

■ SPECIAL REPORT ■

PROPOSAL

Make it special and unforgettable

Moira Green

Why do men go on bended knee to propose marriage? This traditional gesture of betrothal has been going on for centuries and, even today, more than three-quarters of men surveyed believe a guy should kneel to pop the question – and just as many women say they expect it.

Its historical origins seem unclear, but one explanation links the gesture with ceremonial occasions from medieval times, when knights would kneel (left knee down, right knee up) while being awarded honours from kings and queens.

In Hong Kong, says wedding planner Evelyn Mills, a public declaration of love is becoming quite a thing. This is part of a shift towards more Westernised weddings, explains Mills, founder of Marriage Maestros.

It used to be customary in Chinese culture for the parents of the two parties to discuss their intentions (and expectations) before any announcement, but now that's more likely to be kept between the couple.

The proposal itself, Mills says, is a big deal. "All girls want it to be special – it's part of the fairy tale, but it also shows sincerity." On bended knee is a plus, for that "knight in shining armour" chivalrous appeal.

Her tips for the guys are headlined by "definitely have a ring ready". Most men should know their lady-love's taste, so it shouldn't be too hard to pick one she will adore. Flowers will also be appreciated.

Whatever the setting, make it romantic, Mills advises. On The Peak, on a beach at sunset or in the Hong Kong Observation Wheel in Central are all popular places to pop the question.

At the wedding itself, some couples like to show the proposal. For this the groom-to-be would hire a videographer to secretly capture the moment,



Proposal at the Hong Kong Observation Wheel. Photo: Marriage Maestros

and perhaps have organised family and friends to be hiding nearby, ready to jump out and congratulate the couple.

These "flash-mob style proposals" are becoming a trend, according to website www.howheasked.com. But blogger Tim Kimmell, on www.familymatters.net, cautions that "grandstanding proposals" could put undue pressure on the person being asked. "It's got to be a 'yes' that comes from the heart, rather than from coercion orchestrated by the setting," Kimmell says.

The main thing is to put some thought into it. Though she may well want to spend the rest of her life with you, the majority of women (53 per cent) in a 2014 survey in America would change something about the way their spouse-to-be proposed. About 22 per cent would move the moment to another location, while 20 per cent wished the proposal speech had been different. No pressure, guys.



There has been a shift towards Westernised weddings. Photo: Thinkstock

WEDDING PLANNING

DELEGATION IS KEY TO SUCCESS

Trying to micromanage everything yourself for the big day is fraught with danger, so assign different tasks to assistants, writes PETA TOMLINSON

There are a million and one things to organise ahead of the big day – and no matter how efficient your planning, chances are some things will slip through the net.

In a survey, an overwhelming 82 per cent of brides reported having regrets about some aspect of what's supposed to be the happiest day of their lives.

One bride arrived at the chapel without her bouquet – it had been left behind, on the kitchen table. Bridesmaids, where were you? Another couple's highly choreographed and long-rehearsed bridal dance went awry when the audio system at the reception venue failed. An Irish couple forgot to pick up the mother of the bride – she had to drive herself to the church. Another couple cut their cake with an antique silver cake knife which was a family heirloom. By the time someone remembered it the next day, it had been thrown out with the trash.

In Hong Kong, says Jacco Yeung, of Wedding Master, the banquet is a minefield of details that can be overlooked. When you have 200 to 300 guests arriving at a venue, have enough ushers on hand to guide them to their tables. You don't want crowds milling around the lobby, the experienced wedding planner says. Banquets can be long, with not much happening between courses, Yeung adds. He recommends hiring a performer, such as a singer or magician, to keep everyone entertained and the event moving along nicely.

The most common thing a bridal couple forget is to delegate, Yeung says. Trying to micromanage everything yourself is fraught, so assign tasks to your attendants.

Wedding planner and stylist Sandra Chau agrees. "Divide and conquer" is her motto. For her running sheet on the day, she writes down every task alongside the name of who is responsible. Chau advises the bride and groom to write their own "packing list", separately, to check off items they will personally need to take with them on the day, or on the honeymoon if leaving directly from the venue.

Chau's top tip for the whole planning exercise is to "know when the sun will set" on the appointed



Newlyweds often say they wish they had stressed less on the day and relaxed a bit more. Embracing technology and going online to make use of helpful tools can change all that.

day. There's a "golden hour" for photographs when the lighting is perfect for mood shots – between sundown and darkness – so schedule the ceremony in time to catch it.

It's nice to include in your album close-ups of items precious to you on the wedding day – the invitations, the groom's cufflinks, the bride's veil, for instance – but Chau suggests providing these items to your photographer and videographer beforehand. That way, they can style the items for the shoot, and have time freed up to capture all the "live" moments on the day.

It's also considerate to organise a meal for the non-guest helpers at the wedding – the photographer, the videographer, the planner – as they've had a big day, too.

"A luxury wedding can take over 250 hours of planning time depending on the complexity of the event, let alone all the decisions you have to make after you have explored options," explains Sonya Yeung, creative director of luxury wedding services Bliss Creations. "People usually have an idea of what they want but often don't know how to go about executing it." It is clear that a wedding consultant is there not only to make the soon-to-weds' vision a reality, but also to reduce the amount of stress associated with organising such big events. "With our many contacts in the industry, we are able to help them realise their vision with as little stress as possible."

A common lament among newlyweds everywhere is that they wished they'd stressed less on the day, and relaxed a bit more. Embrace technology to help with that.

They might not replace the personal touch of a wedding planner, but online tools can be helpful,



Wedding planners can use their contacts to ensure the arrangements for destination weddings work.

nonetheless. With apps like My Perfect Wedding Planner, WeddingHappy and Wedding Planner Complete, you can compile a guest list, create invitations (and track those sent), record RSVPs, and manage details of the guests attending – from seating plans and meal selections, to flight arrival times. The budget organiser function also lets you keep track of the spend.

Various apps may help avoid what many married women later say they regret: their choice of dress. Wedding LookBook by The Knot brings the latest styles to your smartphone, while with Wedding Reality, brides can upload their own photo to try on different dresses, and match them to their body shape.

At the end of the day, though, the perfect wedding would surely be like that of the bride who posted soon after: "I don't regret anything about my wedding day. I married my soulmate, and that's all that mattered."

CAKES

Creations with a twist set the tone

Kim Soo-jin

When it comes to planning a wedding, nothing is as delightful as planning your own wedding cake. Hong Kong boasts a number of high-quality bakeries and cake shops that cater to couples who know what they like and demand the very best from the culinary world, in terms of taste, service and design.

"We've had some real foodie couples who truly wanted something special, like a nine-foot-high croquembouche filled with caramel cream," says Bonnie Gokson, founder of Seva and Ms B's Cakery.

The present trend right now is calling for whimsical creations with rustic decorations that help set the tone.

"Very natural, back to basics, [with] less sugar decoration and sugar coating," says Yves Matthey, executive pastry chef at the Mandarin Oriental. "The cakes are decorated with natural decoration, such as dried leaves, fresh flowers and branches. They can be crafted with edible sugar base or with non-edible natural decoration."

Penney Pang, founder of Penney Pang Designer Cakes, agrees. "It is very trendy right now to have [a] wedding cake with a vintage twist or rustic finishing," she says. "[Also, the demand for] wedding cakes decorated with flowers never dies, and it seems sugar lace is still very popular among brides."

Delicate sugar flowers, especially when executed by

experienced hands, add just the right amount of charm and elegance without overpowering the cake. Both Pang, who has won awards for her cake decorating skills, and Gokson are known for their skill in creating such life-like sugar art.

"Our sugar art work is precise, delicate and exceptional," Gokson says. "A lot of our stunning works carry up to 400 to 500 pounds of sugar art weight."

What's on the inside is just as important as what's on the outside, and couples are giving careful thought to which flavours work best with which seasons.

"Chocolate flavours are popular during winter, while lemon cake with poppy seeds is popular during the summer days," Pang says.

Over at the Mandarin Oriental, clients are also opting for creative, fruity combinations,



Sugar art detailing on a Mandarin Oriental wedding cake.

such as yuzu and coconut, carrot and lemon, yoghurt with mixed berries, and lime and mint.

"Flavours are a personal choice, but most of the choices are fresh, light and not too sweet," Matthey says.

It is also wise to bear in mind the complexity of the design when figuring out how far in advance you need to place your order. Simple designs can take a few weeks to make; complex creations may need up to a few months and more manpower.



Intricate sugar art work on a cake by Penney Pang Designer Cakes.



Ms B's Emma cake features sugar art peonies and roses.

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