

HERE COMES THE ADVICE

Go-to
guides for
planning a
worry-free
wedding

BY FELISSA BENJAMIN

Floral arrangements, seating charts, budgets — terms that can strike fear in the hearts of even the calmest couple-to-be. But before you tear your hair out (or your fiancé's), rest easy:

We've compiled a list of books for any kind of ceremony, every type of bride and even the often-forgotten groom. So fire your wedding consultant, take a deep breath and get ready to plan your very own Zen-filled, angst-free, cost-conscious wedding.

1. PRACTICALLY USELESS INFORMATION: WEDDINGS

By Norman and Katie Kolpas (Rutledge Hill Press, \$16.99)

If you feel pretty confident about your planning skills, take a look at this book filled with, well, useless information. Learn everything from Eskimo vows to the marriage rate in the Ukraine to the shortest celebrity weddings. Not all of it is trivial (it isn't *totally* useless, after all). Hum through a list of wedding songs, drool over cake flavors and decide which bouquet styles to toss at your single friends. Don't look here if you're feeling overwhelmed or stressed, but if you like a good laugh, this book is for you.

2. WONDERFUL WEDDINGS FOR COST-CONSCIOUS COUPLES

By Alecia Davis, host of TLC's "For Better or for Worse" (Meredith Books, \$14.95)

This book comes with a 16-page insert of affordable projects and five interactive quizzes — all of which amounts to more work than help. For the type-A in all of us, there's a planning section with a budgeting worksheet so you can make sure you don't go overboard with those lava lamp centerpieces.

3. WEDDING ETIQUETTE HELL

By Jeanne Hamilton (St. Martin's Press, \$13.95)

Whether your dilemma is choosing bridesmaids' dresses or deciding where to seat your future in-laws, this book can save you from eternal damnation. Each chapter is broken down into rules and offers first-person accounts of simply inappropriate behavior, including the morning after a night spent at Hunkmania. It even includes faux-conversations between Miss Jeanne, an indispensable elegance guru, and Bride-weena, a fictitious and etiquette-challenged bride, offering a look into the difficult choices every girl has to make before her wedding day. Unfortunately, if you don't already know to send thank-you cards,



BRAND X PICTURES

WEDDED
BLISS

there might not be anything even this how-to can do for you.

4. WEDDING ZEN: CALMING WISDOM FOR THE BRIDE

By Susan Elia MacNeal (Chronicle Books, \$9.95) Keep your "zense" of humor through even the roughest pre-nuptial moments. A newlywed, new-age devotee herself, the author lets other books tackle the logistical problems — like picking the perfect caterer — while she focuses on the emotional rigors of a wedding, such as divorced parents and Uncle

Sy's mismatched socks. We're all for deep breathing and bubble baths, but if you're going to let go of all personal attachments like MacNeal suggests, shouldn't you just elope? For best results, read in the lotus position.

5. THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO SURVIVAL HANDBOOK: WEDDINGS

By Joshua Piven, David Borgenicht and Sarah Jordan (Chronicle Books, \$14.95) After going through this book, we felt a little

queasy. Who has ever needed to create a wedding gown out of a table cloth or form a jug quartet because the band bailed out at the last minute? Well, apparently someone did, because this nifty guide is filled with every trick to spare you catastrophes, from the minute you get engaged right through the honeymoon — apart from being swallowed whole by your mother-in-law. Be warned, reading this book might lead to extreme paranoia. That is, unless you were already concerned about fainting bridesmaids.

6. ANTI-BRIDE ETIQUETTE GUIDE: THE RULES AND HOW TO BEND THEM

By Carolyn Gerin and Kathleen Hughes (Chronicle Books, \$15.95)

Never getting married unless Prince Charming (or Matthew McConaughey) shows up? Then this is definitely the book for you. Not only does it list traditions of all kinds, but it tells how to break them and create your own. Learn how to avoid scheduling conflicts, create an unconventional processional (have both your dads walk you down the aisle!) and make your dream day uniquely your own. This book gives the perfect advice for keeping everyone — from the traditional grandma to the hippy mom to the anti-bride — happy.

7. WEDDING GODDESS: A DIVINE GUIDE TO TRANSFORMING WEDDING STRESS INTO WEDDING BLISS

By Laurie Sue Brockway (Perigee Books, \$16.95)

Remember that "Friends" episode when the girls become empowered and try to protect their goddess pools? Well, this book instructs brides-to-be on becoming goddesses. Problem is, it's a fine line between goddess and bridezilla. Brides, the book says, have to transcend the frenzy of planning the wedding and just take charge of the day — emotionally, spiritually and physically. At the end of each section is a goddess vow each bride must make in order to successfully become a goddess bride, meant to calm the wedding beast.

8. THE EVERYTHING GROOM BOOK

By Shelly Hagen (Adams Media, \$9.95)

This book would have been helpful to Michael Vartan's character in "Monster-in-Law," thanks to a whole section on getting the bride and mother of the groom to mend their differences. Need help knowing how wild a bachelor party to have or how to plan the honeymoon? This book gives the groom practical advice, leaving the foofy stuff, like color schemes, to the bride. ♦

