

For better or worse

Moving with the times is part of the job for people working in the wedding industry.

GENEVIEVE PAIEMENT

Weddings used to be big, formal affairs, as ostentatious and stilted as the ubiquitous multitiered fruitcake with the miniature gleaming white Roman columns. But times have changed and Australians are choosing to say "I do" a little differently.

Many people working in the wedding industry today are self-starters who saw a gap in the market and decided to fill it, offering services to match new wedding trends and traditions. DJs who double as wedding MCs are as common as the live band, wedding planners often take care of all the details and civil wedding celebrants have taken ground from the parish priest.

Dressmaker Lisa Merton, based in Newtown, launched her unconventional Culture Shock bridal wear three years ago. "Friends of mine were desperately looking for something different from the white dress and started asking me to make something for them," she explains. "I'd been around the world three times and always picked up beautiful fabrics from India and Japan. We do Western-style couture gowns, but made with ethnic or exotic fabrics and details."

Merton, 35, says working in the wedding business offers a sense of reverence and appreciation lacking in mainstream fashion. "It's a lot slower paced – it takes four to six months to create a gown, leading up to such a special moment. Most of my clients are in their 30s, so they don't want 'the perfect white dress'. They just want to have a really great party, not a big stuffy thing full of religious formalities. The old-fashioned wedding is becoming rare."

And who has the time to plan an old-fashioned wedding to entertain 500 friends and family members? Since many couples today are career-driven and work long hours, the services of wedding planners are increasingly in demand. Deborah Taliani Terie is an Italian-born wedding planner who started the Sydney company Just Get Married! two years ago. "Sometimes I do everything for them, sometimes I provide specific services and they do the rest," Taliani Terie



A sense of reverence: Lisa Merton says most of her clients aren't after the "perfect white dress".

Photo: Jennifer Soo

says of her work, which involves planning weddings in Australia and Italy. "I do everything from finding venues and photographers to working with them on their wedding day. I also find suppliers and get quotes from them."

Taliani Terie, who used to work in advertising and events management in London, says experience is the most important attribute of a good wedding planner. "You have to gain a lot of customer service and people skills and be

If you think DJing weddings is as easy as slinging CDs and flirting with desperate bridesmaids – think again.

very, very patient," she says. "It's good to gain experience working in event management companies or in the restaurant business, where you deal with people. There is no such thing as a natural-born wedding planner – you must gain experience."

Arthur Spooner has 30 years' experience in the wedding business. One of the founders of the mobile DJ company Mobydisc, Spooner started the venture "just for fun. It started out as a hobby. My mates and I used to DJ parties on weekends for friends." They quickly realised that the wedding industry was where the money was. But if you

think DJing weddings is as easy as slinging CDs, swilling free champagne and flirting with desperate bridesmaids – think again.

Wedding DJs are frequently asked to act as MC as well, so a certain amount of public speaking know-how is necessary. Oh, and forget about creative integrity – you have no choice in what songs you play. "These days, brides and grooms want to choose their own music," Spooner says. "And it tends to be current, top 40 stuff."

Conducting the ceremony used to be the strict domain of religious officials. But not any more: the number of marriage ceremonies being conducted by priests has dropped dramatically in the past few years. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 55 per cent of marriages were performed by civil celebrants in 2002, compared with 39 per cent in 1982.

In Australia, the TAFE Civil Marriage Celebrant short course is compulsory if you want to apply for registration through the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Office and become a celebrant. And once you're accredited and registered, it's up to you what direction you want to take.

You could specialise in anything from ceremonies incorporating Celtic handfasting rituals (involving tying the couple's hands together), to same-sex commitment ceremonies, or adventure ceremonies on mountain tops in skis, or on a white-water raft. As time marches on, it seems trips down the aisle will only get more wild.