

The Perfect Wedding





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The notion of hiring a wedding planner immediately conjures up a picture of the hilarious, flamboyant, control freak, Franck, played by Martin Short, in *Father of the Bride*. While this movie has become a comedic classic, viewers are also charmed by the poignancy of how a father's heart is stirred as he prepares to walk his only daughter down the aisle. Planning a wedding is an enormous undertaking, and an event director would be wonderful! But, let's face it – who wants a “Franck” invading your personal space and taking over? Afterall, whose

wedding is it anyway?

Jo Ann Schwartz-Woodward, owner of Schwartz & Woodward, a company specializing in planning weddings and unique events in the Houston area, says that while Hollywood's characterization of a wedding planner gives us many chuckles for the price of a movie ticket, in the real world, wedding planners are an event-saver. With that said, exactly how does a bride find a reputable wedding planner?

First, the wedding planner you select should be a member of the Association of Bridal Consultants.

Members abide by a code of ethics that are vital in the arena of wedding planning. For example, credentialed wedding planners may not receive kickback fees from vendors they refer to their brides. Vendors often offer discounts to wedding planners, but members of the Association of Bridal Consultants must pass those discounts directly on to their clients. Next, even if you have attended an event coordinated by a particular wedding consultant, don't presume all went smoothly. Call the bride and ask if she would recommend the wedding



planner. If you don't know someone who has used the planner, request references – and make sure to make those calls and ask a lot of questions! Finally, it is imperative that you *like* the wedding planner. Again, no one wants to deal with a volatile and persnickety "Frank."

AND THE ANSWER IS: ABSOLUTELY!

But, are wedding planners affordable? We all remember Steve Martin's character, George Banks, fishing in the attic for a decades-old tuxedo trying to save a few pennies, after receiving the outrageous invoice for his daughter's wedding.

"Years ago," says Jo Ann Schwartz-Woodward, "event planners were used in high-end weddings. These weddings were really the mother of the bride's event. Today, weddings are very different. The bride and groom are at the center of planning, as many couples pay for their own weddings."

For this reason, wedding planners Schwartz & Woodward offer several different packages that enable every couple, regardless of budget constraints, to use their services. But don't just pick anyone. There are keys to a successful relationship between the wedding planner and the soon-to-be-married couple, according to Schwartz-Woodward. "This is the couple's wedding. When we meet for the first time, I spend two hours with the couple discussing the vision – the style and flavor of their wedding. What colors do they want? What's the vision they have for their special day? What do they love about weddings



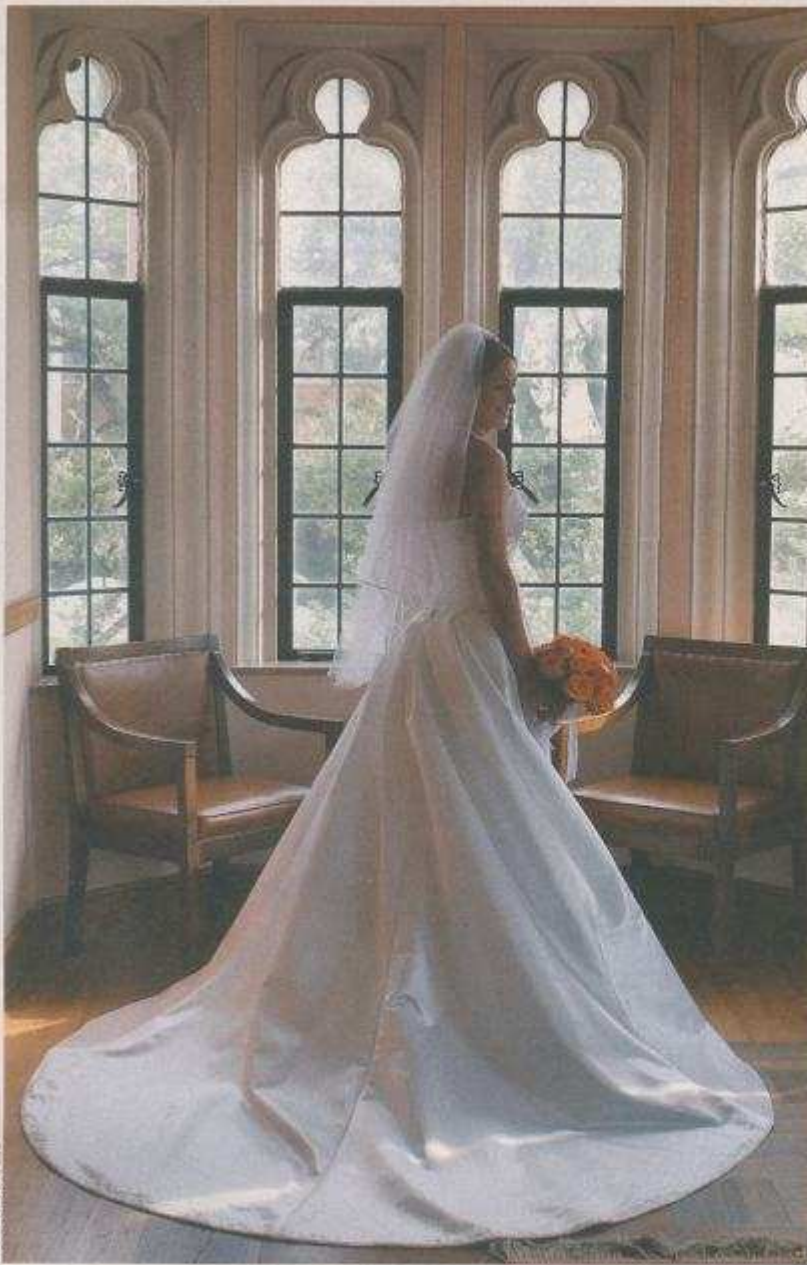


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they have attended and what do they dislike? I really work to get to know the couple and to get a sense of them as people."

During this "Getting Started" package, for which Schwartz-Woodward charges \$800, a budget and timeline are established, and a vendor list is given to the couple. In addition, they review pictures and materials brought by the

bride and discuss rehearsal dinner locations with the groom. For up to six months following the initial planning meeting, the Schwartz-Woodward staff makes themselves available to discuss the vendor selections and to assist in final decisions.

Eight-hundred dollars? That's very do-able! And for many couples, it is precisely the level of service they

need – just to get pointed in the right direction.

The next level of assistance is "The Day of..." package. Priced at \$1,800, this package is for couples who want a professional on hand throughout the day of the wedding to coordinate the soup-to-nuts of the event. Schwartz-Woodward meets with the bride six weeks before the wedding to develop a timeline for the wedding weekend; then it's off to the reception site to review all of the details. Contracts are reviewed, lists are made of what needs to be brought to the wedding and reception, and the rehearsal dinner is discussed and directed, if requested. On the day of the wedding, the planner is on hand to direct every single detail – from overseeing the florist, setting up bridal portraits and assisting the wedding party down the aisle to ensuring the bathrooms are spotless! All in all, more than 40 key elements are overseen throughout the weekend.

Finally, there is a "Full Service" package. Combining the "Getting Started" package and "The Day of..." package, this package provides couples with a "full time" event director that assists in the selection the church and the reception venue, visits cake vendors with the couple to make a final selection, and sets up appointments to preview bands and interview photographers. Additionally, the planner assists in creating a menu for the reception and attends the tasting of the final menu selection. They also help select wedding invitations and a calligrapher. As part of this package, Schwartz-Woodward negotiates and reviews vendor contracts, creates a schedule for vendor payments and maintains ongoing contact with all the vendors that are participating in the wedding.

The services offered by Schwartz-Woodward through their full service package are too long to list. Suffice to say that every detail is covered – no



stone is left unturned. They have it all under control, even down to assisting in the selection of a honeymoon destination. Cost: \$4,000.

According to Jo Ann Schwartz-Woodward, here are important questions to ask as you interview wedding planners:

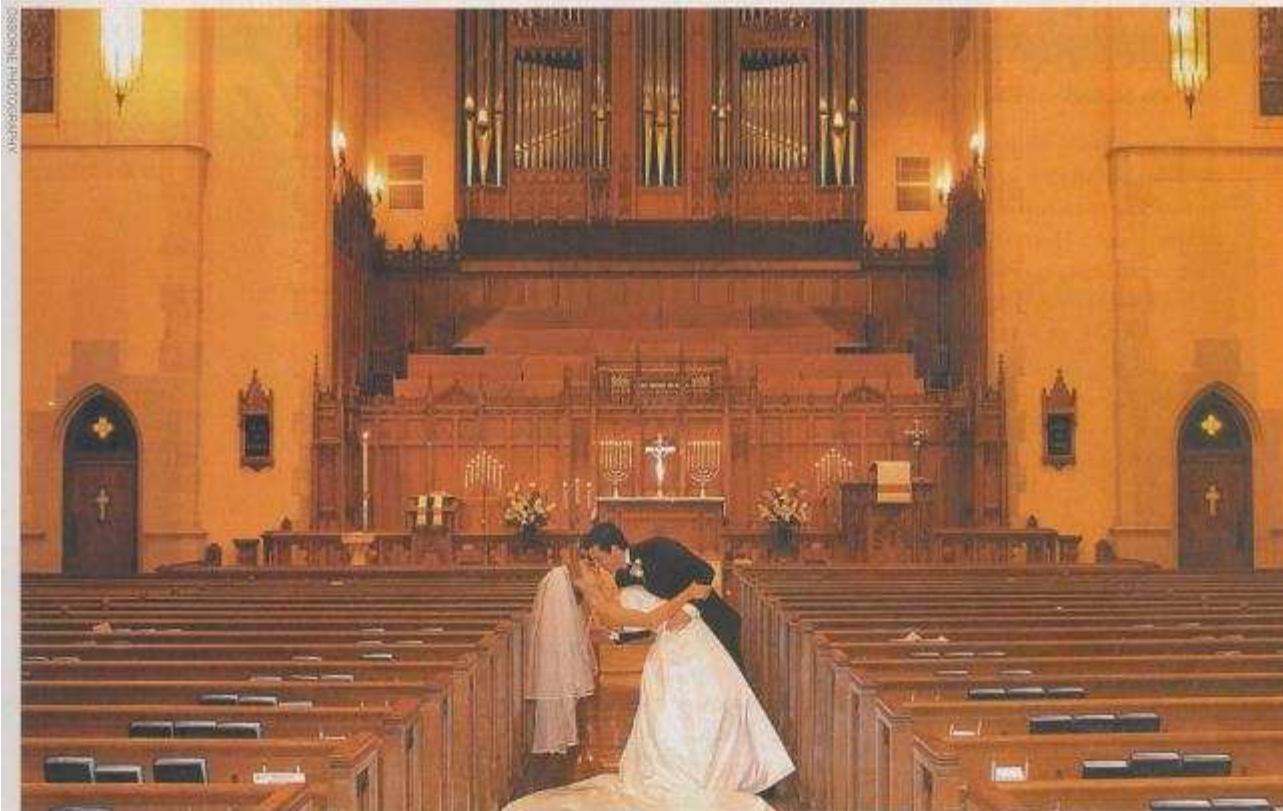
- How long have they been planning weddings?
- How many weddings have they coordinated?
- What budget ranges have they worked with? This is important, particularly if you are working with a small budget. Can they work with your budget?
- How do they handle problems?
- What is the worst situation they have been in and how was it handled?
- Do they have a particular attachment to vendors, such as florists or photographers, or are they willing to work with the vendors the bride has selected?
- Do they work with assistants?
- What is the back up plan should the planner fall ill on the wedding weekend?

OUT OF THIS WORLD

Schwartz-Woodward has done it all – from the small, tight



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budget wedding, to coordinating the wedding of cosmonaut Yuri Malenchenko to Ekaterina Dmitriev, while Malenchenko was orbiting 240 miles above earth in the international space station.

Juggling issues such as security concerns at NASA's Johnson's Space Center, through working out the details of broadcasting the wedding over a teleconference screen set up in the space center auditorium, along with the "ordinary" details of a wedding: the cake, the bride, bridesmaids and groomsmen, music selections and photographer – it was nothing short of a wedding planner's Rubik's cube.

Aside from all the unusual nuances, the wedding went off beautifully and landed this wedding planner on the *Today Show* with Katie Couric, CNN, and *Fox News*.

IT'S YOUR DAY

No wedding should be the same. Says Schwartz-Woodward, "Unfortunately, many wedding consultants have a "template": the same cake person, florist, photographer and so on. In my opinion, there are 31 flavors for a reason. Start jotting down your ideas. Make a file of pictures, and if possible, identify your wedding planner six to nine months before your wedding date. If you have to cut it closer, it's important to be flexible. Churches and reception venues are booked up to a year in advance."

It's your day and planning makes for the perfect wedding. ➔

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