

# VOWS:

*The VOWS Profile:*  
**Francesca's Bridal**  
Building an award-winning boutique  
by following opportunity.  
**PAGE 64**

**Turn scrolling into  
store visits!**  
**PAGE 40**

**Community isn't extra...  
it's strategy!**  
**PAGE 52**

**Know your bride,  
close more sales!**  
**PAGE 58**

Francesca Ripple  
owner - Francesca's Bridal



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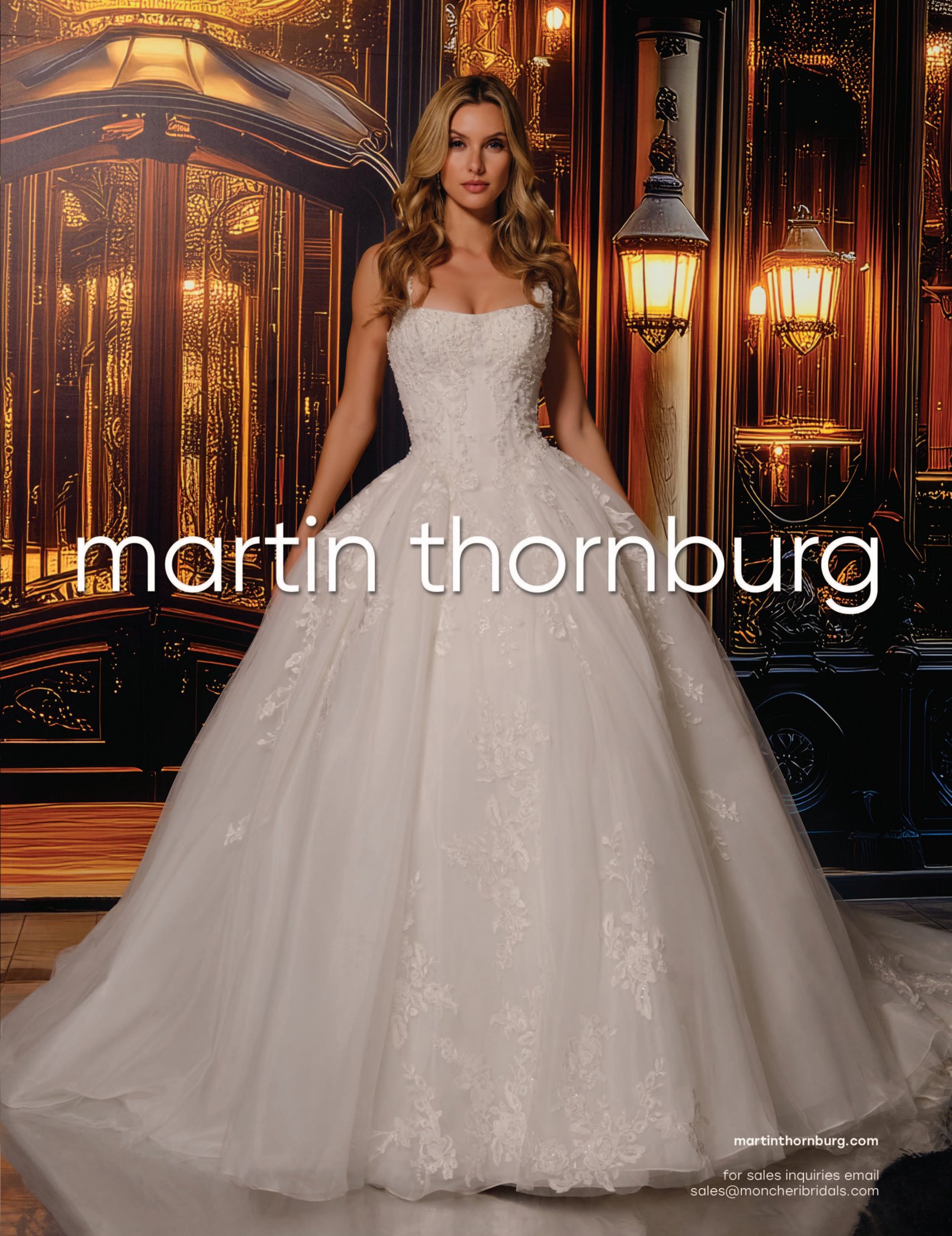


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# VOWS:



Credit: Whitney Wasson Photography

## Taming Tech

### Social Posts Brides Love Most

Seven strategies that actually capture attention – and turn scrolling into store visits. **by Daniel P. Smith 40**

### Winning With Reviews

Best practices for earning, leveraging and managing brides' feedback. **by Hilary Daninhirsch 46**

## Community Connections

### Beyond the Dress

How community involvement strengthens your brand, your team and your bottom line. **by Amanda Baltazar 52**

## Getting to Yes

### Bridal Archetypes That Matter

Understand who she is, what she wants and how best to deliver it. **by Allison Deerr 58**

### The VOWS Profile: Francesca's Bridal

#### Follow the Path

Francesca Ripple didn't build her award-winning Maryland boutique by following a business plan – she built it by pursuing opportunity, relationships and reinvention. **by Shannon Hurd 64**

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# VOWS.

Continued from page 20



Brides at Francesca's Bridal in Lutherville, Md., sign wooden flowers with their name and wedding date and put it on the store's "Said Yes" wall. When they pick up their dress, that flower is handed back to them in a window gift box.

## Publisher's Letter

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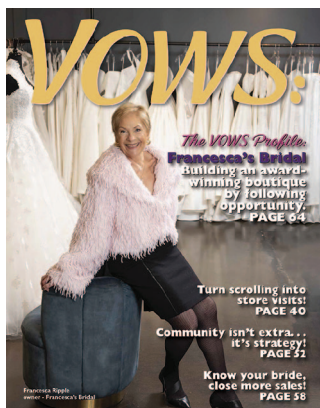
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### On the cover

Francesca's Bridal owner Francesca Rippe in her Lutherville, Md., boutique.

Credit: Whitney Wasson Photography, IG & FB @whitneywassonphoto

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# A Continually Evolving Bride



**Peter Grimes**  
**Publisher**  
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**Speaking with** a number of you at the latest round of Markets confirms that today's bride, her shopping approach and her decision-making process continues to evolve... and frustrate.

Many of the "norms" no longer seem to be so, with an increasingly indecisive bride (increasingly!?!). From your comments, often expressed in frustration, the following is a snapshot of brides' behavior in many markets: -

She's either planning well in advance – booking appointments for weddings in Fall 2027 – or stressing over needing a gown within a ridiculously narrow window. Some report brides with eight-week timelines.

Foot traffic has also grown less predictable. Some Saturdays are fully booked, others filled with no-shows. And brides booking appointments continue to shop multiple stores in an effort to keep the experience going.

In this issue, we've attempted to address this reality with articles focused on providing insights and reminders on approaches for interacting with different types of brides, on creating social posts with impact, and how to "win" with reviews.

We've also published insightful articles in recent issues that I recommend re-reading, or checking out if you missed them.

Here's just a few.

- *How to Turn Cold Brides into Hot Appointments:* Jan/Feb 2026
- *Understanding Gen Z's Money Mindset* Jan/Feb 2026
- *Be the Boutique AI Recommends* March/April 2026
- *It's Also After the Sale that Counts* March/April 2026
- *It's Hospitality not Service* December 2025
- *Personalization + Inspiration Continues to Impact Brides* October 2025

(If you can't locate these issues or articles, e-mail [peter@vowsmagazine.com](mailto:peter@vowsmagazine.com) and I'll send you the link to one or all articles!).

On a final note: there is no silver bullet. Changing one thing, one approach does not miraculously overcome these challenges you're facing. Success comes from a continual evolving of your brand, of all touch points with your brides... a process that bridal boutiques are particularly good at!

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Editor In Chief  
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720-936-3326

# Why They Remember You

The small moments that shape lasting impressions.

**There are** certain stores you remember.

Not necessarily because they were the biggest, fanciest or had the most options, but because of how they made you feel.

I was thinking about that while working on this issue - not just in the context of bridal, but in general.

We've all had those shopping experiences. That place where someone greeted you immediately and made you feel like they were genuinely happy to see you. The place where things felt calm, easy and fun. The place where, even after you left, something about it stuck with you.

And chances are, it wasn't because of one big, dramatic moment. Rather, it was a series of small ones.

That idea kept resurfacing as I edited these stories.

In our feature *Social Posts Brides Love Most* (pg. 40), the focus isn't just on getting attention – it's about what actually resonates enough to move someone from scrolling to showing up. What makes someone pause, engage and think, *that's a boutique I want to visit*.

In *Winning with Reviews* (pg. 46), this idea becomes even clearer. Brides rarely rave about inventory alone. They talk about how they were treated, whether they felt listened to, what the shopping process was like, whether someone supported them and made them feel confident in their decision.

That's what they remember.

Our *Beyond the Dress* story (pg. 52) reinforces this idea in a different way. The boutiques that embed themselves in their local communities by showing up, supporting oth-

ers (including pets, which definitely speaks to my heart!) and building relationships aren't just creating goodwill. They're creating familiarity, which builds trust long before a bride ever walks through the door.

Even the *Bridal Archetypes That Matter* story (pg. 58) comes back to this same idea. When you understand who a bride is - not just what she's shopping for, but how she thinks, what motivates her and what she likes/dislikes, you're able to meet her in a way that feels personal instead of transactional.

And that's what creates a memorable experience.

Our profile of *Francesca's Bridal* (pg. 64) is another excellent example of this. Owner Francesca Ripple's story isn't built around a perfectly mapped-out business plan,

but rather relationships, instinct and the ability to recognize and pursue opportunity. In other words: paying attention to the moments that matter and acting on them.

That's what memorable stores do.

They don't rely on one standout feature or viral moment. They create a consistent experience that feels intentional from beginning to end.

Because at the end of the day, brides may come in looking for a dress but they walk away remembering how they were treated.

And in a business built so heavily on referrals, reviews and word of mouth, that memory isn't just meaningful.

It's everything.

## Boutique Contributors

(+Instagram handles – give them a follow!)

**Amanda's Touch**, Waynesboro, Va.

@amandastouchbridal

**Bacio Bacio Bridal**, Wellington, Fla.

@baciobaciobridal

**Boujee Bridal and Quinceañera**,

Albuquerque, N.M.

@boujee\_on\_a\_budget\_bridal

**Bridal and Formal**, Cincinnati, Ohio

@bridalandformal

**Covet Bridal**, Essex, Conn. @covetbridal

**Dress Gallery**, Wichita, Kan.

@shopdressgallery

**Emma & Grace Bridal Studio**, Denver,

Colo. @emmaandgracebridal.denver

**Francesca's Bridal**, Lutherville, Md.

@francescasbridal

**Jennifer's Bridal**, Hockessin, De.

@jennifersbridal

**Kleinfeld**, New York City, N.Y.

@kleinfeldbridal

**Love It at Stella's**, Westminster, Md.

@love.it.at.stellas

**Madeleine's Daughter**, Portsmouth, N.H.

@madeleinesdaughter

**MB Bride and Special Occasion**,

Greensburg, Pa. @mbbride

**Mia Grace Bridal**, Chesterfield, Mo.

@miagracedbridal

**Modern Bride & Formal Shop**, Bedford,

N.H. @modernbridenh

**Norman's Bridal**, Springfield, Mo.

@normansbridal

**Something New**, Colorado Springs, Colo.

@somethingnewboutique

**Swoon Bridal**, Reno, Nev. @swoonbridal

**The Bridal Collection**, Centennial, Colo.

@thebridalcollection

**The Bridal Gallery**, Salem, Ore.

@bridalgalleriesalem

**The White Dress by the shore**, Clinton,

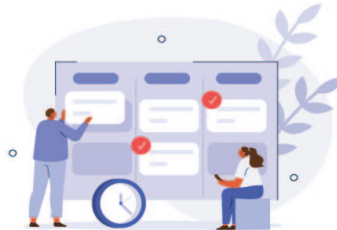
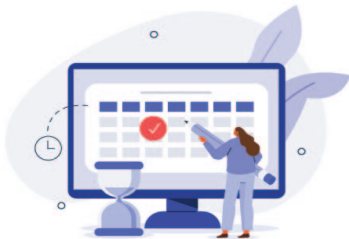
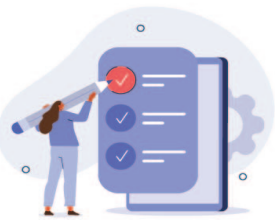
Conn. @thewhitedress

**Twirl Boutique**, Lexington, Ky. @twirlbridal

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**VOWS: Industry Calendar**

Postings from brands, boutiques and reps  
Also check the VOWS online calendar  
for updates and additions:

<https://www.vovsmagazine.com/events>

**2026 International and Domestic Market Dates**

**May 11**

**Mon Cheri Academy virtual session**  
[www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca](http://www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca)

**June 22**

**Mon Cheri Academy virtual session**  
[www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca](http://www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca)

**July 13**

**Mon Cheri Academy virtual session**  
[www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca](http://www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca)

**August 3-7**

**ANDMORE Formal Markets**  
Apparel Mart, Atlanta, GA  
[www.atlanta-apparel.com/markets/formal-markets](http://www.atlanta-apparel.com/markets/formal-markets)

**August 16-18**

**National Bridal Market Chicago**  
Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL  
[www.nationalbridalmarket.com](http://www.nationalbridalmarket.com)

**September 13-15**

**Harrogate Bridal Week**  
Harrogate Convention Centre  
Harrogate, England  
[www.bridalweek.com](http://www.bridalweek.com)

**September 23-25**

**Mon Cheri Academy live in-person event**  
Held in conjunction with National Bridal Market  
The Mart Chicago, Illinois  
[www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca](http://www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca)

**October 13-15**

**NY Luxury Bridal Fashion Week**  
Check with individual designers  
for their schedule of events and shows  
[www.thebridalcouncil.com](http://www.thebridalcouncil.com)

**October 13-15**

**Designers at the Essex House**  
JW Marriott Essex House NYC  
160 Central Park South  
New York, NY  
[www.designersattheessex.com](http://www.designersattheessex.com)

**October 13-15**

**Melange de Blanc NY Bridal Market**  
Starrett-Lehigh Building  
New York, NY  
[www.melangedeblanc.com](http://www.melangedeblanc.com)

**October 13-15**

**One Fine Day Bridal Market**  
<https://onefinedaybridalmarket.com/pages/our-events>

**October 13-14**

**The Fringe Collective**  
in conjunction with Melange de Blanc  
Starrett-Lehigh Building  
New York, NY  
[www.melangedeblanc.com](http://www.melangedeblanc.com)

**October 13-15**

**Union Square Couture**  
[www.unionsquarecouture.com](http://www.unionsquarecouture.com)

**October 19**

**Mon Cheri Academy virtual session**  
[www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca](http://www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca)

**November 2-4**

**Better Bridal Group Conference**  
The Rosen Centre, Orlando, Florida  
[www.betterbridalgroup.com/products/live\\_events/better-bridal-group-conference-2026](http://www.betterbridalgroup.com/products/live_events/better-bridal-group-conference-2026)

**November 2-5**

**Association of Bridal Consultants**  
2026 World of Weddings Conference  
Marriott Cancun, An All-Inclusive Resort  
[www.abcweddingplanners.com/schedule](http://www.abcweddingplanners.com/schedule)

**November 17-19**

**Wedding Merchants Business Academy**  
Las Vegas Convention Center  
Las Vegas, Nevada  
[www.weddingmba.com](http://www.weddingmba.com)

**November 23**

**Mon Cheri Academy virtual session**  
<https://www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca>

**December 14**

**Mon Cheri Academy virtual session**  
<https://www.nationalbridalmarket.com/mca>



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National Bridal Market's lounge set up for buyers doubled as a photo backdrop for designers.

*Market Reviews*

**Seen at National Bridal Market Chicago!**

The National Bridal Market Chicago at THE MART welcomed more than 175 incredible designers and an increase in buyer attendance March 15-17. The sold-out Market featured an impressive array of brands across 11 categories: bridal gowns, social occasion, quinceañera and accessories, spread across 200,000 square feet of exhibit space on the 7th floor of THE MART.

This season kicked off strong on Sunday, March 15 with its well-loved Opening Night Party, attracting more than 500 guests who enjoyed an open bar, dancing, networking and breathtaking skyline views. The March Market provided an array of amenities, including daily happy hour events, complimentary breakfasts and lunches, and Instagram-worthy moments for both models and attendees.

This Market also welcomed 22 new designers – including **Matthew Christopher, Isabell Kristensen,**

**Hikaru Bridal, Curve Couture Bridal, Hera Couture, Idan by House of Idan, and Tara Lauren** and featured 25 international designers including those from Korea and Australia, underscoring steady growth in global representation. The show also spotlighted the quinceañera category, showcasing 10 creative companies with enchanting, show-stopping designs.

Also a robust lineup of seven seminars in its expanding Educational Series was presented, designed to help retailers grow and strengthen their businesses. It included a full day of **Mon Cheri Academy** followed by sessions on *Mastering Bridal Marketing: Driving Profit & Appointments; Closing the Sale; Transforming Your Bridal Business: Boosting Conversion Rates & Building Lasting Relationships; The Power of Silent Selling; Quickly Assessing Your Shop's Financial Position;* and *OTR Sales and Content Creation.* The Educational Series returns for the March 2027 Market.

"The National Bridal Market Chicago prides itself on treating our guests as world-class buyers. Each

show is carefully designed to deliver a thoughtful, enjoyable experience for every attendee. As we mark our 50th anniversary this year, we're excited to unveil the special activations planned for the August 2026 show," said Monique Kielar, vice president of marketing for National Bridal Market Chicago.

For more information on the National Bridal Market Chicago visit [www.nationalbridalmarket.com](http://www.nationalbridalmarket.com).



The quinceañera category was spotlighted, with 10 exhibitors showcasing designs, including **Ragazza**.



This season featured a robust National Bridal Market Educational Series.



Veni Infantino gowns were showcased in newly designed and expanded exhibit space.

# National Bridal Market Chicago



Buyer services and treats included a Specialty Coffee Bar, sponsored by SYVO.



Hayley Paige on the runway.



Reception from buyers to the **Watters Designs** collection was quite positive. **Maria Prince**, Watters Designs vice president, shown here.



There was a positive response to **Martin Thornburg's** Fall 2026 collection.



**Lazaro** models took advantage of the iconic **Merchandise Mart** location.



Activity in the **Maggie Sottero Designs** booth following the runway presentation of its three collections.



**Demetrios** Fall 2026 collection.



**Morielee New York** had packed shows for its collections' runway presentation.

Tidbits continued on page 34

Continued from page 33

## ANDMORE Formal Market

### Atlanta Markets Unite Bridal, Apparel, Occasion

ANDMORE's co-located Atlanta Apparel Market and Formal Markets wrapped up a dynamic March 30–April 2 market week, delivering an energizing multi-category sourcing experience across contemporary apparel, footwear, accessories, bridal, homecoming, quinceañera and social occasion. Buyers explored 2,000+ brands across permanent showrooms and temporary exhibits, discovering both Fall/Winter '26 collections and Spring/Summer immediates.

Beyond the booths, the market floor came alive with curated brand experiences and exclusive debuts. Renowned designer and eveningwear sponsor for Miss USA and Miss Teen USA Johnathan Kayne offered a look at his Fall Collection through a high-profile Red-Carpet Meet & Greet featuring Miss USA, while Justin Alexander utilized the platform to debut Fable, a new coordinating flower girl collection that addresses the growing demand for cohesive bridal party styling.

Formal Markets will return Monday, Aug. 3 through Friday, Aug. 7, spotlighting Spring/Summer 2027 collections. The upcoming market will once again bring together leading designers and buyers to preview the latest trends, explore new opportunities and shape the season ahead.

For more information, visit [www.Atlanta-Apparel.com](http://www.Atlanta-Apparel.com).



Johnathan Kayne showed his Fall Collection with a high-profile Red-Carpet Meet & Greet featuring Miss USA.

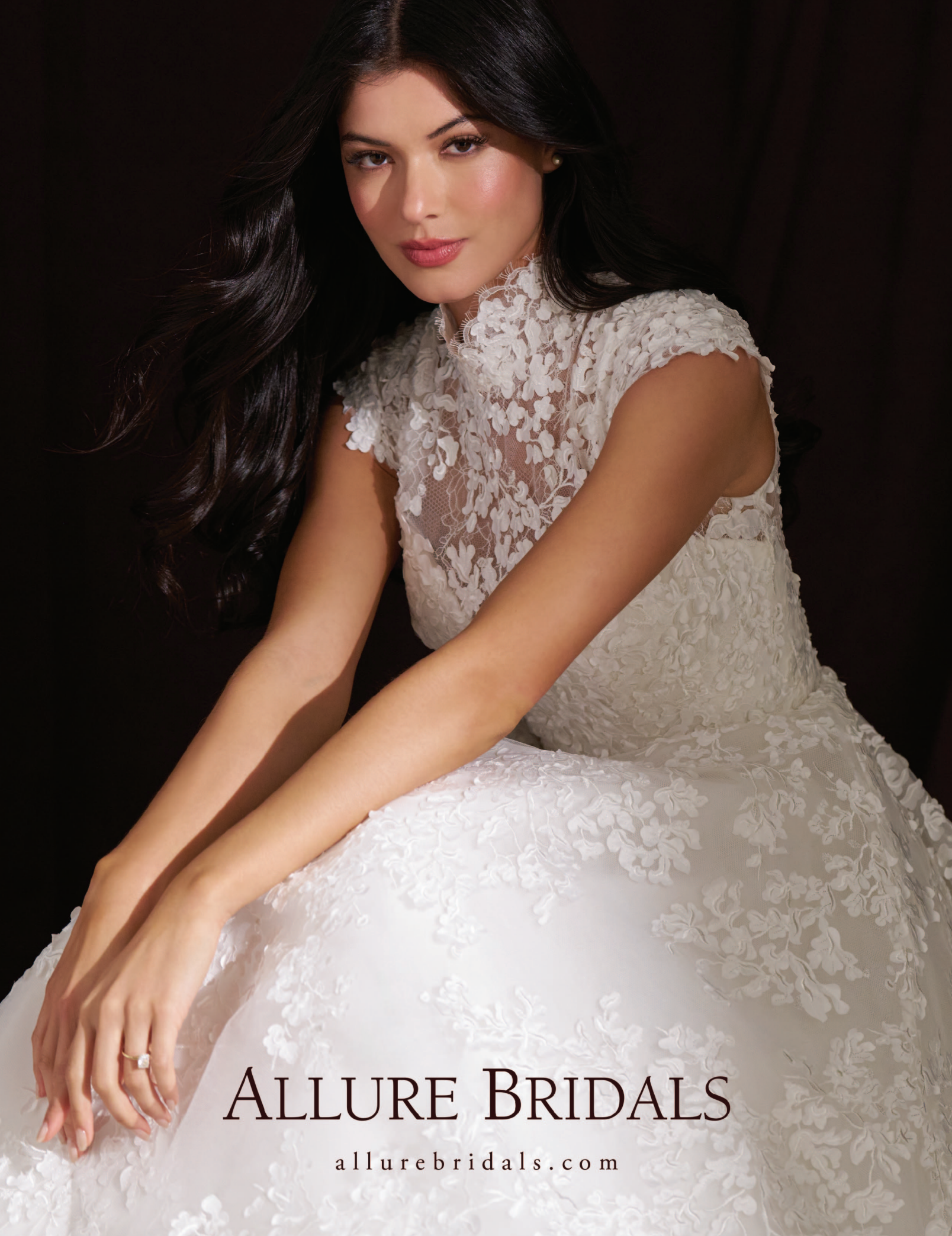


Moriee New York's Vizcaya quinceañera gowns.



Formal Markets' Revolving Runway & Reception, providing buyers with opportunities to experience seasonal trends in motion and connect with leading brands.

Tidbits continued on page 36



# ALLURE BRIDALS

[allurebridals.com](http://allurebridals.com)

Continued from page 34

## New York Market



*Belaire, featured in Mark Ingram's Sterling Collective for Spring 2027.*

### Mark Ingram

For Spring 2027, **Mark Ingram** released the **Sterling Collective**, at the heart a new sterling duchesse satin palette with beadwork tracing décolletage, trailing through trains and punctuating seams. The introduction of sterling silver is a deliberate nod to the approaching 25th silver anniversary of **Mark Ingram Atelier**.

### Poeza, new luxury brand by Justin Alexander Luxury Group

Launched at **New York Luxury Bridal Market**, **Justin Alexander Luxury Group** debuted **Poeza**, its new luxury bridal brand introducing a refined and intentional perspective to the modern bridal landscape. Designed for the bride who values understated sophistication over trend-driven design, **Poeza** embodies a new era of "quiet luxury" in bridal fashion.

The debut collection, **Chapter I: Dawn**, leans into minimalism and thoughtful construction, with key de-



*Lunaria, from Justin Alexander Luxury Group's new collection Poeza.*

sign elements including sculpted waists, exposed corsetry, fluid draping, dimensional florals and refined embellishment, balancing softness with structure.

### Verdin Spring 2027

This **Verdin Spring 2027** collection was inspired by the romantic gardens and luminous paintings of **Claude Monet** as it captures the softness and movement of nature in bloom.

Airy layers, delicate floral details and fluid silhouettes echo the impressionistic beauty of **Monet's** flowers and landscapes. Each gown is designed to feel light, romantic and timeless, like stepping into a living garden at first light.



*Verdin for Spring 2027.*



*Lee Petra Grebenau on the runway for Spring 2027.*

### Lee Petra Grebenau

For Spring 2027, **Lee Petra Grebenau** unveils its **Bridal and Made-to-Order Couture** collections...each ensemble a dialogue between vibrancy and softness — a moment in which femininity becomes an expression of pleasure and living art. At the heart of each creation lies the signa-

ture sculpted corset, framed by luminous hand embroideries, pearls and delicate beadwork unfolding across **Mikado silk**. Every piece emerges as a quiet composition, like a painting brought to life.

### Nardos

**Nardos** marked its 10th anniversary with a retrospective exhibition and the debut of its Spring 2027 bridal



*Nardos Spring 2027.*

collection featuring a new expression of the house's codes, balancing timeless elegance with modern structure and highlighting the artistry at the heart of contemporary bridal couture such as sculptural corsetry, fluid draping and dimensional floral embellishment.



*From the Esé Azénabor Rise collection.*

### Rise by Esé Azénabor

The '**Rise**' collection presented by **Esé Azénabor** embodies the journey of becoming, honoring the bride who steps into her moment with confidence, grace and purpose. Each gown is designed to elevate her spirit, reflecting beauty that is both timeless and fearless.

*Tidbits continued on page 38*



MADISON JAMES

MADISON-JAMES.COM

Continued from page 36

## New York Market



Raha, from Sareh Nouri's Persian Muse collection and tribute.

### Sareh Nouri

From Sareh Nouri this season, **Persian Muse**, a tribute to the women who rise, those who carry strength and softness simultaneously. Who honors where they come from while boldly stepping into who they are becoming. Inspired by her Persian heritage, this collection showcases romance, power and timeless beauty in every gown. It is about confidence, femininity and that quiet fire within - designed for brides who want to feel not just beautiful, but unforgettable.

### Lihi Hod

Lihi Hod's **Unveiled** collection is a meditation on what has always lived within. Before a woman walks toward her future, before she chooses the gown, before she is seen, something stirs quietly inside her. In Lihi Hod's world, unveiling is not about exposure, but about revelation. It is the moment the inner self takes form.



Lihi Hod Unveiled collection.

The collection translates this vision through a balance of structure and softness. Sculpted ball gowns in silk taffeta, mikado and satin stand alongside sleek sheaths, ethereal A-lines, and fit-and-flare silhouettes that fall into sweeping trains. Corseted bodices, refined necklines, open backs, floral lace, hand-applied pearls, crystal embellishment and 3D appliqués lend the collection its distinctive tension.



From Mira and Lihi Zwillinger's SS27 collection.

### Mira and Lihi Zwillinger

There are moments when everything feels still, uncertain, quiet, just before something begins to rise.

With the rise, **Mira and Lihi Zwillinger** present the **SS27** couture collection, inspired by the power of transformation, the moment when something shifts from within and begins to emerge.

### Alyssa Kristin

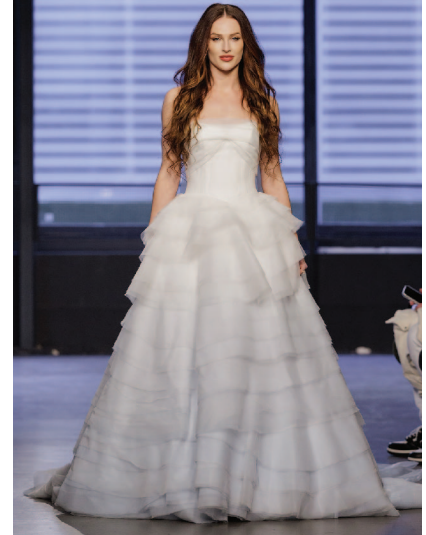
The **Alyssa Kristin 2027** collection reflects a broader return to vintage influence in bridal today, reinterpreted through the brand's signature minimalism and precision. Timeless silhouettes evoke a sense of the past, reinterpreted through a distinctly modern lens - where traditional details are stripped back, refined and executed with precision. From sculptural construction to fluid bias draping in luminous fabrics, each gown feels intentional, elevated and entirely current.



The Simone from Alyssa Kristin.

### Hayley Paige

For Fall 2026, **Hayley Paige's** next chapter in her return to bridal design



Hayley Paige REIN collection on the runway during New York Luxury Bridal Week.

is entitled **REIN** as it's about "taking the control back. Taking the reins. Committing to the craft with discipline, with devotion... until the cadence becomes your own again."

REIN follows Paige's first chapter Spring of 2026, which was entitled **Twice Upon a Time**.



From OUMA's Alluvia Collection.

### OUMA

OUMA Bridal's Spring 2027 "**Alluvia Collection**" collection is inspired by the layered landscapes of Danxia, where mineral-rich cliffs ripple in bands of crimson, clay and sand, and explores how time, pressure and patience shape form

Rooted in Chinese landscape philosophy, OUMA's gowns hold structure without rigidity, volume without excess and embody a balance... expressive yet composed, romantic yet grounded.

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# Social Posts *Brides Love Most*



**In today's** digitally charged age, Courtney Maher knows the value of a boutique's social-media presence all too well.

The creative media director at Reno, Nev.-based Swoon Bridal, Maher oversees the 18-year-old boutique's active social-media presence, which includes an Instagram feed hosting more than 18,000 followers and 4-5 weekly posts, a thoughtfully curated Pinterest page and a growing TikTok presence highlighted by numerous videos boasting 25,000-plus views.

Maher, who has managed Swoon's social media for the last nine years, is constantly looking for inspiration, cooking up new content ideas and developing posts. She's also acutely aware of social media's critical importance to traffic and sales at Swoon.

"This new era of bride wants to know everything, and they want their questions answered before they ever make an appointment," Maher says. "Social media is the bride's first stop on her journey and learning what's out there, which means we have to be present, active and engaging on social."

To be certain, social media plays a substantial and ever-increasing role in the planning decisions of brides and their partners. According to Zola's 2026 First Look Report, nine in 10 couples re-

port making wedding planning choices based on a social-media post. In particular, websites like Instagram and TikTok are influencing everything from table settings and flowers to the photographer and venue. Zola also notes an uptick in couples adding a second fashion look for their reception, such as a playful party dress, after seeing the trend emerge on TikTok over recent years.

"Nearly every girl who comes into Swoon mentions our social," Maher says. "It's where they get a taste of who we are and what we do here, from how dresses move on bodies to how we talk about them."

It's why boutiques like Swoon and so many of its peers across the country continue to invest time, energy and dollars into social media and producing the best possible content.

But not all posts land equally. Some content captures brides' attention and spurs action far more than others. Following are the seven types of posts performing best with today's brides, as well as tips for how to incorporate them into your content calendar:

## **Real Brides, Real Weddings**

Posting photos of real brides on their wedding day has proven to be among the most effective marketing strategies for boutiques. Such posts tend to draw

Seven strategies  
that actually  
capture attention —  
and turn scrolling  
into store visits.

attention, including likes and shares, because they tell a story.

Posting these real-life moments plays into the emotion and aesthetics of the wedding day and builds a level of trust that traditional advertising simply cannot replicate. Prospective customers appreciate seeing various wedding styles and dresses on everyday brides rather than models.

As a best practice, always get permission to post wedding-day photos from the bride and, if using professional images, the photographer. Some shops include a social-media release waiver in the initial sales contract while others follow up after the wedding with the bride and photographer to request photos and permission to publish. Many brides are happy to share images of their big, glammed-up day while photographers appreciate the added exposure, too.

To amplify the impact of your “real brides,” save the posts to a permanent highlight on Instagram so new followers, who are always entering your orbit, can see your satisfied brides. You can create a similar portfolio on Pinterest as well.



Real bride photos always capture attention. Credit: @SwoonBridal on Instagram

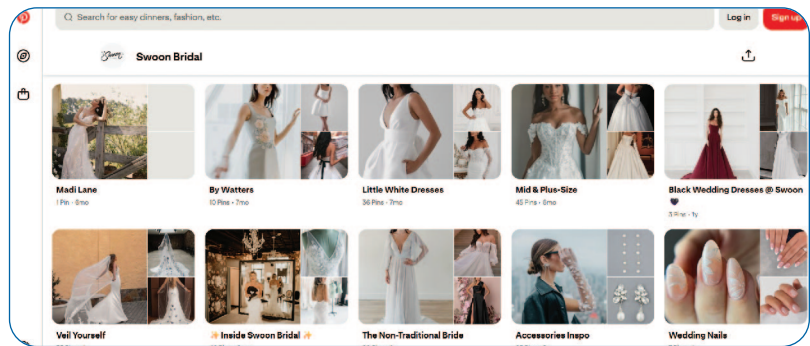
### The ‘Say Yes’ Moment

Many bridal shops have something special for their “say yes” moment – a champagne toast, a photo in front of an art installation or inviting brides to hold a whimsical sign, for instance. Capturing and sharing such moments is un-

deniably valuable, offering social proof your store can help brides find their dream wedding gown.

But before that “say yes” shot, which can risk appearing staged and choreographed, there’s an opportunity to capture the raw emotion of a bride’s dress-finding

### Why Your Boutique Needs Multiple Social-Media Homes



**At Something New** in Colorado Springs, Colo., owner Mindi Linscombe acknowledges each social-media platform inhabits its own lane.

Something New bridal customers, Linscombe reports, skew heavily toward Instagram, where visual storytelling and Reels perform exceptionally well. Prom customers, meanwhile, favor TikTok, where they can access short-form, snappy content that feels authentic and less polished. YouTube Shorts, meanwhile, has recently emerged as a third important video platform for Something New.

“Instagram feels more editorial; TikTok feels more raw and real; YouTube Shorts sits somewhere in between,” says Linscombe, adding that the success of those three platforms proves “short-form video is winning across the board.”

Beyond video, Pinterest continues holding appeal for brides. According to Zola’s 2026 First Look Report, 77 percent of couples use the platform for inspiration and about half still point to their Pinterest boards as the most essential tool in the planning process. To accommodate this and organize its inventory around specific themes, Swoon Bridal’s Pinterest page features a mix of boards highlighting gowns from different designers, behind-the-scenes content and dresses sharing a common aesthetic.

“We try to keep all of our current inventory on Pinterest to give our brides a full picture of what we have,” Swoon creative media director Courtney Maher says.

The most digitally savvy boutiques, however, don’t play social-media favorites; rather, they recognize the power of each platform and try to tap into each media’s unique reach. At Something New, for instance, Linscombe is intentional about content creation and repurposing. She creates once and distributes everywhere using artificial intelligence and a virtual assistant to help her adapt and repost.

“The key lesson we’ve learned is that you have to live everywhere because you genuinely don’t know where your customer will find you,” Linscombe says.



Capturing the "say yes" moment is a winning strategy. Credit: @somethingnewboutique on TikTok

moment. The smiles, cheers and tears of such moments are not only aspirational to prospective customers, but the authenticity resonates well on social media.

Something New in Colorado Springs, Colo., has curated short-form videos capturing the precise "Say Yes" moment and all that follows – the hugs, the champagne

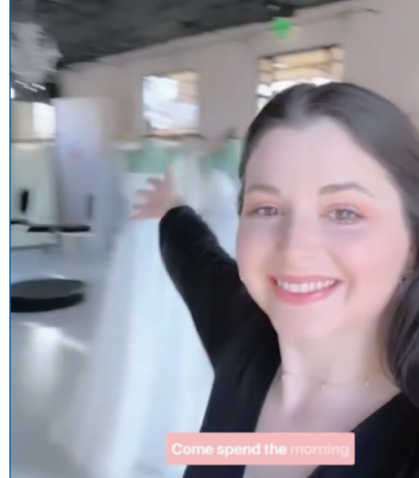
toast and the celebratory mood. It's real. It's lively. It's touching.

"Experience-driven content consistently outperforms pure promotional or product-focused posts; People engage with the story and the feeling, not just the inventory," owner Mindi Linscombe says. "When people feel like they're part of the journey – whether that's watching a bride try on, seeing a stylist at work or capturing an emotional moment, they engage naturally."

Close the post with a call to action encouraging brides to book an appointment. Something New, for instance, invites brides to secure an appointment and to make "everything about what YOU want and YOU deserve."

### Get to Know Us

At Swoon, Maher routinely features staff in candid videos. In one, we get to know a stylist's personal preferences – mornings or nights?



Invite brides into a stylist's world, like @swoonbridal does on Instagram

tea or coffee? – and learn she speaks Spanish. In another, a staff member takes us through her morning as she prepares to open Swoon for appointments. In others, staff discuss their top celebrity brides, favorite dresses in the store and beloved songs on the Swoon playlist.

"We try to portray our stylists as individuals who have their own voice, style and personality," Maher says.

Social-media content presenting the store and its staff delivers valuable currency in the bridal retail world. It humanizes the experience and the people behind it, helping to strip away some of the anxiety many brides feel. Such videos also give brides insight into the vibe of your boutique, helping to build trust and forecasting what they can expect during their appointment.

"These videos give Swoon a face beyond the dresses and the models they see. It lets brides see who's going to be helping them and how personal the experience will be," Maher says.

### Insider Tips

At The White Dress by the shore in Clinton, Conn., owner Beth Chapman leverages her years of experience and her team's expertise to offer "insider tips." In one popular post, the shop shared a dress shopping timeline

### Uninvited Guests: Four Content Types that Crash the Social-Media Party

**Overly professional feeds:** Professional models donning couture gowns in front of European castles make for beautiful photos. Only sharing high-fashion photography, however, limits relatability to your audience.

**Negative content:** Yes, you deal with some difficult, quirky and wild customers. Oh, the stories you could tell! But even though drama sells, keep the jokes and underhanded comments out of the public sphere. Laughing about a bride who asked tons of rudimentary questions or scolding a bridezilla who brought way-out-sized expectations into the boutique might generate likes, but it also risks damaging your reputation. Show yourself as a reliable ally – always.

**Stock photos:** Contemporary brides, specifically Millennials and Gen Z, prize authenticity and relatability. Generic wedding photos – from stock websites to AI-generated content – show up as filler; yet more, they do not highlight your inventory, your personality or your values.

**Uncredited photography:** Wedding photographers are part of your bridal ecosystem and can be a source of referrals. Give them credit when you use their photos. You can also spotlight other vendors who contributed to a bride's wedding day. You might earn additional referrals and collaborative opportunities. If nothing else, you capture good karma.



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Educational content performs well, like this post from @thewhitedress on Instagram

for 2027 nuptials, reminding brides that “wedding timelines move faster than they seem.” The post outlined why advanced planning matters in dress shopping and provided an easy-to-follow table on when to finalize a dress purchase based on the wedding month.

From tips to walking in a heavy gown to what to expect with alterations to how brides can prepare for their appointment, you have earnest, expert advice to share with brides. Even more, brides tend to appreciate this helpful content, as it solves pain points and eases an often overwhelming experience. Many brides save these “insider” posts, and this content is shared often as well – two actions the social-media algorithms tend to favor. As a result, these posts can get pushed to a larger audience.

In fact, Zola’s 2026 First Look Report noted planning posts like “what to book at 18 months vs. 6 months” are saved at higher rates than pure décor photos. The finding underscores brides’ appetite for pragmatic content that supports and demystifies wedding planning.

To produce relevant content, consider your brides’ most frequently asked questions and draft

a list of common struggles. And don’t be afraid to wade into choppy waters like discussing budget with a stylist or managing a tricky interpersonal dynamic during the appointment. Content addressing the less glamorous, even messy parts of the process resonates because it acknowledges real-world challenges and provides honest perspective.

### Pop Culture Inspiration

With “*Top Gun: Maverick*” capturing box-office attention in the summer of 2022, Swoon produced a 35-second video for TikTok imagining four of the film’s pilots as wedding gowns. Set to the upbeat tune of OneRepublic’s “I Ain’t Worried,” a Swoon model donned the gowns and brought a little cinematic flair to her modeling before the camera. The video quickly went viral and, to date, has been viewed more than 111,000 times – a remarkable feat for a one-door bridal boutique in Reno, Nev.

The success of the “*Top Gun: Maverick*” post inspired Maher to feature other Swoon gowns built around pop culture themes, such as the ACOTAR adult fantasy romance book series, Taylor Swift albums and “*Stranger Things*” characters. It’s a unique, clever twist to showing the diversity of Swoon inventory.

Maher says themes resonate well and are the latest high-growth area of engagement for Swoon, particularly as she often pairs the video with a caption asking for viewers to pick what dress they like best.

“These themes bring a lot of eyeballs to Swoon and give people a low buy-in way to engage with us,” Maher says. “It opens the



Themed posts capture attention, like this one from @swoonbridal on TikTok

door to education, showcasing the inventory we have and answering questions for others to see.”

### The New Arrival

“Unboxing” videos are a larger viral video trend in the social-media universe, popular for unveiling a mystery product and capturing a genuine, first-look reaction.

While boutiques might not do traditional “unboxing” videos – simply plucking a couture gown from a box can diminish its perceived value – you can certainly embrace “new arrival” videos to spotlight the latest additions to the store’s inventory. (This is certainly the more powerful alternative to a carousel of photos showing the latest gown arrivals.)

New arrival videos create excitement by bringing viewers behind the scenes and providing a splash of exclusive access to the freshest product. The best videos feel authentic and in the moment rather than staged.

Emma & Grace Bridal Studio regularly posts videos of new arrivals to its Denver boutique. Staff



Showcase new arrivals to capture attention.



Collaborative posts are always a smart strategy

will model a gown, showing how the dress moves and zooming in and out to show varied details, such as beading or hidden pockets. Captions often shout out unique features of the dress and typically include a call to action, such as “book an appointment today.”

For a different take to the new arrival video, you might capture stylists’ first look at a new dress, perhaps identifying features of the gown they find most intriguing at first glance. In this way, stylists discover the gown alongside the viewer. Or maybe a stylist details why the store brought in a new gown with comments like, “We heard so many of our brides asking about shorter gowns, so here are three of our latest additions to the showroom.”

### The Collaboration

Collaborative posts with other bridal vendors – photographers, venues, florists and the like – are quite popular with brides because they demonstrate the multi-layered execution of a couple’s vision.

Swoon was recently one of more than 20 local vendors featured in one of the first weddings at The Venue at Meadow View, a

new private event space in Reno. The nine-image post generated nearly 4,000 likes and more than 125 comments.

These collaborative posts increase attention and credibility for your boutique by leveraging the reach of industry partners. They also help introduce brides to other potential vendors, which they often appreciate during the daunting planning process.

However, be sure to partner with credible vendors who share your commitment to professionalism and quality. If you sell couture gowns, for instance, you’ll want to collaborate with vendors who cater to the same luxury market to ensure synergy and relevancy.

### The Content Flywheel: Turn One Appointment into a Social-Media Content Machine

**The constant need** for relevant social-media content demands creativity and, quite frankly, efficiency. After all, resources and time are not in infinite supply. Turning one bridal appointment into multiple pieces of content is a savvy way to optimize your efforts and share lively posts that deliver inspiration, education and social proof. Here’s how:

**#1: The Preparation:** Create a short video of a stylist pulling dresses based on the bride’s pre-appointment survey. The stylist can provide a snapshot of the bride and briefly detail the first three dresses she’s pulling and why.

**#2: The Appointment:** Develop a recap video of different moments from a bride’s visit – from her consultation with the stylist to her first gown try-on to a tender moment shared between the bride and her mother.

**#3: The Selection:** Provide a look at different gowns a bride tried on throughout her visit, including close-ups of unique features.

**#4: The Reveal:** Record the reactions of a bride’s party as she steps out in a gown she really loves. Human reactions pack a heavyweight-sized emotional punch.

**#5: The Yes:** Capture the energy-filled moment when a bride chooses her dress, including the reactions of those around her.

**#6: The Stylist Perspective:** The stylist offers a quick appointment recap, sharing how honest feedback and collaboration inched the bride toward “the one.”

**#7: The Idea vs The Reality:** If a bride came in with firm ideas of what she wanted and went in an entirely different direction, you can share photos of her inspiration followed by photos of what she selected. You can also detail how and why her decision moved.

**#8: The Fitting:** A bride’s return to the store for her fitting provides a new opportunity for fresh content. You can show the bride putting on her gown for the first time, detail modifications made to the dress and reactions of her guests.

**#9: The Alterations:** If your shop is blessed with a quality seamstress, highlight those talents with a before and after post. Show a seamstress modifying a bride’s dress, from adding sleeves to a creative closing of the plunge. Contemporary brides appreciate knowing they have options.

**#10: The Wedding Day:** Collect pictures of the bride on her wedding day. You might also include comments from the bride about how she felt in her dress and how your boutique helped her get to that magical day.

Note, permission is important when involving photos and videos of any guests in your shop.

Ask for reviews while excitement is highest - before brides leave your store.

# Winning With Reviews

Best practices for earning, managing and leveraging brides' feedback.

**Today**, with the touch of a button or swipe of a screen, your boutique's entire profile is available on the internet for all to see. And that includes customer reviews on social-media platforms, as well as sites like Yelp, Google, Wedding Wire and the Knot.

And, increasingly, these reviews are impacting the way brides shop.

"Brides now take reviews quite seriously and determine if they will go to that shop based on reviews," says Clark Pederson, VP of operations at MB Bride and Special Occasion in Greensburg, Pa. "Too few, and they may not trust a young business. Too many, and they may think it is too high volume, fake or old."

Though many long-established boutiques like Kleinfeld rely on word-of-mouth recommendations, there is no doubt reviews are still of tremendous importance.

"Reviews are the highest ROI marketing asset that we have and continue to improve our website ranking," says Jennifer Shipe, marketing director. "For an emotional purchase such as a wedding dress, online reviews often influence the decision-making process. There is no better crowdsourced advice than advice from real brides-to-be on the same journey as you."

Another benefit: With so much AI-generated content these days, real-life reviews can cut through the noise and provide a level of trust.

"Customers are looking for 'real,'" agrees Liz Stoner, owner of Norman's Bridal in Springfield, Mo. "They want to weed through all of the AI gibberish to find everything they can before visiting a store in person. I find myself going straight to reviews when considering where to eat, where to vacation and so on. This is a big purchase in their life and they want to go to the best of the best."

Taken together, these insights underscore a critical reality: reviews aren't just reflections of your business – they actively shape it. They influence visibility,

An array of thank-you notes and photos are prominently displayed on a wall across from the check-in desk at Jennifer's Bridal in Hockessin, Del.

credibility, conversion and customer confidence. In many cases, they serve as the very first interaction a bride has with your brand.

Given how increasingly influential reviews have become, it's worth taking a fresh look at how you earn, showcase and leverage them. From visibility and credibility to conversion and customer trust, reviews now touch nearly every part of the bridal journey, making them one of the most powerful tools in your marketing arsenal. What follows are key reminders and best practices every boutique should know, revisit and refine.

### Securing Reviews

One of the most popular methods for securing reviews is still to send out a post-appointment survey, typically done via e-mail or text. Many boutiques use Bridal Live software, which enables you to send an automatic follow-up email with a request to leave a review and provides direct links.

While sending out a survey is a good idea, it shouldn't be the only collection method you rely on.

It's also important to capitalize on momentum in person. When the appointment goes well and excitement is at its peak after the bride says yes to the dress, this is a great time to ask for a review. Some boutiques have reported that excited brides will even write a review before checking out or while still in the parking lot.

How you frame the request is important.

"We approach reviews as an invitation, not an expectation," says Chelsea Tyler McNamara, owner of Covet Bridal in Essex, Conn. "By letting brides know that their feedback helps future brides and genuinely matters to us, it removes

## What is the most memorable piece of feedback you've ever received?

"Customer reviews encourage us to continue to improve our offerings. Post COVID, we received a few notes from brides requesting private or semi-private appointments along with more time to shop. This prompted us to create several VIP Experiences that brides can book, which feature three-hour appointment slots, upgraded dressing rooms, champagne, accouterments and more customizations. Our VIP appointment bookings have become one of our most successful marketing programs to date."

— Jennifer Shipe, marketing director, Kleinfeld

"This was a review from one of my brides' brothers on Saturday: Liz did an amazing job helping my sister pick out her dream wedding dress. She was a part of her journey the whole way from meeting her at an expo to the first try on where Liz normalized her feelings and made her feel okay to take some time and make a decision she felt right about. She made my sister feel so comfortable when it came to not rushing but also things like changing clothes and dressing. She was honest about expectations and needs and never attempted to 'upsell' anything. She let all of us as the party to feel what we needed to feel and provide levity where needed. She showed honesty, compassion and integrity. We loved that it was a family-owned business and it showed. I would recommend anyone to come to her."

— Liz Stoner, owner, Norman's Bridal

"We recently received a review from a bride who had visited 12 salons before coming to us, which alone made her feedback especially meaningful. She not only mentioned her stylist by name but shared that for the first time in her journey she felt truly comfortable, cared for and celebrated. As an owner, reading that was incredibly moving. Those feelings are the heart of what we work so hard to create, and knowing we were able to provide that after such a long, exhausting search made it especially memorable."

— Chelsea Tyler McNamara, owner, Covet Bridal

"A bride once wrote that she 'felt seen, not sold to and we listened to them.' That is one of our guiding principles - focusing on the connection over the sale."

— Lenyce Boyd, founder, Bacio Bacio Bridal

"A customer was offended because a larger tape measure was pulled out for one of the bridesmaids. To her that was embarrassing, as she was plus size. So, once she placed a review about it, we changed our way for something so simple as a switch of a measuring tape. If you see someone in the party is going to require a larger tape measure then from the start you grab the longer one instead of switching between two different ones and making it more obvious that a larger one is needed and made it a more discreet thing."

— Jennifer Mason, manager, MB Bride and Special Occasion

"We had a young lady who didn't find her dress at our salon but still left us an amazing review saying that it was the best customer service. I asked her if she left a review where she bought the dress, and she said it was not worthy. It blew my mind. I messaged to thank her for doing that, and she said 'I owed that to your business and how you made me feel.' Isn't that impactful?"

— Christina Starr, owner, Boujee Bridal and Quinceañera

*Respond quickly and thoughtfully to every review.*

pressure and reframes the request as something meaningful rather than transactional.”

MB Bride sends the bride an automated text with a link already in the e-mail, as they view that as a low-pressure way to request reviews.

“We phrase it to feel like they would be helping us out; people like to help,” Pederson says.

As a newer boutique, Christina Starr, owner of Boujee Bridal and Quinceañera in Albuquerque, N.M., definitely relies on reviews. Her staff gently broaches the topic while brides are still in the dressing room, emphasizing that they would be grateful for the good feedback and how it can help their business. She says people respond positively when they believe they can be of service.

“The best place to catch them is while they are still in your store, hands down,” Starr says. “Ask for the review while you’re getting contracts ready. They’re so grateful, they want to do that for you. We’ve had bridal parties where everybody leaves the review. We make it really fun and upbeat.”

As convenience is key, some stores display a QR code at the front desk, enabling brides to instantly connect to a review platform.

“Keeping the process simple and immediate has proven to be the most effective method,” McNamara says.

Although stylists try to ask for reviews at the end of each appointment at Modern Bride & Formal Shop in Bedford, N.H., co-owner and CEO Brian Fortin also puts a fun spin on things.

“A couple of times a year, we have competitions with the staff to see who can get the most five-star

reviews in two months,” Fortin says.

The highest achievers receive a financial bonus. He says no customer has ever complained when asked to participate and brides are enthusiastic about helping their favorite stylist win the competition.

In fact, last year’s fourth quarter competition resulted in 120 five-star Google reviews for Modern Bride & Formal Shop, the most it had ever received in such a short time.

Starr hosts competitions too, rewarding staff who receive the most reviews with a gift card. She says customers are eager to participate in the friendly competition, hoping that their favorite stylist earns the prize.

Some boutiques, like Jennifer’s Bridal, request feedback even if a dress was not purchased. But not all boutiques specifically ask for reviews.

“At Kleinfeld, we know if we give the bride and her guests a

top-notch experience from the minute she engages with our brand until she walks down the aisle, she will leave a review without us asking,” Shipe says. “This review may be public, such as Google reviews or simple word of mouth to her friend group, which is just as valuable to us.”

If a review is requested but the bride does not deliver, some boutiques will let this go, not wanting to hound the bride.

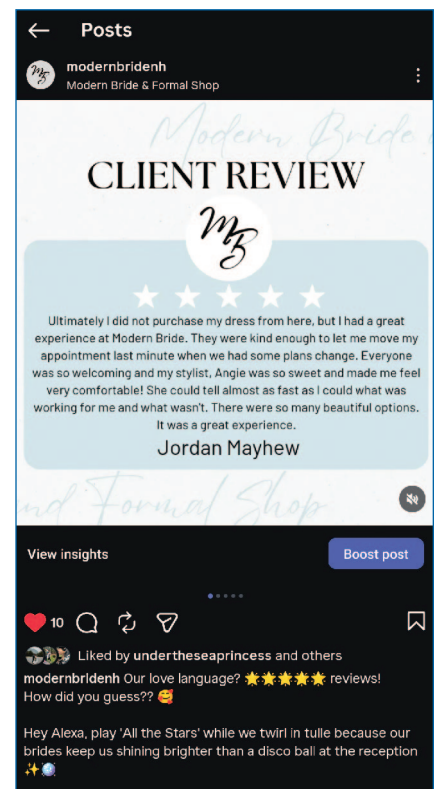
Those that do follow up typically do so once with a gentle reminder. After that, they’ll drop it.

“We frame it as gratitude - not expectation,” says Boyd, who follows up once but does not want brides to feel pressured. “We tell brides that reviews help us celebrate their stories and help future brides feel confident, rather than presenting it as a request for feedback.”

*Continued on page 50*



In a cozy corner of *Covet Bridal* in Connecticut, a pin board displays sweet messages from brides and design partners, a reminder of gratitude, celebration and unforgettable moments.



Google Reviews, such as this one for *Modern Bride & Formal Shop*, are extremely important for boutiques given their reach.



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Continued from page 48

## Responding to Reviews

Collecting reviews is only half the equation. How you respond sends an equally powerful message - not just to the reviewer, but to every future bride reading along.

It is common practice for a business that receives a good review to thank the reviewer.

"We want our brides to be heard and seen so we respond to all reviews, often asking them to send us wedding photos," Shipe says. "We thank them for taking the time to leave the review and wish them all the best during their wedding planning process."

Starr and her staff respond to reviews almost immediately.

"We have some brides that said 'we loved your response to our review,'" Starr says.

If a negative review should come in, it is good practice to follow up and try to make things right. Acknowledging the review publicly with a brief comment but handling the resolution privately is the best solution. That way, anyone who reads the review sees that you were on top of it and cared enough to respond, but how exactly things got resolved remains



Framed photos of thank-you notes, which can serve as testimonials for stellar service, adorn the walls leading to the second floor of MB Bride and Special Occasion.

## Use reviews to coach staff, refine processes and celebrate wins.

private so not every customer expects the same treatment.

The main goal is preserving relationships. Frequently, a negative review is simply a matter of a misunderstanding or miscommunication, which can be smoothed over with a simple conversation.

At some boutiques, such as Fortin's, stylists are responsible for responding to their own reviews. Other boutiques leave this task to the owner or manager. There is no "right" way to handle this, but there should always be a system in place so responses don't slip through the cracks.

## Learning from Reviews

Savvy owners understand that reviews aren't just marketing assets - they're real-time feedback loops that can sharpen operations and strengthen teams.

Many boutiques utilize reviews - positive or negative - as teaching moments.

"Our survey is intentionally structured so that if any question or topic receives a low score, it automatically alerts our sales leadership team, allowing us to quickly identify and address the feedback that was shared," Shipe says. "This system has helped drive meaningful operational enhancements and provides real, actionable examples that we incorporate into team training and coaching."

When a bride mentions her stylist by name in a review, Covet Bridal makes sure to point those out in staff meetings as learning opportunities.

"When a stylist builds trust and makes a bride feel truly seen, it shows up in the feedback," McNamara says.

"Those reviews help our team understand that relationships, not just the gowns, are what ultimately define a great appointment."

To keep momentum high, most boutiques will give a public shoutout to the consultant whose name was mentioned in the review.

"In our morning meetings, the bridal managers often read reviews as a learning tool and to congratulate and thank staff for taking such great care of our brides," Shipe says.

Fortin says they do sales analyses after reviews come in and can even use them to identify patterns - why one stylist consistently receives glowing feedback or why another might need additional support.

"We'll use the number of reviews as a training guide as a point of discussion within the team," he says.

Good reviews - or even just the fact that customers take the time to review your boutique - are achievements many owners celebrate with staff, whether by acknowledging the stylist who received the most accolades that week or, like Starr does, by hosting a celebration when the team hits major milestones such as 500 reviews.

## Displaying Reviews

While most reviews now live online, many boutiques still find creative ways to bring that feedback into their physical spaces.

Some display printed reviews or thank-you notes behind the scenes as morale boosters for staff. Others integrate testimonials into dressing rooms, break rooms or hallways as reminders of impact.

Even when reviews aren't physically showcased in-store, nearly every boutique actively incorporates them into marketing - from websites and e-mail campaigns to social media and bridal show materials.

"Brides trust real voices, so authentic reviews outperform scripted ads every time," Boyd says.

Jennifer's Bridal extracts reviews for its website but does not publish them on social media, while MB Bride selects reviews for flyers handed out at bridal shows. Modern Bridal & Formal regularly shares reviews across its social channels and plans to feature rotating testimonials on its redesigned website.

Regardless of platform, the strategy is the same: let your brides do the talking, and display where it is visible for all to see.

### Maintaining a Strong Review-Based Reputation

Stoner recommends asking every single customer - including members of the bridal party - to leave a review, emphasizing how critical they are in helping future brides choose where to book appointments.

And consistency matters.

"For local searches, reviews are the top-ranking factors that influence placement and local reviews," Shipe says. "Quantity, quality key words and recency are key and one bride taking the time to leave a review will trickle into the algorithm and can influence hundreds to book an appointment at your salon."

But ultimately, reviews begin long before a link is sent or a QR code is scanned.

"Focus on the experience first,"

McNamara says. "Reviews are a byproduct of how a bride feels, not something you can force. When you lead with care, consistency and genuine connection, the feedback tends to follow naturally."

For newer owners especially, Fortin stresses that reviews deserve the same attention as inventory, staffing and sales goals.

"It isn't just another daily routine, mundane function of doing

business; there is a lot of importance on it," he says. "You have to understand the demographic you're dealing with and the way this generation purchases their products, the way they use their research. The importance placed on reviews is absolutely critical. I can tell you all day long how good we are but you need to hear it from another bride."

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# Beyond *the Dress*



**Independent bridal** stores are already part of some of life's biggest moments. But many are making an impact far beyond the wedding day by investing time, money and energy back into their communities.

From charity drives and scholarship programs to adoption events and fundraising fashion shows, these stores are proving that community involvement isn't just good for the community - it's good for their business, staff and brides as well. Following are seven boutiques that are making a difference in their own unique ways. . .

## **Mia Grace Bridal**

Pets are so beloved to the owners of Mia Grace Bridal in Chesterfield, Mo., that every March the boutique holds a Pet Food Month, encouraging brides to donate dry dog food, cat food or cat litter.

Almost all brides bring in a donation. The store works with around 100 brides a month so the total donation is sizeable. As a thank you, Mia Grace gives donating brides a gift, such as a "wifey" or "bride" sweatshirt; 50% off a custom blue jean jacket; \$100 towards wedding gown preservation; or 50% off their veil. Sometimes brides can choose their gift and some years the gift is random.

Every year Mia Grace donates to a

different charity. This year it partnered with Tenth Life Cat Rescue and Is Today My Day Dog Rescue.

"A lot of our brides like to do something for the community," says Madison Crawford, who co-owns the store with her mom, Vicky Smith. "We found they are more receptive to physically donating something than to giving \$10 to an organization. That doesn't feel as intimate as it does going to the store and picking out the food and bringing it in."

To let brides know about the month-long event, Mia Grace posts information on its social-media channels and sends out an e-mail blast.

"And when the brides are in the store their stylists discuss it at the be-



Madison Crawford and Vicky Smith love hosting events almost every month to gather everything from diapers to pet food and school supplies.



Mia Grace Bridal's annual Pet Food Month results in a sizeable charitable donation.

gining of their appointment and talk about how excited they are about it," Crawford says. "A lot of time that creates some excitement in the appointment The brides love being able to get a gift while also making an impact."

Throughout the year Mia Grace hosts other special events. In February it holds Heart Month to raise money for congenital heart disease research, donating \$10 for every bride that special orders her wedding gown. If a bride matches the donation she receives a gift. In July it donates to Push for Pencils, providing school supplies for kids; in October and November it participates in a coat drive; and in December it runs its most popular event, the Diaper Drive for Saint Louis Crisis Nursery.

"Last year we collected over 50 boxes totaling to 4,343 diapers," Crawford says, "and that does not include all the wipes and formula."

Crawford and Smith like their events to be hyper local "because brides and employees see this affecting their neighbors."

"We're a mother-daughter business and love being involved in our local community," Crawford says. "That's really important for us and it is for the brides too. If we can say where these items are going, which is nearby, that makes a difference."

### Love It at Stella's

Love It at Stella's gives away a

## Give back locally to build deeper emotional loyalty.

number of gowns every November to military and first responder brides. The Westminster, Md.-based store participates with Brides Across America and last year gave away 28 gowns.

"It's a highlight of the year for us," owner Doris Dower says.

That same month, for every gown the store sells, it gives \$20 to a local women's shelter. Typically, it gives around \$1,500 and the store's silent owner always matches the donation so it's usually close to \$3,000.

Dower likes to do this during the same month as Thanksgiving because she considers it a gratitude month.

Brides who'd like to receive a gown register with Brides Across America and find a store participating in this annual event. Then the brides make an appointment for a selected day in November and come in to try on dresses, which are from a rack of gowns that are discounted or not performing for the store.

"They have an appointment and can try on several gowns; hopefully we have one in their



Last year Love It at Stella's gave away 28 bridal gowns to military and first responder brides during its November event.



Stella's owner Doris Dower hands a poster with signatures from brides to show their support to Ashley Stahl and Danielle Stansbury from Springboard Community Services.

size," says Dower, who only remembers one bride not finding anything.

The event runs for an entire day and is exhausting, Dower says, so now she holds it on a day before she's closed "to give my girls a chance to relax and regroup."

The Brides Across America event makes a much bigger splash for Stella's than the shelter donation, which is anonymous.

And while it's wonderful to hold an altruistic event, there's a benefit for the store too, even if that's not why Dower holds the event.

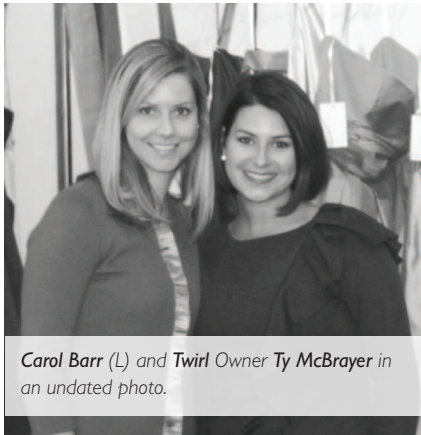
"It's nice to have a clean out of our rack in November," she says. "We still have to pay taxes on the things in the store so it's good to freshen it up and get new stock in."

Stella's posts information about the event on social media, and TV stations sometimes come in to run a segment.

"It's another boost to the store reputation," Dower says.

### Twirl Boutique

In 2021 Twirl Boutique in Lexington, Ky., launched its own collection, The Heart Full of Joy Collection, featuring private label wedding gowns. When a bride purchases a dress from this collection, the store donates a portion of her purchase to the Carol Barr



Carol Barr (L) and Twirl Owner Ty McBryer in an undated photo.

Fund with the American Heart Association.

Carol Barr worked in a STEM field and this fund goes towards STEM scholarships for young women in Eastern and Central Kentucky. Barr, who died of heart disease in 2020, was the best friend of store owner Ty McBryer.

"We wanted to honor her legacy and keep her in our hearts and minds," says Taylor Clark, store manager and lead buyer.

Twirl features the collection on its Pinterest page but doesn't specifically promote it over other collections it carries.

"We never use it as a marketing tool because it's so tender of a topic and so important to us," Clark says. "So typically, if people ask who's the designer of this dress we tell them about the collection. It's usually something we go into once they've said yes to the dress."

Once brides find out about the scholarship, "they always feel a special connection," Clark says. "They're falling in love with these dresses then learn about the special meaning behind the dress and it seals the deal for them and it's a win for us as a business. It's probably the most special thing we've done."

For the collection, Twirl tries to source unique gowns that aren't readily available.

"Our main goal is that it's re-



Owner Ty McBryer and models show off dresses from the The Heart Full of Joy Collection.

flective of who our brides are," Clark says. "We don't just ask ourselves if we like the dress but is this reflective of a Twirl bride, a Kentucky bride."

Each gown's name is reflective of Kentucky's culture or geography.

Twirl's goal is to have around 20% of sales come from this collection and the amount it donates every month varies based on monthly sales. It donates \$5,000 to \$7,000 per year to the fund.

Initially, it was a lot of work building out the collection and trying to figure out gowns that were worthy, Clark says.

"Starting our own collection has been something that has taken a lot of emotional space because we want to make sure it's in honor of Carol," she says.

### Bridal and Formal

Bridal and Formal in Cincinnati, Ohio, has partnered with a local high school for the past 20 years to raise money for patients with pediatric cancer and their families. For 10 of those years, it has

worked with The Dragonfly Foundation.

This year the boutique raised \$130,000. Over the years the amount raised has climbed, beginning with \$60,000 for the first event.

"There aren't enough resources in Cincinnati to help people navigate the systems and to find support for the family when a child is receiving cancer treatments, so the rest of the family kind of gets left behind," says Tina Minshall, general manager of the store. "This foundation allows the family to step away and do something fun."

Bridal and Formal works with fashion students at Sycamore High School. They work together to host a fundraiser and put on a fashion show, where students can also opt to showcase their own designs in any style. Dresses from Bridal and Formal are mostly prom and homecoming gowns.

Pediatric patients are invited to walk the catwalk to celebrate their courage.

"The kids strut their stuff and it doesn't matter if they're two or 15," Minshall says. "It makes your heart happy and turns into more of a celebration of them doing their thing and their families celebrating being normal and not having to worry."

The fashion show is free to at-



High school participants dressed up for the event and excited to help raise money for pediatric cancer patients in conjunction with Bridal and Formal.

## Make your boutique part of something bigger than sales.

tend and open to anyone. Money is raised in advance through phone calls and on the day of the event through raffles and donations made at the fashion show. Staff from Bridal and Formal act as advisors to the high schoolers.

“At this point it’s a well-oiled machine,” Minshall says.

The biggest challenge, she says, is teaching the high schoolers how to figure out their priorities, time frames and deadlines.

“They have to realize they can’t be putting together their gift baskets the night before,” she says.

Bridal staff also teach them some basics, including how to communicate, look someone in the eye, hold a conversation and ask for things.

The event takes “an enormous amount of time,” for the students, but it’s a great experience, since many go into fashion fields and to further study fashion. The event is mostly organized by high school juniors and seniors, especially the latter. Around 40 of them walk the catwalk and at the most recent, 12 showcased their collections – anything from three to six garments ranging from everyday clothes like jeans to prom dresses.

The new seniors at the high school every year step into the shoes their predecessors left behind, and from whom they learned the year previously.

“They’re the leaders now and they can hit the ground running as soon as school starts,” Minshall says. “They start their fundraising phone calls immediately.”

Bridal and Formal staff attend the event and select which dresses to donate, though that depends mostly on which gowns the seniors fit into. And while the event is good marketing for the boutique,

that’s definitely not the motivation, just “a nice side benefit,” Minshall says.

### The Bridal Collection

The Bridal Collection in Centennial, Colo., has been hosting its Tulle and Tails event for around eight years (it was originally called Dogs & Dresses). The goal of this special day is finding forever families for dogs and cats through True Companions Animal Shelter and Clinic in Denver.

“Giving back to charity and giving back in our community has been a cornerstone of what we do,” says Jordan Ensminger, creative director. “It creates a strong sense of purpose within our boutique. We’re not just selling gowns; we’re part of something bigger.”

Every year the store hosts the event on a Saturday in September – when the weather has cooled down a little – outside its store, with the dogs under awnings and the cats inside a cooled trailer.

“We wanted to create something joyful and unique that would have an impact on our community and our brides,” says Ensminger, adding that when someone is getting married it’s a great time to add another family member.

Store employees spend around

80 hours planning and promoting the event. Marketing these days is mostly social media and live streaming from the shelter (which goes on True Companion’s website and on the boutique’s social media and website events page) but for the first one the store promoted it on TV and radio and in a community newsletter.

“It started really small and it’s grown so large now that we have vendors who come and give free treats and give packs to people getting a pet for the first time,” Ensminger says.

The vendors also sponsor the adoptions so new pet parents don’t have to pay to take their new cat or dog home.

The Bridal Collection also sets up a photo backdrop outside the store and people can include special signs like “I fell in love with my furry friend,” or “I said Yup to the Pup” so people can celebrate the



Tulle and Tails, hosted annually by The Bridal Collection in Centennial, Colo., helps dogs and cats find their forever parents.



Guests visit with adoptable cats at Tulle and Tails.

moment.

While the event is happening, business continues as usual inside The Bridal Collection and the store donates a portion of its sales from that day back to the charity so the brides are giving back without even meaning to.

"It makes the experience even more special," Ensminger says. "They got a dream dress and helped out a furry friend in need."

People interested in adopting a pet submit an application before the event so they can take their animal home that day. But sometimes certain pets prove very popular, in which case it works on a first-come, first-served basis. And, like with dresses, people often leave with something different than they were looking for. For example, they might come for a puppy and leave with a senior dog, Ensminger says.

And while some people don't adopt a pet on the day of the event, Tulle & Tails helps get the word out about True Companions so some people might visit and adopt a pet in the future. The event also brings visibility to the store "but that's never been our motivation," Ensminger says.

### Amanda's Touch

An annual prom show hosted by Amanda's Touch in Waynesboro, Va., helps raise money for pet charities Cat's Cradle Rescue and Augusta Dog Adoption.

The boutique invites local high schoolers to be involved and they both walk the catwalk and sell \$10 tickets to the event. The show is held in the ballroom of a local hotel in January, and serves as a kick-off to prom season. Some models strut the catwalk with a feline or canine friend from the

## Blending retail and rescue creates unforgettable moments.

charities, and sometimes attendees apply to adopt the pets the same day.

Each student walks the catwalk at least three times, in different outfits, which they select based on both preference and what fits. Around 75 students are involved, says Kristie Hizer, operations manager.

It can be hard to find male students who want to be involved, she adds, so often it's her employees' sons or the boyfriend of a girl in the show. The male students have their own section of the show.

Amanda's Touch has been holding the event for more than a decade and it's a lot of work, but it's worth it, Hizer says.

"There are months of prep and on the day of the event I'm at the hotel from 8 to 8," she says. "I devote a lot of time to this; it's my baby – my days revolve around this prom show for four months."

A volunteer DJ and photographer work with the store, and the girls and store post about it on social media. Sometimes parts of the events are themed. One year was themed Barbie and in 2025 it was Y2K.

The event lasts for 30 to 45

minutes.

"They're high school girls so they're super nervous so they tend to run down the runway and getting them to walk slower is hard," Hizer says.

And while the event gives the store and its dresses some exposure, charities are the main focus. The last event raised \$3,500, which comes from the cost of the tickets and raffles during the event.

The show isn't cheap for Amanda's Touch to host but it's worth it, Hizer says, "because we're helping animals find loving homes while giving high school students confidence and a once-in-a-lifetime experience."



Pets strut their stuff on the catwalk for the Amanda's Touch prom show to raise money for pet rescue.

Credit: Robin Skiewaski Photography



The Amanda's Touch staff, ready for the prom show.

Credit: Robin Skiewaski Photography



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# Bridal Archetypes *That Matter*



Credit: Christine Sveda Photography

Stylists at *Madeleine's Daughter* guide brides through an exploratory process using thoughtful questions and active listening to narrow down selections. In particular they love the social-media-savvy bride "because she comes in inspired."

**Bridal shoppers** don't fit neatly into a single category. Each bride arrives with her own ideas, expectations, concerns and influences. That hasn't changed.

What has changed is how those expectations are shaped – and how quickly they evolve.

From social-media-fueled inspiration to shifting financial priorities and new definitions of the shopping experience, today's brides are more informed, more complex and, at times, more overwhelmed than ever. The archetypes may feel familiar; but the way they show up – and how they need to be guided – continues to shift.

Understanding these bridal types is no longer just helpful; it's integral to creating connection, building trust and ultimately earning that "Yes."

Following are some of the most common bridal archetypes you encounter, along with suggestions for how to cater to each. While some of these brides are nothing new, refining your response to them is an ongoing process – and one that can make the difference between a missed opportunity and a confident sale.

## Body-Conscious Brides

Almost every bride is body conscious to some extent; rarely if ever do you meet a woman with zero concerns about her height, weight, shape or complexion.

On top of that, constant imagery and messaging on social media focused on appearance and unrealistic role models add greater levels of concern for many bridal shoppers.

With this issue, it's important to tread cautiously.

"We are very careful with language and the words that we use, and we work to validate their feelings," says Angie Oven, owner of The Bridal Gallery in Salem, Ore. and president of the Better Bridal Group. "Whether we agree with them or not, it's their truth, so we have to navigate this without leaving the bride feeling she isn't heard."

More than anything, body-conscious brides need to know that you understand.

"They need to physically see and hear that you get their message," says Jillian Forsberg, owner of Dress Gallery in Wichita, Kan. "Dismissing their fears is unacceptable. For example, if a bride

## *Narrate selections to center comfort and confidence.*

is conscious of her arms you don't say, 'Oh, your arms are fine.' That tells her she's not actually being heard."

Instead, offer the bride options to feel like her best self. This might be a dress style that takes attention away from said arms or accentuates something else she loves about herself.

One effective tactic: narrate why you're pulling each gown in a way that centers her comfort, not her concern. For example, "This silhouette highlights your waist and keeps the focus upward," rather than referencing what she wants to hide.

"Your job is not to tell them that they are wrong," Forsberg says. "Our job is to give them options to make them comfortable."

Keep in mind that body-conscious brides are typically highly sensitive and aware of others' reactions. Be honest with your responses if she asks questions but try to steer the conversation away from her appearance. Really listen to her and also ask about her fiancé, hobbies, career or anything else she brings up in conversation.

"We see our role as her advocate," Forsberg says. "Whether she needs a cheerleader, a sounding board, or simply a calm, supportive presence, we meet her there. When a bride feels safe and supported, it allows her to shift her focus away from self-consciousness and toward the excitement of finding her gown."

### **Tight-Budget Brides**

When money is tight, a bride may fear that your shop won't have a dress she can afford or that her appointment won't receive the same level of attention brides spending more would get.

Job one is to dispel these fears. From first contact, your voice tone, level of attentiveness, prompt follow up, energy and enthusiasm all send a message.

As for the budget issue, be up front about it. Ask about the amount she is looking to invest in her gown (a better word choice than "spend", because it implies value), and then confirm that clear range ("We'll stay within \$X-\$Y today") so she feels protected. Then reinforce that boundary throughout the appointment.

"Our number-one core value is sales integrity, so we avoid overselling," Oven says. "That said, sometimes they don't understand what the true value of that dress is. Educating them becomes a critical part of guiding their decision making. We rarely offer a discount to meet their budget. Devaluing our dresses just isn't part of that equation."

Indeed, education is a key part

of dealing with budget-conscious brides. When presenting a gown, anchor value immediately: construction, customization options, included features. This helps her justify the decision emotionally and logically at the same time.

"Tell them about your gowns in a way that adds value, and then actually add the value," Forsberg says. "Does it come three inches shorter at no charge? Can you find something that has the desired aesthetic without the price tag? Discounting your old samples can make the bride supremely happy, and you are getting a loyal customer and a gown out the door."

At Madeleine's Daughter in Portsmouth, N.H., transparency and trust are key. They set expectations early through their website, social media and pre-appointed concierge calls so there are no surprises before a bride arrives in the store.

"We guide her to what's possible within her budget and curate selections that are intentional, so she never feels overwhelmed or



At *Madeleine's Daughter*, stylists pay close attention to whom the bride is looking for validation as she tries on gowns. This is key when a bride is clearly influenced by others' opinions.

## Control gown selection to protect budget and trust.

discouraged,” says Sophie Dirom, bridal buyer and signature bridal stylist for the Madeleine’s Daughter team. “Because budget can be a sensitive topic, we approach this with charm and clarity, so she feels empowered in her decision and trusts that we are really, truly looking out for her best interests.”

As a closed-concept salon, all gowns are kept in a private closet at Madeleine’s Daughter, which helps with the budget issue because stylists are the ones selecting styles that best match brides’ preferences, including budget.

“Ensuring that a bride doesn’t see a gown outside of their comfortable spend range is key that the bride is able to trust us,” Dirom says.

### No-Budget Brides

When a bride doesn’t have a budget, and can seemingly spend an unlimited amount on her gown, this may seem like a dream come true. However, this scenario actually presents a different challenge.

The main issue: Narrowing her choices down from everything in the store to a realistic selection can be daunting and relies heavily

on a stylist’s expertise and experience.

“More options don’t always mean an easy decision,” Dirom says.

It’s crucial you really listen to what this bride is looking for, and pull gown selections that speak to this. To avoid overwhelm, limit initial pulls to a tight edit – five to seven gowns max – and explain that you’re curating intentionally to help her make a confident decision. While you should focus on finding the best dress and not price tag, be mindful of the fact that if you only pull the most expensive selections, this could create the impression you only care about money. Include gowns of various price points that speak to her vibe and explain the quality differences between them to help dispel this perception.

“Our goal is not to show everything, but to show the right thing,” Dirom says. “When we lead with intention, she feels confident that her investment lies in something really special.”

And, most importantly, have fun!

“Let them be a kid in a candy store,” Forsberg says. “Put on your finest garments for them. Treat them like a friend. She’ll likely be treated differently at other stores who are afraid of that level of spending capacity or think she is kidding. Let the lady spend her money. She wants to, and you deserve to have fun with her!”

### Multiple Appointment Brides

Brides who schedule multiple appointments with different shops are nothing new. They’ve existed for decades and often crave excitement, celebration and attention.

While this can be frustrating, it’s important not to fight the reality.

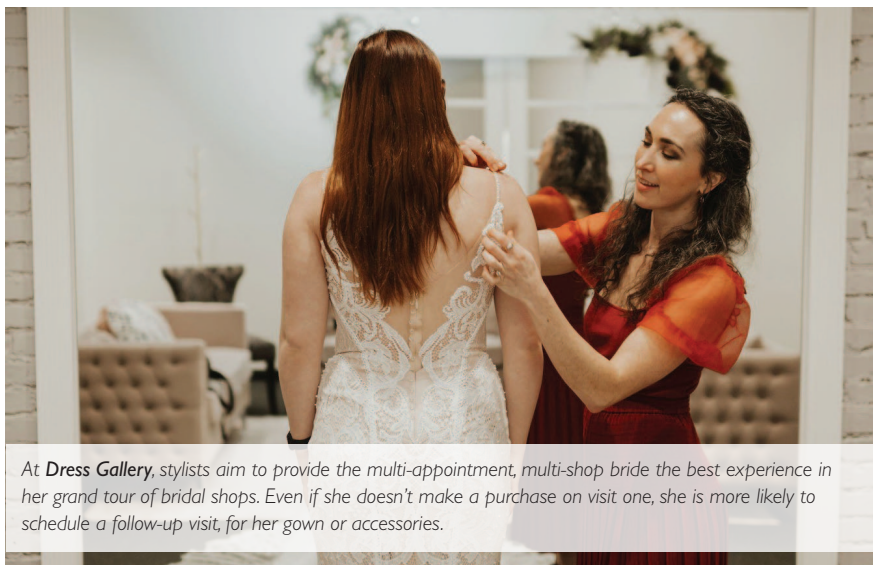
“This is their right, their fun, their pleasure,” Forsberg says. “Take heart. You are good enough to be included in this grand tour.”

That said, there are some strategic moves you should make to increase the chances she returns to your shop. For starters, focus on providing the best experience.

Create a memorable anchor: a standout moment she doesn’t get elsewhere – whether that’s a signature styling touch, a personalized note or a follow-up message referencing specific gowns she loved.

“Make her smile; be her friend,” Forsberg says. “Don’t be pushy. Let her take lots of photos, enjoy her time, and find her the perfect gown.”

Understand, too, that part of her motivation in scheduling multiple appointments could be an attempt to process the overwhelming amount of information



At Dress Gallery, stylists aim to provide the multi-appointment, multi-shop bride the best experience in her grand tour of bridal shops. Even if she doesn’t make a purchase on visit one, she is more likely to schedule a follow-up visit, for her gown or accessories.

she is trying to take in so she can feel confident in her ultimate decision.

“Rather than competing or convincing a bride to shop less, we return to our foundation, creating a standout experience using our expertise,” Dirom says.

Indeed, stylists should take the time to understand what this bride has tried, what she has and hasn't loved, and use this information strategically.

“We try to gently educate these brides on overwhelm and when to recognize when excitement turns into the feeling like they are drowning in a sea of ivory,” Dirom says, “Our role is to be a trusted guide and not just another shop. That's where we can truly earn her confidence.”

Before this bride leaves your store, ask when her last appointment is. Schedule a follow-up appointment for her – even if it's just a check-in via phone call – for the day after that. And be specific in that follow-up: reference her top dress by name or detail so she can easily recall the feeling she had in your store.

Along the way, text her, encourage her, and – even if she buys elsewhere – celebrate her.

“You will be the next shop a bride buys at through karmic connection and kindness,” Forsberg says.

### Other Opinions Matter a Lot Brides

While every bride appreciates that beaming smile, enthusiastic thumbs up or simple nod of approval in response to a potential dress, many will look to a single person to truly validate their gown choice. Sometimes the biggest influence isn't even part of

the entourage at her appointment, but this person's input is still required.

Your first job is figuring out who this influencer is.

“In the appointment, we pay close attention to who the bride is looking to for validation and gently redirect the focus to her,” Dirom says.

Once identified, subtly validate the influencer's opinion through-

out the appointment while redirecting authority (“I love that perspective – and here's what I'm seeing based on fit and structure.”)

And remember: the bride should always remain your main focus and gown pulls should be mostly in response to her input. Some retailers follow the “3-1” rule: pulling three options based on what the bride says, and one



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the key influencer(s) picks.

“Our role is to protect her experience while still honoring the people she brought with her,” Dirom says. “When done well, she leaves feeling confident that the decision is really hers and not that of her entourage.”

It the influencer is particularly overbearing, it can be helpful to distract her with helpful tasks, such as helping to zip a gown or select a veil, so she feels included in a central role. But don’t hesitate to share your expertise.

“(The bride) needs your professional guidance as much as she wants the opinions of those she loves,” Forsberg says.

### Obsessed with Social Media Brides

She may be an actual influencer or simply enamored with likes and clicks. Either way, when a bride is deeply devoted to social media, this provides both opportunities and challenges for you.

The positives: she is likely to take, post and tag a lot of photos. This is basically free publicity for you. Make sure you provide Instagram-worthy spots throughout the store with eye-catching back-



Stylists at **Dress Gallery** know it is often necessary to educate a bride on the value of a dress, from fabrication to construction, when price is a factor in her purchasing decision.

## Turn social-savvy brides into powerful brand advocates.

drops and flattering lighting. Point them out to her and then let her film and have fun! Take it one step further by offering to capture a quick, well-lit video or photo for her, positioning yourself as part of her content creation process.

“The bride with 5,000 followers is your new bridal magazine,” Forsberg says.

Understand, too, that this bride has also likely done a decent amount of pre-appointment research. As such, it’s important to assess how accurate or pertinent her social-media-gained information is. After all, this bride may be assuming what the shopping experience will be like based on what she has seen online.

“Each salon provides such a unique experience; it can be difficult if the bride hasn’t done her research when they’re shopping or hasn’t read the shop’s instructions on what to expect,” Dirom says. “We love this bride because she comes in inspired. At the same time, social media can create unrealistic expectations, especially with Artificial Intelligence, which can lead to information fatigue.”

Madeleine’s Daughter tries to translate the bride’s inspiration into reality by explaining gown construction, fabrication and fit while offering styles that fit her. Consider using side-by-side comparisons – “inspiration vs. reality” – to guide expectations while still honoring her vision.

“It’s less about recreating an image but more about creating her moment,” Dirom says. “Once they have narrowed down to a few gowns, even ‘the one,’ we ad-

vice that their social-media savvy may be best used to research how gowns look on real brides.”

### No Idea What She Wants Brides

Even with the many and varied sources of information available to bridal shoppers, there are some that have no idea where to start when it comes to gown selection. They may enter the appointment with no knowledge or thoroughly confused and exhausted from extensive research.

Think of them as a clean slate.

Start by going through some simple yes or no questions to get a sense of her personal style and vibe. You can also glean clues from how she is dressed, her ring or what she says about her favorite stores or wedding theme.

Start with extremes – fitted vs. flowy, minimal vs. detailed – to quickly narrow preferences and build momentum early in the appointment.

“She may say that she doesn’t know what she wants, but asking the right questions will help guide her in the right direction,” Forsberg says.

Once you have this information, use it to guide your gown selection. Give her several options in terms of silhouette, fabrics and style and watch her reaction closely. You will see clues, including non-verbal.

“This bride is one of our favorite brides because they allow us to step into our role as experts,” Dirom says. “Through thoughtful questions and active listening, we aim to help her discover preferences she didn’t even know she had. This bride comes in with an open mind, which allows us to build from the ground up. By

being strategic with our time and selection, we can create a journey."

### Just Wants a Dress Brides

Sometimes you may encounter a bridal shopper who is not engaged or actively planning for a wedding, yet who still wants to shop for and/or purchase a wedding gown for her own reasons. It might be for the experience, to celebrate a milestone or, sadly, planning ahead.

Forsberg recently had a bride who wanted her mother to see her in gowns before undergoing a major operation. Dress Gallery fulfilled her wishes and the bride bought her gown with her mom there in the room.

"You can truly be part of some incredible moments if you see humanity in them," Forsberg says.

While the temptation might be to write off a non-engaged "bride" as someone who is just using your store, it's important to remember that not only could she be serious about spending money but how you treat her absolutely influences word of mouth. Bottom line: she should get the exact same treatment as the bride with a ring on her finger.

Document the experience just as thoroughly – notes, favorites, follow-up – because these interactions often turn into referrals or future purchases.

"Here is where we really lean on the systems we have in place to pre-qualify our brides and make sure that their time in the store is as beneficial to her as it is to us," Dirom says. "We approach this with curiosity and openness while sharing our structure with clarity and warmth. Rather than dismissing it,

we honor the moment and meet her where she is."

### Random Request Brides

Work in an industry long enough and you'll eventually see a little bit of everything.

It might be a bride who asks you to lie to their guests.

"This happens when the bride may first come in for an appointment alone or without a critical person needed for the decision; they want us to act as if they never came in, not come back for the second appointment," Dirom says.

While blatantly lying isn't a good idea, there is no need to volunteer information to her guests if she doesn't want you to.

Then, there are brides who've already purchased a gown elsewhere but still come to their appointment simply to avoid a cancellation fee.

"Again, I say, 'Play with them,'" Forsberg says. "Put them in your best gowns. After their secret is revealed, offer to style the gown for them when it comes into the other store. Kill them with kindness."

Train your team on a consistent response framework – acknowledge, adapt and redirect – so even

unexpected requests feel handled with confidence and professionalism.

No matter the archetype, the common thread is this: brides want to feel seen, understood and guided – not sold to.

While these categories can help you anticipate behavior, they are not boxes to put brides in, they are starting points. The most successful retailers are the ones who stay flexible, listen closely and adjust in real time. Because often, a bride may show elements of several types at once.

At its core, this is about reading the room, responding with intention and creating an experience that feels personal and not procedural.

When you do that well, everything else follows: trust builds, decisions become easier and "Yes" moments happen more naturally.

"This is a dream industry to work in," Forsberg says. "Your attitude reflects that and it can be catching with the clients you serve. Always remember your favorite bride and that working with the next bride can be a perfect experience for both of you. Live in that bride's world for a little bit. Enjoy your job!"



The Bridal Gallery's stylists are very careful with the words and language they use and work to validate rather than dismiss a bride's feelings. Reassurance that she'll find the perfect dress is integral.

# Follow the



Francesca Ripple didn't build her boutique by following a business plan – she built it by pursuing opportunity, relationships and reinvention.

## Where Is It?

Francesca's Bridal and its sister store Francesca's Atelier are located in Lutherville, Md., in an historic center called Green Spring Station. In the 19th century Green Spring Station was a toll gatehouse collecting money from farmers for their produce and wares. During the Great Depression a restaurant was built named Green Spring Inn. In 1979, the first boutique was opened. There are now 17 women-owned boutiques at the station. In 1992 Johns Hopkins Health Center, which sees 3,000 people a day, was approved to build around Green Spring Station. Brides travel from many states to visit Francesca's Bridal and Atelier, including New York, Washington D.C., Virginia, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Because many brides leave home for their jobs, they will purchase dresses in their home state where their families live. A good portion of the boutique's brides live in California and New York.

**Francesca Ripple** didn't set out to own a bridal salon.

Rather, her path – which includes everything from a modeling career, to management, to owning a window treatment business – has always been defined by gut feelings and chance encounters. Somewhere along the way, without a formal business plan or life-long dream of entrepreneurship, she became a bridal store owner.

Looking back now, after more than two decades in the industry, Francesca doesn't describe her award-winning Lutherville, Md., boutique as a business she built. She describes it as a path she followed – one instinct, one opportunity, one adventure at a time.

"I know people go into business because they want to make money and have success, but I've done it because I was intended to do it from the beginning and all the steps I experienced along the way were to prepare me for it," she says. "When I realized that, I was able to settle in and focus on creating this vision of a beautiful, exquisite, curated boutique where women could go, be dressed and feel special like the olden days and love every minute of it."

## Reinvention is the Strategy

Francesca grew up in a household of seamstresses, including her mom and aunts, and learned how to make her own clothes at a young age. Not only did she enjoy sewing but it served a practical purpose: At 5'10", she had trouble finding outfits that were long enough and sewing allowed her to make prom dresses and pants any length.

At 18, Francesca started modeling and worked for, among other clients, the bridal salons in Maryland.

One day, while modeling in a bridal fashion show, she heard the store owner needed to hire a manager. So, at 21, she started working for this salon while continuing to model, learning as much as she could about retail including window displays, merchandising, sales, directing fashion shows and, ultimately, managing the store. This went on for about 10 years, during which time she also started a window treatment business.

Then, in 2000, she learned the store owner wanted to sell. Initially, Francesca, now retired from modeling, said no because she was focused on her family, including husband Richard and three children. But the owner requested she

## *Francesca's Bridal is a life that grew into a business.*

come in and examine everything in depth, which she did.

"And then it just seemed to make sense," she says. "It was an opportunity for me to own my own business and make it my own. And I didn't want it to be really anything like hers. She was a very good businesswoman but she wasn't selling the price point I wanted to sell and I felt like I could do things differently."

After purchasing the salon, Francesca opted to stay in the same location – a 3,500-square-foot store in Baltimore County – but immediately began changing designers, price point and target consumer. Previously, the store had served a lower-end, more DIY bride and carried a variety of niches, including bridal, bridesmaids, prom, tuxedos and mothers.

But, through networking with wedding planners, Francesca was meeting brides with larger budgets who wanted to be styled in upscale gowns. So, little by little, she got rid of the old stock and upgraded designers to be more in alignment with what they were looking for. The boutique also shifted to high-end prom dresses.

Francesca made a concentrated effort to put her store in places it would be noticed, doing fashion shows in trendy, upscale locations. With clientele continuing to expand, she realized they couldn't do it all so, starting in 2013, dropped tuxedos, bridesmaids and prom and focused strictly on bridal and mothers.

Although the mothers niche started out small, it quickly became clear there was a part of town they needed to expand to, based on the zip codes of where their mothers and brides were

coming from.

"We literally just knew that we had to move," she says.

Around this time, Francesca was directing a fashion show at the Four Seasons. She mentioned to one of the directors she wanted to open up her own socials store for mothers. The next morning, she got a phone call from the owner of Green Spring Station, a popular historic shopping center in town, saying he had a place available. She saw it the

next day and immediately said yes.

"That's how things kind of happen to me, just being somewhere, having a conversation and there it is," she says. "And you know that it's all happening because it's meant to; you're just manifesting those experiences and desires."

The Atelier, at 1,040 square feet and a price range of \$2K-\$8k, opened in 2014. While mothers make up the majority of its clientele, having a dedicated socials store provides the opportunity to sell dresses to anyone shopping for a social occasion, including welcome parties, rehearsal dinners, brunch, wedding guests, bar/bat



The main retail space at Francesca's Bridal, highlighting several gowns. "We love how the dark background really shows the wedding gowns," owner Francesca Ripple says.

### *Most Memorable Moment*

**Being in business** for so many years has given Francesca Ripple many memorable moments. Making the decision to open a social occasion salon was certainly one of them, and it turned out to be a huge business move.

"I knew it immediately," Francesca says. "Mothers leave themselves to last and now they have a place to shop just for them."

A year later, they moved the bridal salon four doors away from the social store.

"Moving our business to Green Spring Station from our original spot was huge," Francesca says. "As a total surprise our First Lady Dawn Moore presented me with a Certificate of Achievement for dressing the women of Maryland!"



*Clearly curated spaces help tell every designer's story.*

mitzvah and galas.

A year later, bridal moved into Green Spring Station as well, just four doors away. That salon is 1,200 square feet, plus another 500 square feet on the third floor for alterations, and carries gowns ranging from \$3k-\$15k.

"Moving locations and creating two salons out of one was absolutely the biggest change I've ever made in my business,"

Francesca says. "It's helped because it provides a larger client base, number one, and that's more interesting. Number two, there's periods where the Atelier is gangbusters and then it switches and bridal is gangbusters. It helps even out your cash flow."

**Curated, Not Crowded**

Walk into Francesca's Bridal and you'll notice immediately it's very curated.

"We don't have one designer that looks like the next," Francesca says. "Every designer is specific, each has a space and you can very clearly identify that; it's not at all confusing when people walk in."

As well, there is an intense focus on styling both brides and moms.

"I consider it different than sales," Francesca says. "We want them to buy a dress but we don't approach it that way. We ask about their vision for their day, then after we've looked at them – and we know their figure, we know our stock - we meet that vision."

Francesca's seamstress background is helpful here, as she and her staff are very knowledgeable about what they are and aren't capable of doing with a dress. And they're very clear about it.

"That's actually how we sell a dress too," she says. "We put a tremendous amount of thought into what we can do regarding custom changes, what the company might be able to do before we get a dress."

Alterations are done in-house, overlooked by Francesca or her daughter to make sure the bride and seamstress understand each other.

"There's usually a language barrier there and, if the seamstress isn't a good communicator and the bride doesn't understand what she's saying, a tremendous amount of mistakes can be made," she says. "So, we make sure that doesn't happen and everybody understands how this dress is going to turn out."



Owner Francesca Ripple (center) with daughters Kara Moro (L) and Victoria Hetzel (R).

Credit: Whitney Wasson Photography



Brides sign wooden flowers with their name and wedding date and put it on the store's "Said Yes" wall. When they pick up their dress, that flower is handed back to them in a window gift box.

Credit: Whitney Wasson Photography



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Francesca's Atelier opened in 2014 and carries semi-formal and formal attire for special occasions and events.



Francesca's Atelier is four doors down from Francesca's Bridal in the historic Green Spring Station.



Owner Francesca Ripple and her daughters enjoy a great relationship, both in and outside of work.

Beyond that, they get to know brides via an initial call or online interview prior to their appointment and warmly welcome guests to the shop. Appointments are paid (\$50, credited toward gown purchase) and they only accept 2-3 guests per bride ("It's usually a disaster if we do it differently," Francesca says). VIP appointments cost \$150 where the bride is offered champagne and a longer appointment time with nobody else in the store.

To provide an elevated level of service, it's essential to hire the right staff. First and foremost, Francesca looks for a salesperson.

"If you can't sell you don't stay," she says.

Beyond that, stylists must love being with people, know how to interact and focus on having a great time. They continually reach out even after the bride's wedding is over, maybe on an anniversary or because they noticed something on Instagram that person is celebrating.

"Our consultants all go beyond that and I think that's also what brings us new brides," she says.

When these elements are in place, training comes naturally.

"If you have a salesperson who's eager, interested and learning the stock it's simple," she says. "We're all motivated, we're all women and we're happy to do what we're doing."

As for marketing, Francesca credits her location "because our center is very busy and we're showcased well" as well as Instagram ("brides like pretty pictures and they love to be entertained.") A dedicated staffer handles the store's social media, while an SEO agent does its Google ads and website.

*Happy clients drive growth more than any marketing strategy.*

"It's helped us tremendously," she says. "We've learned a lot from them, we get more appointments, and what he puts out shows our authenticity. If I were starting a boutique today, I'd invest more in an SEO management company because that's what their job is and they know what they're doing."

However, none of these marketing techniques hold a candle to her number one:

"Pleasing the clients we have," Francesca says matter-of-factly. "All of our clients are very happy and that's the best right there because the majority of our business is word of mouth."

**A Family Business**

Francesca's is truly a family business, with Francesca as owner and operator and two of her daughters directing each store.

Originally, after graduating college, they were only going to work in the business until they got a "real" job. Nonetheless, Francesca made sure they learned every aspect of running the store: how to work with the seamstresses, how to style, how to choose inventory, how to use the POS system.

"In doing so they then decided where they wanted to put their talents but they could run the salons because they had experience in all pieces of the pie," she says.

Today, Victoria Hetzel runs Atelier while older sister Kara Moro runs Bridal (a third daughter worked in the salon for a while before deciding to go into printing).

Francesca's husband of 45 years, Richard, whom she met while out with friends, works for Sarno and Son, handling tuxedos

and suits. While his job does not directly relate to her boutique, their relationship has absolutely benefited it.

"It's really and truly been a wonderful marriage because we're a team," she says. "We knew in the beginning we were not changing who we were, ever. I was supporting him for who he was to become in his life, and he was supporting me for what I was to become in my life. And that's exactly the way it's been – no matter what happens we support each other."

Additionally, four grandchildren,

ranging from one year old to freshman in high school, add much joy.

"I literally love life," she says. "Spending time with my grandchildren is extremely important for them and me."

As for the business, Francesca splits her time, working three days a week. Thursday, at one store, Friday the other and Saturday going back and forth depending on needs.

And while she used to be on the floor more actually helping brides, her role has evolved with time. She's still there, suggesting dresses and talking to every bride and her mom or guests.

"And I think it's extremely important, first of all to show myself,"



***In The Spotlight:***  
**Francesca's Bridal**  
**Francesca's Atelier**

**Established:** October 2000  
**Owner:** Francesca Ripple  
**Size:** Bridal, 1,200 sq ft plus 500 sq ft alterations; Atelier 1,040 sq ft  
**Rent or Own?** Rent  
**Number of Dressing Rooms:** three bridal, three atelier  
**Price Range of Gowns:**  
**Bridal:** \$3,000 to \$15,000  
**Atelier:** \$2,000 to \$8,000  
**Number of Lines:** Bridal, 10-12; Atelier, 14  
**Average Bridal Sale:** \$4,500-\$5,000.  
**Staff:** three full-time, four part-time  
**Database Management System:** Poppy  
**Alterations:** in-house  
**Marketing:** Website, Google ads, Insta-

gram, Facebook, *Baltimore Weddings* magazine and participating in five events held at the center. SEO management

**Website:** francescasbridal.com, francescasatelier.com

**Facebook:** 1.8K followers

**Instagram:** 5,200 followers

**Good Business Read:** While Francesca reads books that promote continued support for her vision, such as *In the Company of Women*, *Am I Going to be OK* and *The Path Made Clear*, what works best for her are mentors. "Kathleen Cameron is someone I consider a mentor and friend; spending time with her is critical for my business growth," she says. "Katie Yezek has been my personal growth and development coach. I have a wealth mentor I meet with once a month. He is brilliant; he shares his knowledge and gives advice on my business."

**Goodwill Causes:** Francesca's supports Brides with Breast Cancer with a donation, and Kennedy Kreiger through a huge fashion show raising money towards their efforts. As well, it supports the Johns Hopkins Women's group.

*Let purpose, not  
scale, define your  
growth strategy.*

she says. "Second, for me to know: what is she looking for? Do we have it? Where did she see it? I gain a lot of information by doing that."

Ultimately, while Francesca's is a family business, they take it seriously – and personally.

"Business and personal are never separate, and we're OK with that," Francesca laughs. "When everybody has their day off a week, we try not to bother each other and we're pretty successful. But all the other days are mish-moshed together. A business is a very big part of your life and should be treated more as an extension of it and not a separate entity."

### More Than a Business

It's tempting to call Francesca's story a business success, but that would miss the point entirely. From the beginning, this was never a straight line or calculated climb. It was a series of moments – unexpected turns, instinctive yeses, doors that appeared only after she was already in motion.

Because what she built isn't just a salon. It's a life shaped the same way she's always moved through the world: forward, curious, unafraid to pivot and trusting that each chapter, whether a high or valley, was part

of something larger still unfolding.

As Francesca moves forward into the future, this same sense of adventure will continue to guide her path. She plans to invest in lines that add more in terms of flexibility and customization, as well as potentially start a YouTube channel.

She does not, however, plan to expand.

"I really don't think more is better," she says. "It's very important for us to keep our businesses luxury. We're not a salon for everybody and we know that. The people who come to us understand they're getting exquisite work and care. I just don't think I could do that on another scale."

That perspective shapes everything that comes next. Not expansion for the sake of growth, but evolution with intention. Not chasing more, but refining what already exists – making it more personal, more flexible, more her.

Over 25 years, Francesca has seen the highs and the valleys. She's felt the uncertainty that comes when there isn't a clear an-

## Q&A with Francesca's Bridal Owner Francesca Ripple



### Q: What Approach Do You Take to Market Buys?

A: (That is) driven by our brides. What are they looking for that we do not have? What shapes, colors, accessories pieces, overskirts, necklines, etc? The second critical factor is price point. We leave ourselves available to see new designers. I am driven by my gut.

### Q: What is Your Advice for Dealing with the Indecisive Bride?

A: Talk less. When we know we have met her vision, style, price point and her guests agree we get quiet. She has to trust us; it's an emotional decision.

### Q: What is Your Business Mantra?

A: Luxury is not a price point, it's an experience I deliver. I lead with intuition, service with intention and succeed with grace.

### Q: What's the Biggest Challenge You've Faced in Business?

A: Sometimes it's frustrating when you don't know where to go for an answer. What's helpful is realizing that I'm not the only one; your friends with similar businesses are going through the same thing. This may be a valley, but there's going to be a mountain and success again. And in 25 years you realize that's just how life is. (Acknowledging this) makes it feel better.

### Q: What Advice Would You Give an Owner Who Feels Stuck or Burnt Out?

A: First, make the decision whether you want to stay in or get out. If you want to stay, change everything like you're brand-new; that's the only way. You might need new lines, a new location, a new director or to talk to new people. Call your designers, ask them for some stores to talk to and let them introduce you. Changing gives you a different perspective on your business and suddenly you're not in a rut anymore; you're in growth mode. You've put yourself in a new position and when you do that new things happen.



One of the intimate seating areas for brides and guests.

swer, and the reassurance that comes from realizing you're not the only one navigating it. And through it all, one truth has remained constant: the path keeps unfolding - as long as you're willing to keep going and let it grow with you.

That's the mindset she embraces: Stay open, stay engaged. Don't cling to what was working yesterday if it no longer fits today. Talk to people. Seek out mentors. Change when you need to – completely, if necessary. Because change isn't disruption. It's momentum.

For Francesca, it all comes back to one simple idea:

"I love learning, I love changing, I love reinventing - and I love doing it with other women," she says. "It gives me purpose. And if you stay open, excited and keep moving with it, things always work out."

She followed this path – and it became her life.



*Looks & Lines*

**Bridal** (gowns, veils, jewelry and flower girls):

Galia Lahav, Anne Barge, Blue Willow, Antonio Gual, Nicole and Felicia, Lazaro,

Yumi Couture, Ines di Santo, Savannah Miller and Jesus Peiro, Le Lee Studio and Senstudio, Peter Langner

**Accessories:** Paris by Debra Moreland, Maria Elena, Peter Langner

**Atelier** (mothers, guests, bar/bat mitzvah and gala): Anne Barge, Lucian Matis, Nicole & Felicia, Alex Teih, Peter Langner, Kevan Hall, Carol Peretz, Greta Constantine, Mi Jong Lee, Emmelle, Paula Varsalona, Tina di Martina, Gemy Maalouf, Cyril Verdavainne

**Accessories:** Maria Elena, Nickho Rey, Olga Berg

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## Work Available

### John Paul Ataker — Wholesale Sales Representatives Sought

John Paul Ataker, a New York-based luxury bridal and evening wear house, is seeking experienced wholesale sales representatives for all territories. Candidates must have established relationships with bridal and evening wear boutiques. Competitive commission. To apply, send your resumé and a brief introduction to [davidquinzin@johnpaulataker.com](mailto:davidquinzin@johnpaulataker.com).



### National Representative Opportunity

**Bianco Evento**, European designer and provider of an extensive collection of bridal and social occasion dresses and accessories with no minimum order, no customs fees and delivery in 4-6 days with 95% of its collections in stock, is seeking an experienced individual to act as its U.S. National Representative. Duties would include acting as primary contact between U.S. accounts and Germany-based headquarters. Submit resumé to Bartosz Wodecki, [bw@biancoevento.de](mailto:bw@biancoevento.de). View the collections at <https://bianco-evento.com/de/>; or call 347-609-4951.

### Opportunities from Established Headpiece Brand

Established headpiece manufacturer seeking driven sales reps. Multiple territories available. Submit your resumé to: [bridalsalesrep@gmail.com](mailto:bridalsalesrep@gmail.com).

### Couture Bridal Designer Seeks Global Sales Rep

**Amorétalla** designs timeless, opulent wedding gowns using hand-sewn haute couture techniques. Fabrics, laces, pearls and genuine Swarovski crystals, including precious stones, are curated from around the world. **Amorétalla Bridal** seeks successful sales representation for national and international markets. Commission-based position. The right candidate must have extensive experience and relationships in bridal markets. View the collections here: [www.amoretalla.com](http://www.amoretalla.com). Serious inquiries to [g.atallah@amoretalla.com](mailto:g.atallah@amoretalla.com) and 603-685-8478.

### Adornato Couture Bridal Seeking Representation

**Adornato Couture Bridal** collection is a bespoke, made-to-measure, customized experience for the bride. As bridal retailers are searching for bridal lines with low minimums and primary market education, inquiries to carry Adornato Couture are increasing. As a result, we need more commissioned sales reps to service retailers. Contact Marie Adornato at [info@adornatocouture.com](mailto:info@adornatocouture.com) or 315-263-1712.

### West Coast Territory Rep Opportunity

Major bridal manufacturer seeking experienced Sales Representative for the West Coast Territory. Qualified candidates must have a minimum of five years' experience and established relationships in the bridal industry. Submit resumé and introductory letter to [info@vowsmagazine.com](mailto:info@vowsmagazine.com).

### Bridal Haute Couture Brand Seeking Reps

Bridal haute couture brand is looking for reps or distributors for multiple territories. Two to three years of bridal market experience with established contacts is preferred. E-mail your CV to [ashleymccartney759@gmail.com](mailto:ashleymccartney759@gmail.com).

### Jasz Couture Territories Available

**Jasz Couture** prom, pageant, evening wear is seeking representation. Contact Pam Nierenberg 561-722-6189 or e-mail [Pamelasfashions@gmail.com](mailto:Pamelasfashions@gmail.com) for details.

## Opportunity

### Private Haute Couture Collection — Wholesale Opportunity

Luxury evening and bridal gowns available from a Private Collection of 100+ one-of-a-kind pieces. Ideal for boutiques, designers and resellers. Available as full or partial lots at well below couture pricing. Based in Miami. Inquire for detailed selection, catalog and quantities: Jaqueline at [jaquelinesbridal@gmail.com](mailto:jaquelinesbridal@gmail.com) or 305-443-6977.



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# READY TO LEVEL UP & BE MORE Profitable IN YOUR BUSINESS?

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*Nayri* WEDDING FASHION EXPERT



## 3 Online Courses + Bridal Stylist Community

### BRIDAL STORE BLUEPRINT

For store owners ready to build on a strong foundation to Scale & Grow while optimizing operations & team productivity!

#### BRIDAL STYLIST SALES COURSE

To automate training for bridal stylist onboarding & improve existing sales teams wanting higher conversions!

- ✓ Learn to confidently assume the sale from the first hello
- ✓ Upsell with confidence & close more sales
- ✓ Proven sales training & objection handling

#### INSTAGRAM & TIKTOK SUCCESS

- ✓ Drive more traffic & generate qualified leads for your store
- ✓ Content strategy that converts followers into leads
- ✓ Convert leads into buyers who become your brand advocates & ambassadors on social

### BRIDAL STYLIST COMMUNITY

 <p><b>Monthly Training Calls</b></p> <p>Every month, we host a LIVE training call to discuss important topics that will improve your bridal stylist skills &amp; help you close more sales!</p>	 <p><b>Interactive Community</b></p> <p>Ask questions, contribute to the community, and interact with other like-minded stylists in a private community setting.</p>	 <p><b>Affordable Pricing</b></p> <p>Access to our exclusive community, monthly training &amp; support for just \$37/month, making professional growth &amp; connection possible for every bridal stylist worldwide.</p>
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