

Planning the big day

Changes in Hong Kong's wedding rules and attitudes may be a blessing

Reports by **Andrea Li**

I T IS HARD TO have a vastly different wedding experience in Hong Kong.

Unlike other countries, Hong Kong is restricted by a lack of legally certified venue options because couples are required to marry only in religious establishments or marriage registries, while the majority of wedding reception parties are usually held in large restaurants or hotel ballrooms.

But all this may be about to change. A wide range of venue options may open up at the end of this year or early next year, depending on when the government passes a law that would allow couples to be married by certified solicitors or notaries public in venues other than the existing ones.

Once the law is passed, solicitors with at least seven years' experience or a notary public can apply to the marriage registry to perform a civil wedding.

They will undergo a training after their application has been approved before they become certified wedding celebrants.

A code of practice will be issued as a guide they can refer to when conducting ceremonies.

But the Immigration Department, under which the marriage registry falls, has yet to work out what the training will involve.

Meanwhile, it is evident from the kinds of weddings taking place that the wedding business has evolved in the past few years.

"The industry used to be dominated by large wedding studios that would consolidate the services of photographers,

dressmakers and makeup artists. Nowadays, there are smaller wedding firms that offer high-end, personal services," said wedding photographer Rosa Tseng.

Couples today put more effort into making an event out of their wedding, and are increasingly opting for high-end, tailor-made personal services with some western inspiration.

The trend towards more personalised services means greater job opportunities for wedding planners, who increasingly need to offer a range

of services, according to Evelyn Mills, founder of Wedding Maestros.

"People who want to be wedding planners should have a good eye for the fine things in life, be willing to get their hands dirty and be able to do everything, especially in emergency situations," said Ms Mills, who has organised weddings for 30 to 900 guests.

She added that a background in hospitality helps.

Wedding Maestros will cater for this personalised wedding trend with the launch of a comprehensive English-language website by the end of the summer.

The website will give couples advice on how to plan a wedding, and will offer rated vendors, a chat room, and daily updates. This will give Hong Kong couples plenty of ideas for planning their wedding.

The fashion for personalised weddings inevitably leads to an intensive search for the perfect



Would-be bridal gown designers should have a degree in fashion design, specialising in costume or couture because, at present, there are no courses on bridal wear.

As for the tailoring of the gowns, all tailors of bridal wear must have had at least couture or evening gown tailoring experience.

Bridal gown tailoring is especially demanding, with customers expecting a very high standard.

Being the favoured choice for most large weddings, hotels in Hong Kong are capitalising on the personalised wedding trend. The InterContinental Hotel recently launched a Weddings with Style brochure that offers couples three wedding themes: classic elegance, contemporary and garden.

"The idea is to use these packages as a starting point and tailor them to suit the couple," said Nouvelle Ho, executive director of events.

Backed by a large team of business and operations staff, Ms Ho oversees the planning of all weddings in the hotel.

The first requirement for potential team recruits was service attitude, she said, with experience in the hospitality sector a close second.

KEY PLAYERS

- Celebrant
- Wedding planner
- Dressmaker
- Photographer
- Videographer
- Makeup artist
- Hairdresser
- Cake maker
- Caterer
- Limousine service
- Florist
- Jeweller
- Suit hire stockist
- Musicians

