

Wedding budget tips



Pick your priorities and budget accordingly, said Rick Brewer, a wedding industry consultant. That means looking at the three to four major budget categories, including the venue, dress, flowers and music. (Jamie Grill / Getty Images)

By **Joanne Cleaver**

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Orchestrating a wedding? Industry insiders share top tips for staying on point and on budget.

Pick your priorities and budget accordingly, said Rick Brewer, an industry consultant. That means looking at the three to four major budget categories (venue, dress, flowers, music, food and so on) and choosing which are worth top dollar to you.

Negotiate but bear in mind that professionals who make a full-time living as bridal vendors are likely to be easier to work with and deliver better results. "If you shop on price, you die on price," Brewer said.

Consider vendors you already work with for other events. Kate Silver and Neil Ballentine married last autumn in their Ravenswood loft and offered their 40 guests a pizza buffet featuring pies from their four

favorite pizzerias. A bartender and servers hired from TaskRabbit helped out. Silver's parents covered their travel expenses and some last-minute food costs, but the whole event cost the couple only \$2,500.

Consider renting special-occasion dresses for parties leading up to the wedding day. Natalie Gottlieb, founder of dress rental service The Dress Reserve in Evanston, is seeing an increase in rentals for pre-wedding showers and photo shoots and for wedding guests.

Some families are taking a holistic approach to the budget, with various members sponsoring line items, said Deborah DeFrancesco, founder of the Bitchless Bride blog and a former wedding planner. For instance, an aunt will offer to pay for the flowers, up to a certain amount, and a grandparent might pay for the music at the ceremony. Just know, she added, that this form of cost-sharing also complicates bill paying and negotiation with vendors, and can undermine creative focus.

Consider the budget conversation open-ended, said Camille McLamb, owner of River Forest-based Camille Victoria Weddings, a planning service. As families narrow options, it's important to request cost estimates that include taxes, gratuities, service fees and other often-overlooked add-ons that can boost the final bill by as much as 30 percent.

Acknowledge that whoever pays has control, says Kim Forrest, editor with WeddingWire.

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