

Get a Custom Wedding Dress Without Going Over Your Budget

Go bespoke without going broke with tips from designer Amanda Ergen-Jennings.

By Carrie Anton

FAVORITE



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If you've scoured the bridal shops, flipped through issues of *The Knot* magazine, and even tried on your mother's gown, but still haven't landed on one look you love, it could be time to consider a dress that's made to order. Known in the fashion industry as "bespoke," this type of dress is designed, crafted and tailored to a bride's unique specifications.

"Bespoke gowns are for any bride looking to personalize her wedding day style, the bride who doesn't see herself in the types of dresses typically found in bridal salons, and the bride who finds bits and pieces of dresses she loves and wants to combine into one dress," says Amanda Ergen-Jennings, owner of [MinkMaids](#), a bespoke bridal design company located in Milwaukee.

Getting to call the shots in every step of the design process sounds like a dream come true, but if you're on a budget, you might think a

custom gown just isn't an option—and that's where you'd be surprised.

Ergen-Jennings estimates that depending on style details, fabrication and the designer, a typical bespoke gown can sometimes run between \$1,500 and \$4,000 (and up, depending on where you live and how intricate the gown is). But if you're thinking of a very simple silhouette, Ergen-Jennings says she's helped brides achieve a custom look for just \$700 to \$100.

Tips for Your Made-to-Measure Gown

If a custom-created dress is what you'll wear down the aisle, follow these tips to make sure your one-of-a-kind gown is a garment you'll look back on as positive experience.

Go Dress Shopping

In addition to it being a fun day with your entourage, going out for a day of trying on dresses will help you better understand the silhouettes that look best on your body. Images of sleeved mermaid-style wedding dresses may be on your mind, but you might see yourself differently after slipping on a strapless A-line gown. Take notes about the features you like about each dress so you can convey those to your designer.

Find a Designer Who's a Perfect Fit

Take the time to research a designer who has made dresses similar to the styles you love. For example, Ergen-Jennings tends to design with structured fabrics and architectural silhouettes. When contacted by brides who like her work, but then send inspiration photos of lacy, chiffon gowns, she knows it's not a good match. "A designer who matches your design aesthetic will ensure you're getting the best quality of work and will help you have the best bespoke experience," she says.

Choose Wisely

Being on a budget may sway you toward the designer with the lowest cost, but if you end up with a dress you're not in love with and have to buy something new, you won't be saving anything. While prices should be kept in mind, don't forget about the bond you feel with the designer.

"One of my favorite parts of working with a bespoke bride is building a relationship with her as we build the gown together," Ergen-Jennings says. "The bride is fully invested in the process and makes a connection with the person creating a very special garment just for her."

Bring Up Budget Early and Often

From the very beginning, you and your designer need to be on the same page about price. He or she will be honest about what is and isn't possible, and can discuss ways to save money with your dream design.

"Many designers are willing to work within a budget if the bride is open to modifications," Ergen-Jennings says. "Simplifying the silhouette, removing intricate details or inner construction, and using different fabrications (for example, polyester instead of silk) will all help to reduce the cost of a gown."

Stay the Course

While minor adjustments during the design of your custom gown won't necessarily tack on costs, major changes too late in the game can. Moments of indecisiveness are normal when working from just a drawing and basic pattern pieces, but a good designer will keep you on track—even when insecurities peak.

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