and mineral absorption.

The most important step though is water: filtered versus tap, glass bottle versus plastic. Purely because of what can be absorbed through plastic as well as unfortunately what's in mainstream water that comes through the tap.

When would be the ideal time to start taking supplements in order to feel wedding-ready?

To me there's never a day too early! Most couples will start planning a year to two years in advance, so why not use the same timeline to start working on yourself? You don't have to go all out, but you might start looking at a nutrition plan, exercising or having hydra facials. However, I fully recognise there may be financial restraints, so this might not always be possible. In which case, I'd say three months is optimal, but the minimum is six weeks in advance. This way there's time to flush out any nasties and create balance allowing the body to become stronger and progress. Many tell me they start to see a difference within two weeks.

Tell us a bit about the company's ethos.

Supplements are a big industry, but they've often received bad press because the products simply don't do what they claim to. So, these are all things we've addressed across everything we do from the ingredients to manufacturing. We make sure that every process has full certification, including soil association and vegan accreditation. We've worked hard to ensure our products are vegan and our marine collagen is protected and sourced ethically.

Everything is sustainable as much as possible. When our bottles are finished with they get made into tiles and flooring, and the packaging too is eco-friendly. Even the energy used in my office is renewable. We're proud of the fact that recently we were responsible for 25 trees being planted in the rainforest due to our renewable energy contract.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Simone's book, Healthy Hair Happy Body, contains her comprehensive and motivational plan to transform wellbeing from the inside out. In each chapter she introduces concepts that provide insight into how the body functions, and what really makes a difference to achieving optimum health, sharing how tiny adjustments over time can lead to better results. It's available at www.amazon.co.uk, priced at £15, with £1 going to Motor Neurone Disease Association.

The Biotin Haircare Plan, £70; The Ginkgo Haircare Plan, £70; and SkinQuencher, £35 by Simone Thomas Wellness, are all available at https://simonethomaswellness.com

Fashion Q&A

Local experts offer advice on how to look your big-day best

A POP OF COLOUR

I'd love to incorporate some colour into my wedding dress. Do you have any ideas of how I could do this?

There are so many ways that you can incorporate colour into your wedding dress. Most gowns come in different shades such as ivory, pinks, greys, blues and blacks. We also work with one of the best companies in the UK that allow us to make custom changes to our gowns, including the colour.

If you're after a subtle hue, most seamstresses will be able to customise a gown by adding coloured thread, beads, fabrics or even crystals to your design. We often tell our couples that with a great seamstress the only limit to customising a gown is your imagination.

We understand that some people want to add colour to remember a loved one, and so we've also started to embroider everything from robins to initials on dresses, veils and denim or leather jackets.

The best advice I can give to any bride-to-be is to shop around for a store that can accommodate you and who will go above and beyond to help make your dreams come true.

Jen Jamieson | Owner and director
www.avamaybridal.com

Gown/by Justin Alexander

BABY IT'S COLD OUTSIDE

What dress style would you suggest for a winter wedding?

With winter just around the corner, no doubt brides-to-be are beginning to search for inspiration to create the perfect seasonal look. Most people think you need to go for fluffy fur shawls, velvet textures and bold red colour pallets, however, in line with this year's most popular bridal trend, we think a clean, simplistic gown is perfect for this time of the year. This blank canvas will allow you to have fun with your décor, so go wild with your styling or keep it bare with a woodland-inspired palette. We would style these gowns with a burst of colour in your flowers, bridesmaids' dresses or even a seasonal table.

Bronagh Power | Marketing executive
www.tdr-bridal.co.uk

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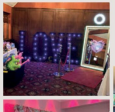
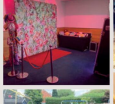
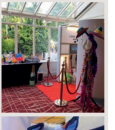
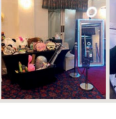
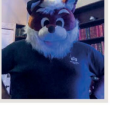



Bevan Events Magic Mirror & Photobooth Hire

Bevan Events are a friendly, family run, Midlands based company that specialise in the hire of XL, Magic Mirrors, Rustic Open Booths, Oval Photo Booths, iPad Booths, 4ft Rustic Dark Oak Light Up Love Letters and 4ft Light Up Numbers for all types of events including Wedding, Engagements, Birthdays, Graduations, Proms, Corporate Events, Christmas Parties and may more.

Visit www.bevanevents.co.uk, www.facebook.com/bevanevents or call us on 07428 715504 to discuss how we can make your event extra special with customised photos, guestbook and usb included and prints for your guests, we take pride in trying to deliver a happy, stress free service for you.

Bespoke wedding gifts

County Wedding Events show sponsor Farrar & Tanner reveals their guide to personalised presents for the bride, groom and wedding party

Farrar & Tanner specialise in premium personalised gifts, with a focus on delivering high quality pieces designed and crafted to last a lifetime. It sources a premium range from the most esteemed companies around Britain and the rest of the world to provide a lavish, diverse collection.

Based in the regency town of Cheltenham Spa, its skilled team of on-site craftsmen deliver a finely engraved or embossed product finished to your specifications for beautiful, stylish and thoughtful wedding gifts.

From gift boxed fine wines and Champagnes to sleek modern homeware and hand-blown glasses, selecting a delightful gift to spoil your loved one on their big day is easy. Most items can be personalised with a name, date, or special message too – creating wonderful memories that last a lifetime.

Raise a Toast

Cheers! At Farrar & Tanner, it has everything you need to raise a toast in style, from silver plated, Swarovski studded Champagne flutes to cake knives engraved with a bespoke message.

Gifts for Grooms

Finding the perfect present for a groom and the groomsmen can be taxing. Farrar & Tanner has carefully curated a selection of fine gifts for men such as stylish pocket watches and elegant hip flasks – most items can be personalised with a name, date or special message.

Wedding Gifts

Farrar & Tanner stock a wide range of premium gifts for newlyweds, with options to suit the unique needs and personality of every couple. Why not personalise your selection with a name, date, or heartfelt message?

FARRAR & TANNER **Check out www.farrar-tanner.co.uk**

A nose for it

A citrus, marine, woody fragrance grooms wearing this can expect top notes of Italian bergamot and pink pepper, hearty notes of marine accord and grey amber and base notes of patchouli and wood.

Montblanc Explorer Ultra Blue is priced: £32.50 (30ml), £51.50 (60ml), £71.50 (100ml) check out www.johnlewis.com

COLOUR SWATCH

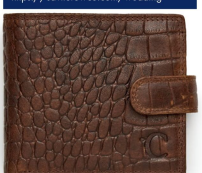
Timex Watches are pleased to introduce three new colourways to its much-loved Q Timex Reissue Series. A natural evolution of the Q Timex the new launches add a pop of colour to the iconic 1979 original. Available to buy now for £159 at www.timex.co.uk

Grooms' NEWS

All the latest news and product launches

SUIT UP

Savile Row has a great selection of new suits for the expected bumper wedding season post-lockdowns. With a range to match all budgets, whether you're the groom or a groomsman, here at CWM HQ we particularly love this on-trend Grey Navy Check Wool Suit (£349) that's been made from 100% wool and can be paired with a white shirt and black Derby shoes. Check out: https://savilerowco.com/wedding



SEASONAL OFFERING

Celtic & Co has launched a whole host of new season products perfect for grooms.

Featuring a billfold construction, its new wallet is crafted in soft leather embossed with a crocodile motif to match other accessories in the collection. It has a full-length zipped compartment and 11 card slots, a clear ID window, a note pocket and a coin pocket with a secure popper closure.

Complete with cotton lining, this compact accessory will keep your cards and cash in fine order for the big day, honeymoon and beyond. Priced, £34, check out www.celticandco.com

TOP 5 UNDER £50

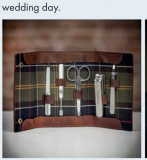
Gifting and accessory specialists Farrar & Tanner (www.farrar-tanner.co.uk) has curated a list of gift ideas containing a combination of personalised, practical and fun products which all encompass an element of luxury for your wedding day.

BARBOUR TARTAN HANDKERCHIEF BOX SET, £30

These three organic cotton handkerchiefs, woven in Barbour's classic tartan, will add a stylish country-chic touch to your attire.

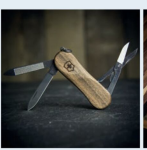
KITCHEN CRAFT ACACIA WOOD MAGNETIC KNIFE RACK, £30

The rack has multiple purposes including freeing up space in drawers and serving as a design element. This would make a wonderful present for someone with culinary interest.



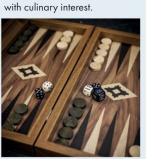
BARBOUR AYDON MANICURE KIT, £35

This manicure kit is an absolute staple in any man's washbag; inside the leather and tartan case, you will find five tools – nail clippers, scissors, tweezers, cuticle pushers and file – personalisation is also available.



VICTORINOX EXECUTIVE WOOD 81 WALNUT SWISS ARMY KNIFE, £40

Combining luxury with practicality, the Evowood has five essential everyday tools including a stainless-steel blade and serrated scissors.



MANOPOULOS WALNUT WOOD BACKGAMMON SET, £49

The board itself is compact for travelling on honeymoon with thick, high walls and side racks to ensure all pieces are safe – personalisation is available.

CHECK *please!*

Look dashing in this on trend print

£290, trousers, https://tavoy-brook.com

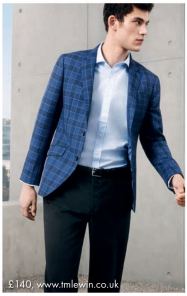
£69.95, www.schoffelcountry.com

£660, https://harrisdistillery.com

£69.99, www.farlows.co.uk

£poa, www.next.co.uk

£17.99, www.shoezone.com



£140, www.tmlewin.co.uk

£299.95, www.schoffelcountry.com

£349, https://savilerow.co.com

HONEYMOON *News* UK SPECIAL

NORTH YORKSHIRE

Hornington Manor, a North Yorkshire wedding venue, has welcomed eight themed shepherd – perfect for newlyweds looking for a private retreat.

Each hut takes inspiration from Yorkshire and beyond, with themes ranging from Arabia to the 1940s they offer complete escapism as well as a luxury king-size Harrison Spinks bed, television, kitchenette, wifi, an en suite with shower and breathtaking views to boot!

The Amy Johnson hut is an ode to one of Yorkshire's finest female pilots, reflecting Johnson's love of 1930s fashion, flying and adventure. To view the rest of the huts and to book your stay visit www.horningtonmanor.co.uk

CUMBRIA

Gisland Hall Hotel, Cumbria, is having a five-star renovation enhancing it's three-star offering. Providing the perfect base for outdoorsy types – in the year of the Great British staycation – explore the area by car, on foot or by bike. It's close to UNESCO World Heritage sites along Hadrian's Wall, Carlisle, Gretna, Hexham and Newcastle.

The property sits proudly in 140 acres and in Spring 2022, it will offer luxury suites and family rooms with patios ideal for those with pets! There'll be an array of guest experiences, amenities, event spaces and luxury Spa facilities, making it the ideal retreat for couples, groups of friends and family gatherings.

In the meantime, the hotel in its existing incarnation is available for affordable staycations at only £80pp (based on two sharing) for three-course dinner, bed and breakfast. Check out www.gilslandhall.com

NORTHERN IRELAND

Galgorm Resort & Spa, the multi award-winning spa resort in Ballymena, is an ideal minimoon location. At the resort, you will experience complete post-wedding relaxation and luxury with an indulgent choice of dining options in three on-site restaurants. What's more there's a gin bar with more than 400 gins, a Thermal Village Spa and Serenity Garden (which is the first of it's kind in Ireland).

From its enviable corner location within the original manor house, couples will be in awe of Suite 1857. It offers unrivalled views of the cascading waters of the River Maine complete with Juliet balcony. With a truly romantic design: a muted palette of brocade wall coverings, antique lighting, French baroque furniture and solid oak floors and roof beams, it's a sight to behold – a traditional freestanding bath with claw feet and separate shower complete the space.

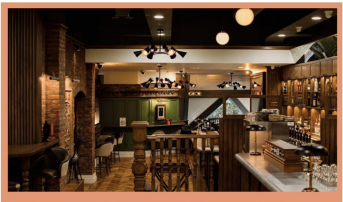
Here are two new offers for a minimooners: a two-night dining retreat from £520 and a two-night spa retreat from £700 for two! Check out www.galgorm.com

LAKE DISTRICT

A chic country house hotel in the picture-perfect village of Grasmere, Victorian House Hotel is launching a Stargazer Experience for the perfect finishing touch to romantic post-wedding minimoons. The Stargazer Experience costs £15pp and includes a backpack and waterproof rug to borrow, a map to the viewing spot, homemade sausage rolls, a generous tipple of Whiskey Mac, a Red Torch specifically designed with map reading and stargazing in mind so guests can flick between the map and the night sky with ease, plus binoculars and a star guide.

Couples can choose from Stargazer Rooms complete with telescopes, star maps, dreamy beds, good coffee, organic teas and generous Land & Water toiletries; there's also a luxurious Shepherds Hut for two on the riverbank.

Available all year round – but stargazing in the Lakes is particularly good in the autumn and winter – an overnight stay costs from £123 per room per night including breakfast. Visit www.victorianhousehotel.co.uk



CO.ANTRIM, NORTHERN IRELAND

For discerning travellers planning a romantic getaway, the newly opened The Rabbit Hotel & Retreat is idyllic. Oozing character, it offers sumptuous yet comfortable accommodation, fine dining, a stylish bar and a mood-enhancing outdoor spa.

The Rabbit is a fusion of modern living with country life comprising 33 bedrooms in four different stylish room types with scandi-inspired, retro design. Each boasts seriously comfy beds, a Nespresso machine, Dyson hairdryer and a Marshall amp, not to mention fluffy robes and flip flops for a trip to the spa: The Relaxation Burrow. The latter has been carefully created for optimum zen comprising Swedish sauna, aroma steam room, salt chamber, outdoor Roman baths, loungers and cabanas – there's also a man-made beach and lake bar!

The offers at The Rabbit Hotel include the 'Hop to It' break from £180 per night based on two people sharing including access to The Relaxation Burrow, bottle of bubbles in your room and breakfast the following morning Check out www.rabbithotel.com

LONDON

Boutique hotel, The Londoner, has officially opened its doors in the heart of London's iconic Leicester Square. With a staggering 350 guest rooms spread across 16 storeys and a subterranean series of spaces, it will certainly leave guests amazed. Designed in collaboration with world-renowned architectural designers Yabu Pushelberg, the luxury urban resort features a range of rooms, suites, penthouses, two private screening rooms, an entire floor dedicated to wellness, expansive ballroom, private art gallery and to top it off a mix of several concept eateries. This includes its signature Mediterranean restaurant, Whitcomb's, plus a contemporary Japanese lounge bar with a rooftop terrace and its neighbourhood bar, Joshua's Tavern – minimooners would never have to leave for the ultimate staycation!

Whilst super in scale, its boutique approach and commitment to hospitality offers the highest levels of luxury with an experience designed to make every guest feel at home. Check out www.thelondoner.com

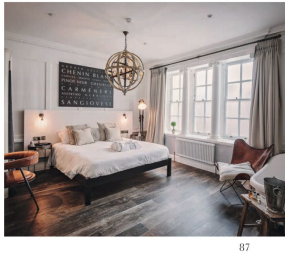
https://duke-hotels.com/

SURREY

Crockers Henley, based in Henley-on-Thames, is celebrating a year in businesses, although it's been a year like no other! Only an hour from London, Crockers Henley presents understated luxury at its finest and provides the ultimate staycation destination. Housed in a Grade II listed building, it's home to seven elegantly designed, contemporary bedrooms complete with rolltop baths, four-poster beds and restored heritage Georgian features.

A delight for foodies and those with a discerning palate, The Grill, overseen by Tom Westerland, is a hive of activity offering a casual dining affair including the famed chateaubriand and Tom's take on English classics. Meanwhile, the two 16-seat Chef's Tables each present an immersive dining experience over ten courses. The Thames Table, overseen by talented young chef Alex Payne, celebrates the best of modern British dining whilst The Gardiner's, with Iain Dixon at the helm, shines light on delicate and complex pan-Asian flavours.

Starting from £400, inclusive of dinner at one of the Chef's Tables, overnight stay and three-course breakfast, based on two sharing. Check out https://henley.crockersuk.com



Escape to Greece: City VS Islands

Bustling cultural centres or tranquil secluded spots, the choice is yours

Culture capital

The Athenian Riviera has undergone a resurgence, much to the delight of the discerning honeymooner who can revel in the dining, drinking and culture which has now ventured into the streets of Athens. The boutique bars and trendy dining outlets along with leading hotels such as The Alex, from the Greek family run group Santikos Collection, make Athens and its Riviera coastline the ideal spot for a city escape.

Piraeus has also become a mecca for exciting new gallery openings in recent years, due to masses of students who have studied abroad returning with new-found talent and kickstarting a new art scene in the region. New openings include Intermission, Rodeo and most recent of all Carwan which after nearly a decade of activities in Beirut, Lebanon and participation in more than 50 international exhibitions, relocated to Piraeus in September 2020.

The team at The Alex pride themselves on being able to offer the best insider knowledge to their guests, finding a suitable recommendation no matter their culinary palate or activity desire for honeymooners and visitors alike. Here they have pulled together a few of their favourite drinking, dining and cultural hotspots to help with planning your very own weekend in the city...

ITINERARY INSPIRATION

Drinks...

Pirée: Combining culture and entertainment, Pirée has a café bar where you can enjoy premium drinks, delicious coffee and a food menu while admiring the work of young talents. The creative energy is palpable, and if you're lucky, you may even get to assist in an art performance.

Okio MusiCafe: In Marina Zeas, this live music coffee bar is open all day and serves drinks and creative cocktails in the evening. The music playlist includes world music, soul, funk and jazz; the bar also regularly hosts live gigs.

Food...

1903 A Taste of Smyrna: Located in the centre of cosmopolitan Glyfada, this is a restaurant which takes you back in time. Well-known chef Ilias Skoulas, is inspired by the genuine traditional Greek cuisine as it developed in Smyrna at the beginning of the previous century, and creates delicious dishes.

Orizontes, Athens: Perched on Lycabettus Hill, one of the highest peaks in Athens, the views from Orizontes are god-level – sit outdoors come sunset with the Acropolis, Aegean Sea and entire city sprawled below!

Culture...

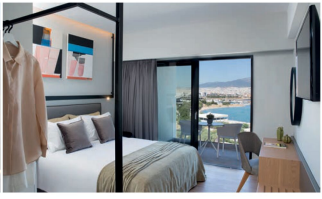
The Intermission: A new exhibition space in Piraeus initiated by Artemis Baltoyanni. The focus will be on exhibitions of critically acclaimed international artists, emerging, established and historical.

Rodeo Gallery: Opened in Piraeus in June 2018 and located in a former commercial warehouse, Berlin-based architect Etienne Descloux designed the space and, in addition to its exhibition programme, the venue hosts screenings, talks, performances and other events.

MORE ABOUT THE ALEX...

When you arrive at The Alex, check in, hand your bags over at the desk, and head straight for the 4th floor where you'll find Nest – the hotel's rooftop restaurant and cocktail bar with unobstructed harbour views! Soak up the incredible sunset views and magical harbourside atmosphere while indulging in the popular menu choice: tagliatelle with ragout beef served with Greek "ksinomitzithra" cheese and thyme.

Nightly rates at The Alex start from £110, visit the following website for more information www.santikoscollection.com/thealex



Island hopping

Not only will honeymooners looking for a short-haul destination be encapsulated with the historical culture of Athens, but Greece is ideal for those in need of some R&R post-vows too. Whether you're after quiet reflection in a small deluxe hotel before another hop for cultural immersion, or perhaps you want to learn a new skill like sailing or scuba diving, Olympic Holidays' bespoke island-hopping itineraries offer something for everyone. With tailor-made itineraries offering accommodation across a range of price points, including hotel and inter-island transfers, its knowledgeable team are on hand to recommend the best destinations and create bespoke cultural trips, holidays and gourmet getaways.

Destinations include the Saronic Islands (Poros, Spetses and Aegina), Dodecanese (Rhodes, Halki, Kalymnos, Leros, Tilos, Symi and Kos), which are delightfully different and easily connected by ferries and catamarans. Cyclades (Santorini, Naxos, Andros, Paros, Tinos and Mykonos) where each island has its own strong identity, so island hopping brings with it new customs, significantly different landscapes and everything for peaceful days to lively nights. The Sporades (Skiathos, Skopelos and Alonissos) with their fantastic beaches, crystal clear sea and lush green forests, and Ionian (Corfu, Paxos, Ithaka, Kefalonia & Zante), home to caves and lakes, ancient ruins and windsurfing hotspots plus five-star hotels with Michelin-star cuisine. Crete can also be combined with both the Cyclades and Dodecanese Islands.

ITINERARY INSPIRATION

A romantic lustre adds sparkle to the marvellous Sporades Islands. Legend has it that one island was created by the love child of gods. Now two islands are the focus of one of the 21st-century's most successful romantic movies, *Mamma Mia*.

Skiathos: Just 12-miles long but with more than 60 beaches, gorgeous Skiathos Town has shady tavernas on a busy waterfront. The narrow streets of the bustling old town are crammed with shops, cafes and bars. You can climb Medieval castles, stroll through forests, discover quiet sandy beaches and even take a rescued dog for a walk.

Skopelos: Next stop, scenic Skopelos. Look out for dolphins before you sail into a harbour that is backed by a hillside covered in white houses with terracotta roofs. Tree-filled Skopelos has forests, and orchards and several beaches can be reached easily by bus or hired vehicles and many more beaches are waiting to be found in bays and coves.

Alonissos: A gem for those wanting to get away from it all. You feel the sense of calm as you sail into elegant Patitiri, the small town and main port. Some beaches have bright white pebbles or sand creating a vivid contrast with the turquoise sea. Many are surrounded by pine forests that cover much of the island. Alonissos is in Europe's largest marine park which protects monk seals and dolphins. It has a rescue centre for baby seals – try to fit in a boat trip around the park!

MORE ABOUT OLYMPIC HOLIDAYS...

Olympic Holidays offers a 14-night Sporades Island-Hopping Holiday from £1,229pp based on two people travelling in 2022 with flights. The package includes three-nights at Skiathos Princess Resort, five-nights at Skopelos Village, four-nights at Marpunta Resort, Alonnisos and one night at the Punta Hotel, Skiathos. Visit www.olympicholidays.com

Next Issue

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2022

ON SALE: 4th February, 2022

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Get married in a hotel

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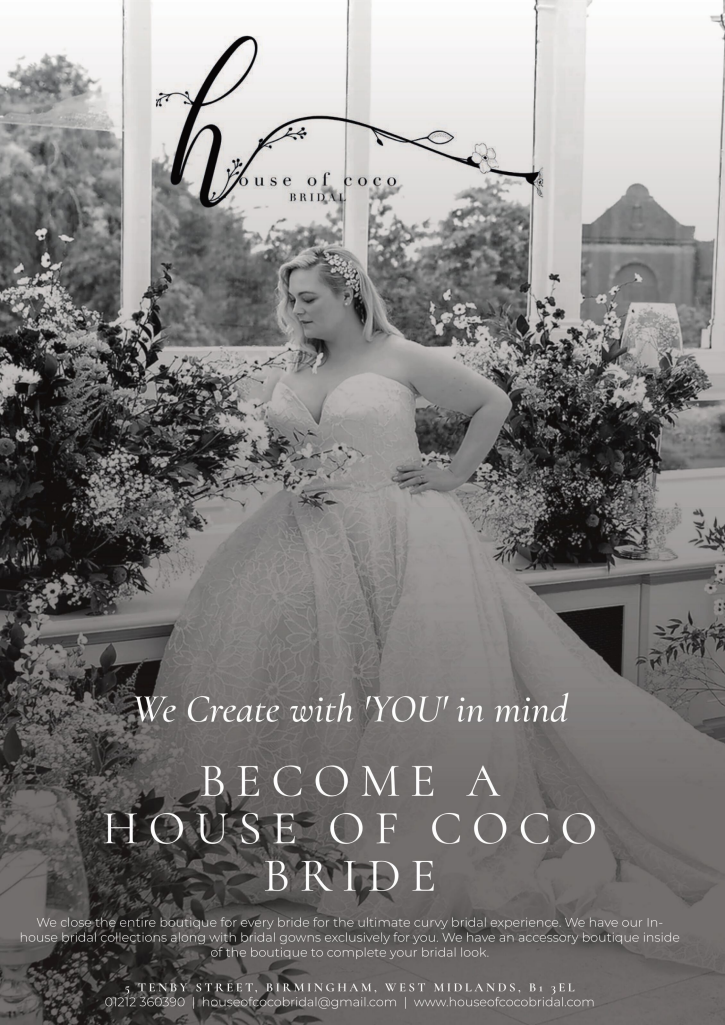

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