

To Spend OR NOT TO SPEND?

Planning a Wedding on a Budget? Consider These **Tips from Local Wedding Planners** About **When to Splurge** and **When to Save**

[WRITTEN BY SARA SHELTON]

Within WEEKS OF celebrating her engagement, Atlanta native Megan Dean found that the excitement of being newly engaged quickly gave way to the stress of planning a wedding. Sitting down with a list of everything she wanted for her wedding in hand and a strict budget in mind, she found herself stopped at every decision, wondering incessantly “Am I spending too much? Can we afford this? Can I really get everything I want in my wedding on the budget I have?”

This seems to be the story of most brides working to plan the wedding of their dreams on the budgets of their realities. From favors to dresses and location to pictures, one financial decision has to be made: Where should I save and where should I splurge? In regard to budgets, most wedding planners and event coordinators come to the same consensus: There’s no need to panic! With a little research and good guidance, even the most budget-conscious bride

can afford to splurge on the things that she really wants for her big day.

Monica Jackson, executive director of Extraordinaire Affairs and Events with locations in Austell and Alpharetta, offers a simple solution to beginning the save vs. splurge debate for each bride.

“Starting off with a realistic budget is the first key to providing savings,” Jackson advised. “From there, you can really figure out what you want and work to incorporate those things within your budget.”

Wedding planner Jennifer Mineo of North Georgia’s Events by Dezine echoes this statement, advising brides to focus on

the important details first before worrying over spending money on the things they could do without.

“I always tell brides that they can have the wedding they want on a conscious budget,” Mineo said. “The most important thing is to consider what you splurge on as an investment into a piece of your wedding that is really important to you.”

So before budget-burdened brides like Dean succumb to the pressure of deciding where to spend the majority of their money on such a big day, take a look at what area wedding experts and planners have to say about where to splurge and where to save.



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Splurge

Photography

Easily the biggest and unanimously advised budget splurge for a wedding is photography. Spend most of your time researching here and allocate a good portion of your wedding budget toward making sure you choose the right photographer to deliver the best product on your wedding day. After all, your pictures are what will last beyond the main event.

“A lot of people don’t understand sometimes why photography can be so expensive,” said Rebecca Hansmann, owner of The Bridal Bar in Atlanta. “I always tell people to remember, this is what you have to hold onto and help tell the story of your wedding after it’s all said and done.”

Jackson whole-heartedly concurred, adding, “This is the area where you truly get what you pay for. Photography is timeless and I think it is priceless when it comes to your wedding.”

Additionally, Jackson advises against cutting corners in this area by using friends, family or acquaintances.

“I’ve seen couples want to use a friend or relative to save money, but I always recommend hiring a professional photographer that not only takes great pictures but has a good eye for capturing the moments you may have missed.”

Entertainment

Along with photography, most planners suggest a no-skimping policy on entertainment. What your guests remember most is usually the great party that follows your ceremony, and the right entertainment is important.

“Entertainment is crucial because it sets the mood and it brings people together,” Jackson said.

Mineo agreed. “I never recommend cheaping out too much on entertainment, like a band or a DJ. This always makes the party, and everyone loves a good party!”

In such a digital age, a lot of brides will opt to save money simply by using an iPod and creating a playlist for their reception

prior to the event. Though this does save on costs, the atmosphere at the reception can suffer without a constant flow of entertainment or music to keep the party going.

Newly married Blake Thibodeau of Alpharetta can attest to this.

“Looking back, I would’ve splurged on a DJ,” she said. “I used a family friend to save money and it ended up being more chaotic due to their lack of experience.”

Food

Another suggested splurge at the reception is food. While you can save money by opting to provide only desserts or appetizers rather than a full, three-course meal, the quality of food you serve shouldn’t suffer because of your budget.

“The meal is the main event of the reception; I think if it’s good food you want, splurge on it!” suggested Lacy Wilhoit, senior account executive with A Divine Event, an award-winning catering company serving metro Atlanta and Athens.

Hansmann agreed, “There is no shortage of great food options in the area, most of whom are willing to really work with you to help you get the best food for the best price. But you can’t be afraid to splurge a little to get the best quality and taste for your reception.”

To create a fabulous wedding menu without blowing your budget, Wilhoit offers a few suggestions.

“Keep in mind what the most important element of the reception is to you,” she said. “If it’s the cocktail hour, plan on great passed hors d’oeuvres and maybe an action station to get your guests excited about the event ... if the focal point is the dinner portion of the meal, cut back on cocktail treats and go for a unique entrée for dinner.”

“Regardless of what type of reception you are having, splurge on what you want your guests to remember about the meal,”

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she continued. “If you love lobster and can’t afford to have it in the entrée, put it into a passed hors d’oeuvre or as a complementing flavor in the first course option.”

Sanity

Most brides forget that the key to making sure you really enjoy your wedding is to stash some cash that will help you take care of yourself. Include some room in your budget to splurge on things that will help save your sanity.

“This ‘do-it-yourself’ idea is really popular with brides these days,” Hansmann said. “It’s not a bad idea but the idea of making one really cute invitation or favor is totally different than doing 150 [of them] weeks before your wedding. I would recommend adding in some room to splurge on things like this in order to save yourself the un-needed stress.”

Craft stores are a great place to shop around for small, ready-made favors or simple invitations to have printed. Though it may seem like a silly expense at the time, having the time to enjoy a stress-free wedding preparation will prove invaluable.

“Planning a wedding is a major task,”

added Rachel Broach of Notable Weddings and Events, a complimentary wedding concierge in Alpharetta. “If you must cut costs, you can act as your own wedding planner to a certain extent, but make sure you have a day-of coordinator. You cannot do this and get married at the same time.”

SAVE

Dress

What most brides might consider the biggest splurge can actually be the best area to save. With a little research and shopping, most women can find the dress style they love at a smaller price.



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“Again, we always ask women what the most important thing to them is and if it is the dress, go ahead and splurge,” Hansmann said. “But I know there are ways to get a great wedding dress for so much less than what most women spend.”

Brides may purchase a sample dress rather than a custom-ordered gown. Though you may have to spend on alterations, the overall cost will come down significantly. In Atlanta, many bridal boutiques offer sample sales and discounts. With enough research, brides can get a splurge-worthy gown for a steal.

Location

Where to have the wedding is often the first question on a bride’s mind, but your venue should reflect your budget, so be sure to have one in place before putting down any deposits.

“Some people want to put tons of money into a location but then end up having little else to offer,” Mineo explained.

“Character can amp up any event location and help to create a great atmosphere without having to drop the majority of your budget on renting a venue.”

Some venues include the ceremony fees in the overall rental cost, so you may be able to save money by holding your wedding and reception in the same location. Or choose a space that is personal to you: a church, a family home or a local haunt. Weddings are meant to be a personal expression of the couple and choosing a location special to you can help save money and add a personal touch in one fell swoop.

Determined to have your wedding at a pricier venue? Ask about holding your event on a weeknight — even a Friday or Sunday — as opposed to a Saturday. Often doing something as simple as moving the date can cut the price for renting a venue nearly in half! Broach also suggested holding your wedding earlier in the day, which could save you money in venue rentals, and also makes it possible to save on food by serving appetizers instead of a full dinner.

Décor

Another easy place to save money on your wedding is in the area of décor. Any venue can be decorated on a dime without extravagant expenses.

“I never really advise spending money on additional décor,” Mineo said.

Saving on décor can come down to a series of simple choices. Rather than choosing the most expensive linens or centerpieces, opt for the lower priced alternatives. No one will know the difference and you still get the same effect! You can also save money by using flowers that are in season during your wedding. Additionally, use the flowers from your ceremony to decorate your reception, or use the bridesmaid’s bouquets as table centerpieces.

Some planners recommend avoiding flowers altogether in favor of cheaper, more creative items.

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“A lot of people opt not to go heavy on the floral side of the wedding and hit up a great craft store or even their own knick knacks to decorate with a personal and affordable touch,” Hansmann said.

Drinks

It seems nowadays most weddings are synonymous with the offering of free alcohol. While this can make for a great party, it can quickly turn into a huge bill.

“You can easily still entertain and only serve what is necessary or what you want to have,” Mineo explained.

Couples can still have a great party without the expense of an all-inclusive, open bar. Instead, offer only a selection of beer and wine or perhaps one signature cocktail.

Overall for new brides like Dean, the stress of wedding planning doesn't have to overwhelm the joy of planning a day to remember. By figuring out what's most important to you, you can have the best of what you want at the price you can afford. **PN**

FOR MORE ADVICE:

A Divine Event

1420 Dunwoody Village Pkwy.
Atlanta, 770-587-9117
www.adivineevent.com

The Bridal Bar

99 West Paces Ferry Road NW
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atlanta.bridalbar.com

Events by Dezine

770-889-3239
www.eventsbydezine.com

Extraordinaire Affairs and Events

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