



Wedding belles

L'Atelier Blanc taps into every little girl's wedding fantasy, with princess gowns and Cinderella-worthy slippers. Boutique owner **Joelle Y. Maalouf** gave **MacKenzie Lewis** a tour of her 'bridal dream house' (and occasional boxing ring)

Do you offer dresses for purchase or for rent?

We have some dresses to purchase and a different collection under our own brand, which is for rent. It's the same style of dress – very different, unique – but for a smaller budget. What's nice is that we only get one of each dress and once it's rented, we don't rent it again for a year. That's important in Lebanon. In this society, everyone knows everyone and photos show up in magazines and on Facebook.

Who are your favourite designers right now?

My favourites are the designers I carry. Oscar de la Renta has the most elegant dresses you can find, Monique Lhuillier with her romantic designs, and then Marchesa with funky, eccentric styles.

What's the biggest trend for gowns this spring?

We're seeing a shift towards colour after Monique Lhuillier introduced a blush shade. It's subtle. We're still a bit late on the trend in Lebanon, but we'll

catch up soon.

Accessories?

Headbands are in. Instead of a traditional tiara, brides are choosing something in ribbon and rhinestones, metal with flowers or even something worn on the forehead. But everybody wants to wear a veil.

And shoes?

The trend now is to have two pairs: a high-heeled pair for the ceremony and beginning of the reception, and then something more comfortable to slip into later. You don't want to be wearing flip-flops on your wedding day, so get some nice white ballerina flats.

What's the best piece of advice you can give a future bride?

Start looking for a dress early. People don't realise that if you want to buy a dress, it takes 3 to 5 months to get here after your measurements are taken; you don't come and buy it off the rack. Once it arrives, we need time to do alterations or

modifications. Some people come 3 or 4 months in advance, but that's a bit late in terms of ordering a dress.

Should a bride see her wedding as a day to be the best version of herself, or a chance to be someone totally different?

You should choose the dress that most suits you and your personality, and that's the way you should plan the whole day. So it goes without saying that you should be the best version of yourself.

Do you have any tips for brides on a budget?

Every bride is on a budget, no matter how big it is. So I advise women to come here knowing what their budget is. It makes it easier for us to help you by limiting your choices. If you have endless possibilities, it can be challenging.

Have you ever had any meltdowns or fights in the boutique?

Oh, this always happens.

Over what?

Once we had a mother-in-law who came in to see the dress, and the bride had already ordered and paid for it. The mother called her son and demanded he come to see it, shouting, 'It's either me or the dress at the wedding!' The bride started crying and the woman

was insulting us: 'The dress is so ugly, don't you have eyes?' The bride cancelled the order. I'm sure she's having a hard time in her marriage now.

Any happier tales?

One couple had been together for so long that they just agreed to get married; he hadn't proposed. So she booked an appointment to see the dresses. When she came out of the dressing room in a gown, he was waiting for her on one knee, with a ring.

Have you ever seen a bride pick an unflattering dress?

Yes, you get that. Usually I'm very honest, which is bad for business. I'd sell more if I were more restrained, but we give one-on-one service and clients appreciate my honesty. Sometimes, even if I think something else would be more flattering, I don't impose. It's her day.

Is it really bad luck for a groom to see the dress before the wedding day?

Some traditions are nice to keep. It might be tempting to have his opinion, but surprise is good. And let's put it this way: if you're meant to be together, you'll both love the dress.

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