



*Wedding  
Bliss*  
*on a* **BUDGET**

Ethan Baron

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# Introduction

Most advice you may read about weddings tells you that balancing dreams with financial reality requires a lot of sacrifice. This book is going to show you, step by step, how to make your dreams come true at a cost you can afford, without sacrificing what matters.

Don't be persuaded by the multibillion-dollar industry that says you should hire a wedding planner. A wedding planner typically charges 10 to 20 percent of your budget, which means you have 10 to 20 percent less to spend on your wedding. It's no wonder the industry's worth billions — it takes a big bite out of wedding budgets! Wedding planners will advertise that they can get their clients wedding services for a reduced price, but clients may spend far more on the planners' fees than they save through any minor discounts. In some cases, planners receive referral fees from vendors, which ultimately leads to more money taken out of wedding budgets. Planners will tell you that they will make sure the service providers show up on the wedding day, but if you hire reputable vendors, there's no need for that because they'll be there, on time.

You may not realize it, but when it comes to planning a wedding for a reasonable cost, you know the basics already. In fact, you live them.

In Chapter 1, you will find the Seven Steps to an Affordable Dream Wedding, which are simple guiding principles you will apply to the

planning process to make sure you spend your time effectively, and achieve your wedding vision while staying within your budget.

In the chapters that follow, you'll find a timeline that lays out exactly what you need to do and when you need to do it. To keep track at all times of what's to be done, you can use the checklists and worksheets provided in these pages or complete and print the ones in the download kit (see the end of this book for more information).

You will discover how to find the services that meet your needs, for the lowest possible price. This book will help ensure that your wedding day turns out exactly the way you want it. Since you will be dealing directly with wedding-service providers, you will have no need to hire an expensive, and unnecessary, wedding planner. The following pages covers every element of the planning, from finding wedding-service providers such as florists and photographers, to booking the venue and caterer, to signing contracts, and sourcing a wedding cake. It will keep you organized, on time, and within budget.

When sensible people — who don't have unlimited finances — plan important purchases, they shop around. They find what they like, evaluate quality, and compare prices. When they find what they want, at an affordable cost, they make the purchase.

In planning your wedding, you'll make a series of important purchases, to obtain the goods and services required for the event. You'll use shopping and buying methods you already know well through the process of day-to-day living.

Most of wedding planning involves obtaining the services of vendors, such as photographers, florists, music providers, caterers, and venue providers. Chapters 3 through 8 show you how to find the best vendors, how to approach them, how to negotiate with them, and ultimately, how to ensure you receive their very best services for their very best price.

The steps in this book will allow you to tailor the wedding to your wishes, keep the process — and the expenditures — under your control, and ensure all goes smoothly on your wedding day and beyond. Think beauty, joy, fun, love, and memories you'll treasure forever. Think big — and think small. You're on your way to a perfect, affordable wedding.



# The Seven Steps to an Affordable Dream Wedding

The seven steps in this chapter make up the guiding principles overseeing the effective and satisfying planning of this extremely important event. By applying these principles to every element of the wedding planning, you will be able to achieve your goal of having your dream wedding at an affordable price. For each of the major elements of your wedding, the following chapters' section headings show you which steps to directly apply, and how to apply them.

Each of the seven steps will help you with the others, preparing you to achieve a perfect whole, a wedding that lets you express yourself through your own creation of the event — by taking control of the process, and costs, on the way up to the big day. The steps hold the key to ensuring that not only does the planning go smoothly and cost-effectively, you will be able to tick off each item on each list with the confidence of controlling the process and keeping it on track.

## 1. Step 1: Visualize

Visualizing is a special step. This is where you sort out what matters, and what you really want from your wedding — and it's easy. Your

main goal for your wedding day is simple: You want to have the time of your life, surrounded by the people who matter most. You want every guest to enjoy a wonderful experience they'll recall fondly in the years to come. And you want this wedding with maximum impact for the minimum price. You will use this clear vision of the wedding to guide you as you prepare and execute your planning tasks.

## 2. Step 2: Prioritize

You will apply Step 2 throughout the planning process to ensure that you get what you really want, for a reasonable cost. You will apply this principle to deciding which elements of the wedding are the most important to you and which receive the appropriate share of the budget. You will prioritize the scenes you want the photographer to capture. You will decide which is more important, the wedding party flowers or the reception centerpieces. By always having your priorities in mind, you'll keep the planning process running smoothly, and make sure you accomplish your goals.

## 3. Step 3: Strategize

Time and money are your two main commodities of concern. You have a time budget as well as a financial budget — you need to balance the wedding planning with the rest of your life. Strategizing is about finding the most time- and cost-effective ways of achieving your wedding goals. Use the modern technology you have at hand to maximize the efficiency of the planning process. By strategizing, you can delegate many tasks while being in control of final decision-making. In the following pages you will learn to negotiate with high-quality service providers, and create positive relationships with the people who will help make your dream wedding happen.

## 4. Step 4: Scrutinize

Scrutinizing is a vital principle for finding your wedding vendors, and contracting their services. You need to look closely at potential vendors to decide which ones will end up on your list of possibilities. You need to look even more closely at the vendors you decide you'd like to hire, checking references to see how they performed for other clients. You need to examine your vendor contracts to make sure they describe in detail the exact products and services you require. The following pages will help you find the right vendors for your event, and how to evaluate them as well as what you must include in your vendor contracts.

## 5. Step 5: Minimize

This is not a time to ask, “What should our wedding include?” This is a time to ask, “What *must* our wedding include?” This is an easy question to answer because it’s based on your priorities: What’s most important to you as a couple, and to your family and friends who will be with you on your wedding day. You’re not going to be cutting corners. You’re going to be focusing on the essentials, and ensuring that you come away from your wedding day having had the experience you dreamed of, without burdening yourselves with debt.

## 6. Step 6: Maximize

Step 6 is a companion to Step 5. This is where you get the bang for your buck, and where you maximize the impact of every element of your wedding. You will learn how to keep costs down while keeping quality up, from securing customized contracts with talented photographers, caterers, and florists, to finding ceremony and reception venues that will provide appealing and memorable surroundings for your event. Paint your wedding with flourishes of beauty, and create a color palette that will express your personal taste and unify the elements of your wedding so that you can create a whole that captures the importance, excitement, and grandeur of your wedding day.

## 7. Step 7: Itemize

Itemizing is what this book is all about. You’ll learn how to break down the wedding planning process according to your priorities and your strategies. By using the checklists and worksheets provided in this book (also included in the download kit), you can detail every step you need to take at every stage of the process, and the forms will allow you to keep track easily of every job that you need to accomplish. The forms cover everything you need to know before talking to wedding-service providers, the questions you need to ask, the clauses that need to go in contracts, and the overall wedding timeline that includes all your planning tasks.

Let’s begin by looking at Checklist 1: The Wedding Planning Timeline. This checklist allows you to keep track easily of the entire wedding planning process. You’ll be able to check boxes and write notes to mark your progress and stay on schedule. The chapters in this book will explain exactly what you need to do in order to tick off each item in this checklist.



## CHECKLIST 1


# *The Wedding Planning Timeline*

### **Immediately after engagement:**

- [ ] Decide wedding date: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Decide ceremony time: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Decide reception time: \_\_\_\_\_  
(If the ceremony and receptions are at different venues, remember to leave time between the ceremony and reception for transportation and photos, if required.)
- [ ] Set your budget for the wedding: \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Write a breakdown of how much of the wedding budget will come from each source of funding.
  - [ ] Confirm with funding sources, such as parents, how much they will provide, and for which components of the wedding event: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Schedule marriage counseling in accordance with religion, if applicable.
- [ ] Select ceremony venue: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Select reception venue: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Select and book an officiant: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Choose and hire a photographer, make appointment for in-person meeting at least three months before wedding date: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Choose and hire a florist, make appointment for in-person meeting at least three months before wedding date: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Choose and hire a caterer (make sure you taste their cooking first!) or confirm alternative food and beverage plan: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Do the following at least six months before the wedding date:**

- [ ] Create the guest list.
- [ ] Obtain addresses for all the guests that will be invited.
- [ ] Send “save the date” cards or emails to people you are sure you will invite, giving them preliminary notice of your wedding and the date.
- [ ] Arrange for accommodation for out-of-town guests:
  - [ ] Arrange with a hotel for discounted rooms, if desired.
  - [ ] Arrange with family and friends for accommodation in homes, if desired.
- [ ] Book hotel, bed-and-breakfast, or other accommodation for bride and groom on wedding night, if required.
- [ ] Compile a wish list for gift registry or registries.
  - [ ] Set up gift registry or registries: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Decide on bridesmaids, if any, and confirm availability: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Decide on maid of honor and confirm availability: \_\_\_\_\_




## CHECKLIST 1 — CONTINUED

- ] Decide on groomsmen, if any, and confirm availability: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Decide on best man and confirm availability: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Decide on ushers, if any, and confirm availability: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Decide on ring bearer, and flower girl(s), if any, and confirm availability: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Buy wedding gown.
- ] Choose bridesmaids' dresses and arrange that they are purchased.
- ] Make appointments with hairstylist for a preliminary consultation and trial-run styling, and for wedding-day styling: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Make appointments with makeup artist for a preliminary consultation and trial-run makeup, and for wedding-day makeup: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Decide whether ceremony music will be live or a DJ: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Hire ceremony music provider: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Decide whether reception music will be live or a DJ: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Hire reception music provider: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Choose a baker and arrange for the wedding cake: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Do the following at least four months before the wedding date:**

- ] Provide preliminary guest numbers to caterer: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Book wedding day hairstyling for bridesmaids, or ensure bridesmaids make the booking, if desired: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Book wedding day makeup for bridesmaids, or ensure bridesmaids make the booking, if desired: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Find out what decor and utility items the caterer does not provide. This may include napkins and linens; any decorations beyond what the florist may provide for the venue, the guest book table, the dining tables, and the cake table; cake knife: \_\_\_\_\_
  - ] Book rental of napkins and linens, if caterer does not provide them.
  - ] Buy a cake knife, or arrange to bring or borrow one for the cake cutting.
- ] Order cake.
- ] Online: Create a wedding announcement, a wedding program, and a thank-you note, and order samples.
  - ] Order wedding invitations, wedding programs, and thank-you notes upon receipt of satisfactory samples.
- ] Choose a bridal shower date and location (between two months and two weeks before the wedding date): \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Send bridal shower invitations.
- ] Arrange for any required wedding-day transportation of the bride, groom, wedding party, and family members: \_\_\_\_\_
- ] Order or obtain guest book.
- ] Buy the ring pillow for the ceremony, if using.





## CHECKLIST 1 — CONTINUED


- [ ] Buy garter for bride, if planning on garter toss.
- [ ] Make honeymoon plans: If pondering a foreign country, make sure you have valid passports (some countries will deny entry if the passport expires too closely to the end date of your trip):
  - [ ] Book honeymoon flights or other transportation tickets.
  - [ ] Book honeymoon lodging.
  - [ ] Book honeymoon vehicle rental, if required.
  - [ ] Buy travel health insurance and visas if necessary, if honeymooning outside the country.

### **Do the following at least three months before the wedding date:**

- [ ] Send wedding invitations.
- [ ] Order wedding rings.
- [ ] For a formal wedding: Ensure the outfits of the mothers of the bride and groom are coordinated. (By tradition, the bride's mom chooses first, and the groom's mom selects something that will complement it.)
- [ ] Meet the photographer to discuss goods and services, and prepare a contract.
- [ ] Meet the florist to discuss goods and services, and prepare a contract.
- [ ] Buy or reserve for rental the groom's suit or tuxedo.
- [ ] Arrange for groomsmen's suits:
  - [ ] Groomsmen agree on using own suits, in color coordination.
  - [ ] Groomsmen fitted for suit rental and rent suits.
- [ ] Consult a lawyer about a prenuptial agreement, if any.

### **Do the following at least two months before the wedding date:**

- [ ] Confirm bridal shower attendees.
- [ ] Buy shoes for bride.
- [ ] Buy or arrange shoes for bridesmaids.
  - [ ] Recommend bridesmaids break in any new shoes by wearing them at least two hours per week in the month before the wedding.
- [ ] Buy gifts for wedding party.
- [ ] Buy gifts for wedding-planning helpers.
- [ ] Schedule a bridesmaids' lunch at your home, or at one of your bridesmaid's homes, to discuss the wedding planning, the plan for the wedding day, and additions to confirm:
  - [ ] Wedding date, time, and location.
  - [ ] Time and location for bridesmaids' wedding day preparation.
  - [ ] Confirm the amount of time needed to get from the preparation location to the ceremony location.
- [ ] Online: Create and order guest place cards for reception, if needed.



## CHECKLIST 1 — CONTINUED


- [ ] Choose, perhaps from among your bridal party or family, a helper or helpers to be responsible for the following:
  - [ ] Ensuring cake(s) are brought to or delivered to reception.
  - [ ] Ensuring cake knife is brought to or delivered to reception.
  - [ ] Taking charge of gifts brought to the reception and/or ceremony.
  - [ ] Putting out the guest book with pens, and retrieve it at the end of the reception.
  - [ ] Setting out the guest table-assignment cards in alphabetical order.
- [ ] Designate a person, not in the wedding party, who will handle any issues that come up on the wedding day, and who will keep track of the helpers: \_\_\_\_\_
- [ ] Find out what the marriage license requirements are for the jurisdiction in which you will marry:
  - [ ] Get blood tests, if required.
  - [ ] Ensure you have all required documents.
- [ ] Sign prenuptial agreement, if any.

### **Do the following by at least one and a half months before the wedding date:**

- [ ] Contact invitees who have not responded to confirm if they are coming.

### **Do the following at least 30 days before the wedding date:**

- [ ] Confirm with the caterer (or the venue if it's doing the catering) the final number of attendees, as well as event time, date, and services. Note that your caterer may have a different deadline, and will inform you as to the required date for the final count.
- [ ] Final fittings, if required, for bride's and bridesmaids' dresses.
- [ ] Confirm time, date, and services with the following:
  - [ ] Photographer.
  - [ ] Videographer, if any.
  - [ ] Venue.
  - [ ] Florist (including exact number of tables for centerpieces, and number of chair rows at ceremony for any decor there).
  - [ ] Music provider.
- [ ] Arrange rehearsal dinner.
- [ ] Create seating map for reception.
- [ ] Apply for marriage license.
- [ ] Keep a record of gifts as they are received, including shower gifts, and who they are from.
- [ ] Send thank-you cards for any gifts already received.
- [ ] Bride and groom should start wearing wedding-day shoes, if new, around the house for at least two hours per week.



## CHECKLIST 1 — CONTINUED

### Do the following at least two weeks before the wedding date:

- Give final guest count to caterer.
- Confirm date and location of rehearsal dinner with those who will attend.
- Confirm date and location of rehearsal dinner with vendors such as caterer and venue, if any.
- Confirm time and location where bride and bridesmaids will get ready on the wedding day.
- Confirm wedding day transportation for bride and groom, family members, and wedding party.
- Confirm parking arrangements for ceremony (ensure any guests with disabilities are provided for).
- Confirm parking arrangements for reception (ensure any guests with disabilities are provided for).

### Do the following at least one week before the wedding date:

- Touch base with the person you've designated to handle any issues on the wedding day, and discuss the status of the wedding planning and any potential issues.
- Confirm honeymoon arrangements:
  - Tickets.
  - Accommodation.
  - Vehicle rental.
  - Pack for honeymoon.

### Do the following one day before the wedding date:

- Hold rehearsal dinner.
- Touch base with anyone who's helping out during wedding day events and confirm arrangements including timing (you may be able to do this at your rehearsal dinner).
- Give bridesmaids and groomsmen their gifts.
- Give to the best man the rings, marriage license, and any payment for officiant, or clergy fees.

### Do the following the day of the wedding:

- Ensure designated helpers, including ushers, are prepared for their tasks.
- Bride has her hair and makeup done.
- Bridesmaids have their hair and makeup done.
- Bridal party begins dressing two hours before the time they have to leave for the ceremony.
- Groom and groomsmen begin dressing one hour before they have to leave for the ceremony.