

Forward planning

Emma Andrew discovers why employing the services of a wedding organiser could end up saving you both time and money



HAVING ploughed my way through dozens of bridal magazines, and acres of wedding cyberspace, I have to admit defeat. I am utterly baffled by the sheer choice on offer for 'the big day'.

With a vague idea that I'd like some kind of country house wedding, I found myself drifting off into a blissful reverie — drifting down a rose strewn aisle in a floaty lace gown, to the strains of a string quartet...

The harsh reality of achieving this idyllic scene though, would be hour upon hour of exhausting research, planning and hard graft. At about this point, it suddenly occurred to me why the concept of a Wedding Organiser is such a brilliant one.

"Imagine me as an extra pair of hands — not taking any of the excitement of planning your wedding away from you, but just taking away the pressure — giving you the

opportunity to enjoy the experience," says Peta Withnell, of Organised Events, instantly banishing any worries I harboured that she might barge in and take over.

She's one of those people you can't help but instantly warm to, and in a matter of minutes, her straight-talking, engaging manner and infectious sense of fun, fills you with confidence that she not only understands your needs, but has the ability to make the whole procedure simple and painless.

When Peta explains that she spent twenty years in high pressure jobs within the hotel and events industry — she was a director for Hilton Hotels — it becomes clear that you're dealing with an incredibly experienced lady with an outstanding business head on her shoulders.

"You'll find lots of wedding co-ordinators out there," explains Peta, "but for many of them, their only

qualification for organising your wedding, is that they organised their own. Planning a wedding requires an immensely organised, methodical approach and, because of my past career, I'm able to offer superb project management skills.

"Having spent twenty years in the events industry, I don't just have great contacts, but I know how the industry works — I know their profit margins, and so I know exactly which areas I can negotiate discounts for you and I recognise when you're getting a great deal on a venue, for instance."

According to Peta, the average amount of time a bride spends planning her wedding is a staggering 250 hours. When you consider that many of these women hold down demanding, full-time jobs, it's hardly surprising that there is a growing trend for using the services of a wedding organiser.

"Many of my clients are high-flying career women," says Peta, "who just don't have the time to spend bogged down in the minute details of their weddings. Even something as simple as finding a venue can be very time consuming.

"I have a whole database full of them, and if you describe your ideal one to me, I'm able to come up with a shortlist that matches your requirements. That way, you don't waste time visiting places, only to discover on arrival, that there are, for example, low ceilings when you wanted high ones."

One of the main advantages of working with Peta seems to be her flexible and understanding attitude. With several of her clients either living abroad (she advertises on the internet) or working long hours, she is happy to fit in with the demands of your lifestyle.

"Most couples spend a year or more organising their weddings, and for many it's an intense experience. We've usually become great friends by the time they get married. Sometimes I spend hours on the phone to brides on a daily basis, but other times I may only meet the couple once, or the entire process is carried out by e-mail."

Whatever the case, Peta is always sensitive to their needs, and more importantly, their budget.

"I think many couples are scandalously taken advantage of," she says. "Once a company realises a booking is for a wedding, they are often over-charged. Some co-ordinators even charge a flat fee of ten per cent of the cost of the wedding — which I think is outrageous. If a couple decide to go for a top of the range champagne rather than a cheaper one, why should they have to pay their co-ordinator more when it's the same amount of work to place the order?"

"Once I've had an initial consultation with the couple, and got a good idea of what they want, I then go back to them with a proposal and quotation. This is based on the amount of time I believe I will spend organising it for them.

Sometimes, I end up spending more time than I originally quoted for with a couple, but I wouldn't dream of charging them extra, it's just one of those things."

The other fantastic advantage of having someone like Peta organise your wedding for you, is that once the actual day comes round, you can relax and enjoy yourself, while she runs round ensuring everything runs like clockwork.

"The day before or the day of the wedding, you'll usually find me rushing around directing florists or caterers and

making sure the marquee goes up in the right spot," she says, "even during dinner, I'm making sure everyone gets to the right table and has a glass of champagne for the toasts."

When your whole life revolves around weddings, it begs the question — don't you ever get sick of them?

"Definitely not!" laughs Peta, "People think my job's terribly glamorous, and I suppose it is, but it's also incredibly hard work. Nevertheless, I love a good wedding, and because I usually know the couple so well by then, I always end up with a tear in my eye."

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Bride photo, courtesy of Paloma Blanca



Car photo, courtesy of Crim's Dyke Hotel

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