



Tying the knot in a recession isn't easy, but Leah Andrew (left) and Andrea Lown point the way to chic secondhand bridal gowns and DIY bouquet tricks.

## Getting your wedding day bliss on a budget

Two former brides help future couples plan dream nuptials that won't break the bank

> BY SHADI ELIEN

**P**lanning your fantasy wedding shouldn't mean sacrificing the down payment on your first home, but from the perfect dress to your ideal honeymoon destination, nothing about the big day seems to come without a price.

But with a little research and DIY attitude, there are lots of places where you can cut costs.

"Everyone wants to have the wedding of their dreams but they want to have it on a realistic budget," says Leah Andrew by phone from her home in Toronto, where she runs the Web site [www.smartbride.com/](http://www.smartbride.com/) with her partner Andrea Lown. "It's all about prioritizing what's important to you."

Some people can take a year or even longer to plan out the intricate details of the big day, but according to Andrew, more time isn't always the financially savvy way to go.

"We often find the shorter the time frame you can give your-

"We often find the shorter the time frame you can give yourself, the more likely you are to stay on budget and on cost," Andrew explained.

Less time also means looking to more creative places to say "I do." As with real estate, it's all about location, location, location.

Places like public gardens, art galleries, or even your parents' backyard can provide a picturesque backdrop and be a unique reflection of the couple. As well, there are huge savings that come with avoiding traditional venues like hotel banquet halls and golf courses.

One important piece of advice from Andrew: "You'll never know if you don't ask." For her own wedding, she and her fiancé asked if they could supply their own alcohol without paying a corkage fee. The venue agreed, and she estimates that she saved about \$1,500.

Andrew suggests using some emerging wedding trends when aiming for a recession-friendly wedding—think about paperless

invitations. With just a few clicks of a mouse, couples can set up their own wedding Web site (usually around \$10 or \$15 a month), where guests can get all the information they need about the upcoming nuptials.

A great wedding photographer can be a significant expense, but by asking for the digital negatives, couples can see big savings.

"You can pay for their [the photographer's] expertise and they are still able to capture your memorable day, but you get the negatives so you can actually choose and develop your own pictures and create your own photo albums," Andrew said.

Flowers are another area where wedding costs can add up. Andrew advises couples to think seasonally and locally. Of course, it's all about personal taste and how much you want to spend, but by moving away from expensive flowers like roses and orchids in favour of wildflowers and using natural materials like greens and even potted plants, flowers and using natural materials like greens and even potted plants, you can knock thousands off the final cost.

"It all depends on your own personal style, but this is a place where DIY could be really easy, depending on if you have a real vision for your day," Andrew said.

For more tips and tricks, you can check out her Web site, where buyers can browse used gowns, accessories, and even decorations in their city, while sellers can post their items for free. After going through the trials and tribulations of planning their own weddings, friends Andrew and Lown saw there was a need for a comprehensive, one-stop shop for all your budget-conscious wedding needs.

Planning a wedding can be a full-time job, but with a little help from on-line resources and some creative DIY projects, couples can create a special and memorable event for themselves and the people they want to celebrate with. ♦