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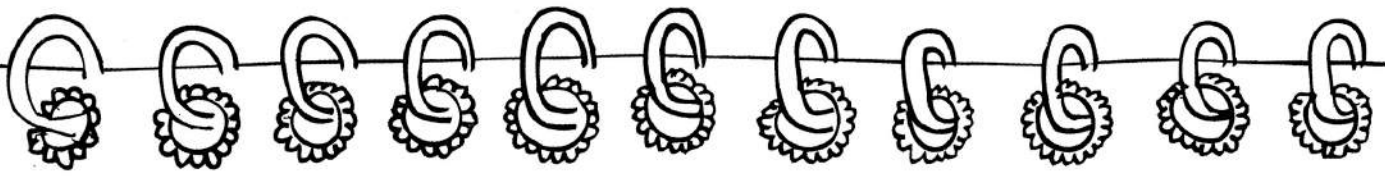
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WHAT TO ASK YOUR VENUE NOW



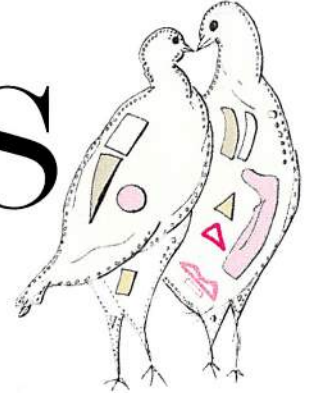
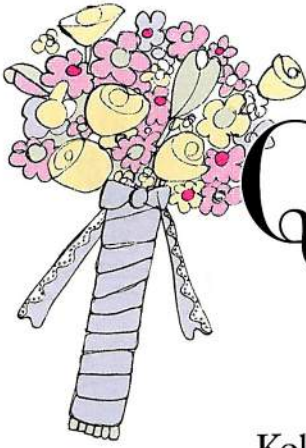
IMMEDIATE MEDIA





Your 10 essential

VENUE QUESTIONS



Kelly Chandler of The Bespoke Wedding Company explains what you need to know before you sign on the dotted line

Illustrations | Jack Carter and Leckie Presley at super-cute stationers Pocket Typewriter (pockettypewriter.co.uk)

1 WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR WHEN I VISIT?

Visualise the guest experience. Walk from the ceremony space to the drinks reception to dinner, so you get a feel for the areas you'll use and how to dress them. Also, look at the entrances and exits you'll be using as the bride and groom.

2 HOW DO I NEGOTIATE ON PRICE?

A venue won't give discounts once the contract is signed, so talk money from the very beginning. Any price flexibility is dependent on the time of year: a summer Saturday is peak season and so unlikely to qualify for money off.

3 WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR IN THE CONTRACT?

Read the small print. In particular, look at the minimum number of guests you're guaranteeing to pay for, and check when you need to confirm the final numbers; this is usually about seven days beforehand. Find out how the venue works out its maximum guest limit: sometimes venues use 5ft tables per 10 guests, which won't give much space – I'd recommend 5ft tables per eight guests.

4 CAN WE PERSONALISE OUR DAY?

You might not always be able to change the package, but altering details like linen, chairs and lighting is generally do-able.

5 WHEN CAN WE START DECORATING?

Discuss what time you'll have guaranteed access for set-up and installation. Most venues will give you two to three hours on the day; this may be all you need, unless you have complicated marquee builds and hired furniture. Look at finish times too – what time does the music have to end and the bar close? Often venues can offer a late licence until 1am, but this may cost extra.

6 WHO CHOOSES THE TABLE DÉCOR?

Find out whether a menu tasting is included; if so, make sure you see the crockery, cutlery, linens and glassware that will be used on the day. Many venues serve the tasting in their restaurant, which means the items may not be the same as those you'll have.

7 CAN WE BRING OUR OWN DRINKS?

Look at the wine list to check you're happy with the prices and range. If you want to source your own alcohol, discuss this at the outset with the venue. You should expect to pay corkage and there will usually be a higher rate for champagne than for wine – it's hardly ever worth it financially unless you want to offer special wines to your guests. Ask about the service charge: sometimes this is applied just to drinks served at the evening bar, and sometimes on the entire food and drinks budget; this should be optional, but have it agreed in writing at the beginning.

8 WILL THE VENUE HAVE STRICT RULES?

There will be some restrictions in even the most laid-back venue. Hotels are generally the easiest and most flexible, while historical properties often have stricter requirements. The major issues are confetti (what type can be thrown and where), sound limits for live music (is there one and how strict is it) and the use of candles and naked flames.

9 IS IT OK FOR MY FRIEND TO DJ?

It's quite normal for venues to insist on particular marquee companies or firework companies, as well as a small range of caterers if the food isn't prepared in-house. Other than that, you should have free rein on florists, DJs, etc., although do at least consider their suggestions – suppliers who have worked at the venue before often have lots of experience to share.

10 WHAT DO I PAY AND WHEN?

Deposits are usually non-refundable, so make sure you're happy with the payment schedule from the start – it's much harder to alter a contract after you've signed. You normally pay around 90% of the costs before the wedding: the venue will give you a pro-forma invoice, which is then balanced out at the end, once final numbers and actual drinks consumed are known.