

Sunday, June 11, 2000

Summer Maids Bloom in Style

By Brook Kropf (Easton)
Freelance Writer, Cedar Rapids Gazette

Summertime, a perfect time for a wedding. With the bride as its classic centerpiece in white and her bridesmaids at her side, a summer wedding can be a vision of sunlit loveliness.

But, while being a bridesmaid is an honor, we all know it has the potential to be a fashion nightmare. Visions of hideous dresses in tulle, satin and chiffon swim in your head.

Well, fear no more because this millennium introduces elegant innovations in bridesmaids gowns.

One of the most eye-catching trends is color. Popular colors include platinum, slate, taupe, aquamarine, lilac, and a buttery yellow.

Designers are turning toward warmer tones said Bobbie Dennison of Weddings Etc. in Marion.

Dennison says black is still very popular, but adds that some brides are replacing it with platinum, which has the same neutral effect as black, but isn't as foreboding.

Combining colors is also becoming very popular. Certain designers like Jordan, available at shops such as Heart to Heart in North Liberty, are pairing colors by taking a simple sheath style dress with spaghetti straps and making the bodice one color, like cream and skirt another

like taupe. The dress is offered in many different color combinations.

Another unique use of color is the Allure style also found at Heart to Heart. It incorporates a simple sleeveless, square-neck bodice with an A-line skirt. The unique touch of a thin black thread interwoven throughout the solid color dress adds depth and accent color to the gown.

Other dresses incorporate color in a more subtle way. One example at Weddings, Etc. combines a sleeveless brocade bodice with an empire-waist skirt. The striking detail is in the brocade, which is in a contrasting color to the dress.

Gowns are also adopting the latest trends in fashion. Backless, sleeveless, strapless and spaghetti straps are all making an appearance this year.

We've seen things that have never been used before, said Mary Schlotterback from Hope's Bridal in Atkins. These aren't the old-maid dresses sold in the past.

The general style is an After-Six or Couture look.

Brides and bridesmaids are looking for simple yet elegant looks, Dennison said. Certain styles like A-line skirts and empire waists are still hot this season. Dennison says this is because the styles flatter all body types. The introduction of separates also solves the dilemma of the hard-to-fit bridesmaid.

Separates are ideal for the girl who is a size 7 on top, but a size 9 on the

bottom, says Bill Rackle, owner of Heart to Heart in North Liberty.

Another benefit of separates is the versatility of style. Designs by Bill Levkoff offer a multitude of selections in tops and bottoms. Bodices can feature sequins and square neck, be strapless or with sleeves paired with an A-line skirt, sheath skirt, or even a skirt featuring a mini-train or godet. Separates can also help solve the Can I wear this again? dilemma.

Schlotterback says she has seen girls pair the tops of separates with a different skirt and add a blazer creating a more casual look. With all these options separates can accentuate all your bridesmaids assets.

An exciting accessory this year is the shawl or scarf. Worn during the wedding or after, it adds a unique touch to every gown.

With such skin-baring styles shawls and scarves are not only stylish, but functional as well, Dennison said.

She warns brides to check with clergy about how much skin to bear in the church. Some have strict rules on what's appropriate.

Now you might be wondering how much one of these gowns costs. High-end gowns by Jordan and Bill Levkoff can run between \$140-\$200. However, many designers also offer more budget-conscious lines ranging from \$120-\$150.

Bill Rackle of Heart to Heart warns that while the budget lines of dresses can save money, manufacturers may be able to offer gowns more cheaply because

they cut corners: not lining the gown or using a lighter material that is see-through. So, while cost is an issue, Bobbi Dennison of Weddings, Etc. advises brides to think of it as their special day and make the most of it.