

# expert advice



For more than forty years, Oscar de la Renta has enchanted the fashionable set with his elegant, smart, always-gorgeous ready-to-wear line. No surprise then that his keen eye for the intersection between classic design and of-the-moment style would translate so beautifully to his bridal collection, which he started in spring 2006. Chic brides are smitten—both Amanda Peet and Katherine Heigl donned his pretty frocks for their nuptials—and so are we. The charming Dominican-born designer recently sat down with us and talked about choosing the perfect dress, why a veil and train add allure, and the importance of asking your mother along when you go gown shopping.

## *Oscar de la Renta*

**business:** Oscar de la Renta Bridal

**known for:** Luxe fabrics, shapely silhouettes, embellishments on tulle and lace, splashes of color, and chic boleros and wraps

**where to find him:** Oscar de la Renta showroom, call 212-282-0542 or e-mail [bridal@oscardelarenta.com](mailto:bridal@oscardelarenta.com) for an appointment. Go to [www.oscardelarenta.com](http://www.oscardelarenta.com) for retailers

### *What should the bride consider before she embarks on her search for her wedding dress?*

You have to think practically. The type of wedding and time of year are the most important things to consider first. What kind of wedding is it going to be? Is it out in the country, casual, a European wedding, a city wedding, or a destination wedding? Also, the time of day should be considered. Is it an evening wedding or daytime garden wedding?

### *Why is it often such a struggle to find the right wedding dress?*

I think this is the first time in a woman's life that she might hesitate in choosing what to wear. It is easy for her to know what to wear

to work each day or out to dinner, but a wedding is specific and a bride wants to look special. When brides come in to try on dresses, and they do have an idea of what they want to wear, they usually stick with it. If I think this is not the best style for them, I give them my best argument for another one.

### *Who should she bring along on her shopping excursion?*

It would be cruel not to bring your mother along. The wedding is almost as important to the mother as it is to the bride. But brides should prepare their mothers for what they are thinking of wearing. The mother always has a notion of what she wants her daughter to look like, but the daughter is a woman now

and she wants to look like one. If I feel like the bride is holding back on choosing something she really wants because she doesn't want to hurt her mother's feelings, I ask the mother if I can talk to the bride alone.

### *Why did you decide to add a bridal collection in the spring of 2006?*

I had always done bridal for family and private clients through the years, and I had done bridal through a licensee. But I wanted to do my own collection so I knew the quality was up to my standards. We now have twenty dress styles as well as veils, shoes, and bags.

### *Have you noticed a change in bridal wear through the years?*

Brides today are not as conventional with regard to purity. They are showing more skin. Almost every woman wants a strapless dress now. They are also open to things like splashes of color. Women are more in control of their destiny than they have ever been, so I have to keep challenging myself to keep up with their demands and wishes.

*"A bride should treat the purchase of her wedding gown as an investment. It is the strongest representation of a woman's personal style she'll ever have—not to mention the most important dress she'll ever wear."*



Patterns hang near a sketch table where the styles (three shown above) first take shape. Trims from the designer's spring bridal line include floral appliqués, ostrich feathers, and an embroidered crystal belt. A silk dress in pleated shantung (at right) has a crisply draped front.

*Is color appropriate for a wedding?*

Absolutely. In pre-Elizabethan times, women wore color to get married. It really is prudish to think a bride should have to wear white only. I am known for color, and I like to bring it into my bridal line, whether it is a waist draped in pink taffeta or a sterling sash that picks up on the silver crystal bodice of the dress. I did an embroidered gown framed in powder-blue silk organza. I like to say it is the perfect "something blue." When I dressed my wife's younger sister for her wedding in Canada, she wore a ruby-red dress with a big skirt. I added a little bit of white around her neck with a lovely collar. It was beautiful.

*When choosing a dress, should a bride go for a style that's similar in spirit to her everyday look?*

A wedding dress should be a reflection of the bride's own individuality and personal style. If she has a more romantic style she may want something more classic. If she is edgier, she may want a cocktail-length dress. Ultimately, she will want to look back on this day and know she looked her most beautiful.

*What fabrics would you recommend for spring and summer weddings? And fall and winter?*

I like texture in a dress—beautiful laces and embroideries. Anything textured looks wonderful in photographs, and since you are dealing in mostly white and ivory, texture adds another element to the gown. For spring and summer, I would advise staying away from

satin or anything shiny. I love cotton organza—it is so beautiful and fresh—but it is not quite right for a city wedding. I also love silk chiffon and lightweight laces for spring and summer weddings. For fall and winter, I like silk faille and silk brocade. Brocade is a fabric that is featured in our collection.

*When is a short dress or great little suit a better choice than a gown?*

The second time around. [He breaks out into the Frank Sinatra song.] "Love is lovelier the second time around. Just as wonderful, with both feet on the ground." Actually, more women are going for a more playful, modern look. The short cocktail dresses I have in the collection are definitely for the less traditional, more adventurous bride.

*Should a more mature bride choose a certain silhouette?*

I don't want to force anyone into one style, but I find the A-line is the most flattering style in general because it's elongating.

*What should a bride consider if a wedding is held outdoors?*

No raincoats! When my stepdaughter Eliza was married at our country house in Con-





Above: A draper pins cotton muslin to a dress form to make a shaped bodice and skirt for the latest collection. De la Renta recommends luxurious silk chiffons for summer brides. At right, a silk-faille V-neck ball gown with embroidered skirt.



necticut, the tent was at the far end of the property. The event planners wanted a tented walkway leading from the house to where the ceremony would be. I said no. It not only rained the day of the wedding, it poured. We had to run out and buy as many umbrellas as we could for the guests. We took Eliza in a golf cart with an umbrella to the ceremony. I always like layers for everyday or for a bride. For outdoor events, I like to do lightweight cashmere boleros for spring and Alençon or guipure lace coats for winter.

*Destination weddings in warm climates are becoming more popular. What type of dress travels well?*

Silk chiffon is the best for an island wedding. It is light, has great movement, and can be easily packed or hand-carried onto a plane.

*Now for the opposite scenario. What should a bride wear for a city wedding that's held in the evening?*

You should rise to the occasion and do something fancier for an evening wedding. A ball

gown or something with a train is wonderful yet classic. If the bride is more fashion forward, silk brocade is a very modern choice.

*What silhouettes are best for a bride if she is not statuesque?*

I love narrow dresses because they lengthen the body. And I like a train on a dress: It adds to the elegance of the look. There is a perception that a train might interfere with dancing, but we have ways of looping up the dress so the bride looks fabulous and can still move around and dance. If a bride doesn't want a train, we have a strapless dress in our collection that features a removable skirt. You wear the skirt, which acts like a train, for the ceremony. At the reception, you take it off and you have a beautiful fitted dress so you can dance. It's a way of giving you drama without being cumbersome during the party.

*When choosing a shoe to go with the dress, are there any rules?*

Most of the time, the dress will determine the shoes. If a bride is wearing a silhouette that





Four looks from the designer (clockwise from top): a silk-brocade dress with asymmetrical cowl neckline; a guipure-lace gown with a portrait neckline; the inspiration for Heigl's wedding dress—a silk-faille off-the-shoulder gown with cascading ruffle train; and an embroidered gown of silk organza with an ostrich-feather neckline and a ruffled, tiered skirt.



shows her shoes, like a tea-length dress, she will need something more stylish, perhaps with lace or crystal embellishments.

*Once a bride has decided on the dress, how does she select the veil?*

You know, brides will often ask me, "Do I have to wear a veil?" I think it adds mystery to the whole look and it finishes her ensemble off. I love veils—just remember to choose one that does not overpower you. I like to use embellishments on my veils. I have one that has beautiful lace trim and another that has crystals sprinkled all over it.

*You featured several hats in your spring '08 collection. When is a hat appropriate instead of a veil?*

A hat can be a really great option for an outdoor wedding; it can act as a block against the sun or wind. And like a veil, a hat can also add a beautiful element of drama when the bride walks down the aisle.

*What would you say to someone who says she is hesitant to splurge on her wedding dress?*

A bride should treat the purchase of her wedding gown as an investment. It is the strongest representation of a woman's personal style she'll ever have—and the most important gown she'll ever wear. You have to

remember the wedding day is also a moment captured forever in photos. It's something you will look back on forever.

*Are there any historical or famous weddings that have inspired you?*

Grace Kelly was very much a timeless bride. From her elegant pearl- and lace-trimmed veil to her romantic gown with its beautiful lace bodice and rich silk-taffeta skirt, she was truly the essence of femininity.

*You were asked by actress Katherine Heigl to design her wedding gown. How long did it take?*

Katherine contacted us about designing her gown the summer before her wedding. Overall, the gown and veil took several months to make. She had a clear vision of how she wanted to look on her wedding day; she knew she wanted something classic, yet still fresh and modern. Katherine tried on several different styles, but ultimately she went with the silhouette she knows works best for her. We custom-made her an ivory silk-faille ruffled off-the-shoulder gown with a cascading ruffle train. She looked absolutely beautiful and statuesque on her wedding day.

*You've attended plenty of weddings. What part of the ritual do you find you enjoy most?*

When they say, "I do." I still get teary at weddings. I'm a very sentimental person.

