

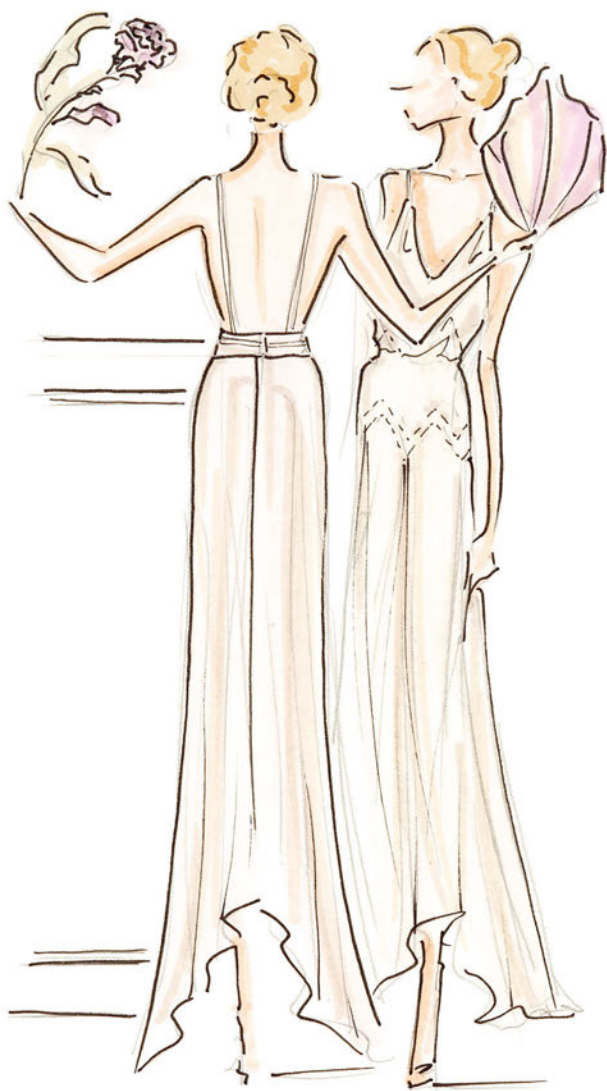
Delphine
Manivet

Oui!

Parisian Secrets
for a Dream
Wedding



Flammarion



Finding Inspiration

NOW THAT YOU ARE READY to take the plunge, you find yourself facing a blank page. Where do you begin? How do you start creating the most beautiful day of your life?

First of all, consider what will be at the heart of your wedding, what you would like your guests to remember about this day. What unites you and your significant other? What values do you share? Are there any childhood dreams you want to make come true? Taking time to reflect on these things will help you lay the framework for your ceremony and set aside anything that isn't right for you. If you are committed environmentalists who lead a simple life in harmony with nature, there is no point poring over photos of designer bling.

You don't have to bury yourself in stacks of books and magazines or frantically pace the aisles of wedding fairs. Your marriage cannot be everything at once: you risk drowning in the tide of advice available online and in the hundreds of publications devoted to the subject. Instead, choose what matches your taste, your story, and your personality. One step at a time, you will build your own personalized list of references.

In the first few weeks, let the inspiration soak in: write down what strikes a chord and discard those things that, upon reflection, don't really speak to you; make mood boards in a notebook or on Pinterest. The structure of your wedding will gradually take shape according to the direction that you choose.

The Theme

WHEN YOU THINK “WEDDING THEME,” incredibly kitsch or saccharine images may come to mind and send you running. You don’t *have* to choose a theme, but if you want to, consider it as a common thread that can help you make decisions and tell a story.

For example, you could choose a theme related to the place where you are having the ceremony (it doesn’t make sense to have a city wedding with a bucolic theme or a desert wedding with a seaside theme). The trend today is to think local, so don’t count on shipping in lavender from the south of France, for example, unless that’s where you are getting hitched. Show consideration and respect for the environment where the celebration will take place, all the while trying to make it shine. Make the most of your surroundings, and don’t try to fit a square peg into a round hole.

Choosing a theme also gives you the opportunity to pick a color scheme for your wedding. Unless you’re a color expert, focus on a limited range of shades. You can start with your—and your fiancé’s—favorite colors or compose a palette based on the ambience at the reception venue.

These five themes with a French accent can be adapted to your own venue:

- *Guinguette*: on a riverbank, strings of lights, checked tablecloths
- Traditional brasserie: oysters, champagne, waitstaff in long aprons
- Vintage Belle Epoque: nineteenth-century style, generous buffets, vintage tablecloths, candelabra
- Art deco–1920s: wine served in small vintage crystal glasses, guests in velvet coats or flapper-style dresses and tuxedos
- Versailles-inspired: peonies in champagne buckets, Billecart-Salmon bubbly, fine porcelain









The Ceremony

NO MATTER WHAT FORM the ceremony takes or the meaning it holds for you, it will be the event that sets your wedding celebration in motion. Often emotionally intense, the ceremony itself may bring together a small, core group of loved ones or all of your invitees. When it comes to the ceremony, the golden rule is to choose the format you are most comfortable with—the one most consistent with what is important to you and your partner.

To make your union official in the eyes of the law, you must complete the obligatory administrative procedures where you live—and they vary according to local practices. Whether you decide to mark the occasion with a civil and/or a religious ceremony will be determined by local regulations as well as the traditions and beliefs you and your partner hold. In France, the legal steps come first and take place in *le mairie*, or city hall, where the bride or groom (or their parents) live. A religious ceremony may also be held in a place of worship on the same or on another day followed by a reception. Obviously, it makes things easier if the reception takes place not too far from the ceremony, but you can always work something out. You might have a very small ceremony in the city hall or special place of worship, with just a few of your closest friends and family, and then hold a large reception on another day.

Religious ceremonies tend to heighten emotions: in one family, there may be an uncle who refuses to set foot in a church or a grandmother who refuses to consider the marriage valid if you don't go before a priest. Some couples may not share the same religion. Do whatever *you* as a couple want. Getting married in a church or under a chuppah or before an imam is meaningful if you and your partner feel a deep connection, in whatever way, to the religion in question. There are many ways to include your families' stories

in your wedding. Keep an open mind and honor the people who are dear to you, but don't let yourself get caught up in something that you aren't comfortable with.

Another solution is to hold a secular ceremony. This format is very popular because it allows you to create your dream wedding from scratch—to get family and friends involved, to perform symbolic gestures, and to exchange meaningful vows—I can assure you, there will be tears! If you choose this option, you will need an officiant. Depending on the country, it might be a justice of the peace, magistrate, registrar, or licensed celebrant. A friend may speak in an unofficial capacity, but they cannot legally marry you unless they also happen to be ordained.



How far in advance you need to reserve a place of worship or venue varies greatly, depending on the location and time of year, but it is not unusual to have to book a year in advance. For popular venues and destination weddings you may need to plan further ahead still. If you want to say “I do” in a popular wedding spot (like Paris!), you’ll need to build in even more time.





Choosing the Reception Venue

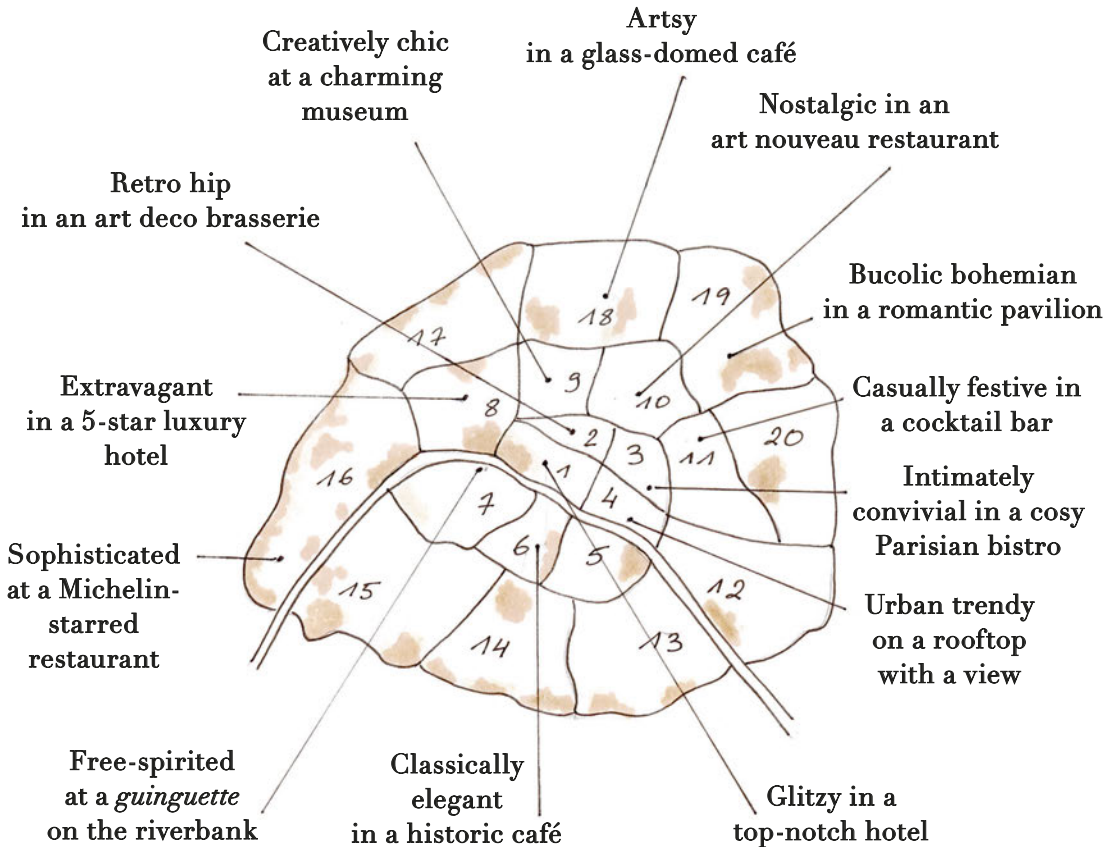
THE WEDDING RECEPTION is an opportunity to get creative. You could plan an extravagant picnic in a meadow with large, low tables and cushions on the ground, jars of candles scattered everywhere, and a piano in the grass; or a sumptuous dinner in a manor house, grand hotel, or château, complete with table service, antique silver candelabra, and a string quartet; or a cozy gathering at an inn with a warm fire in the hearth and a local band setting the tempo. What is most important is to find a place that you like and that tells your story.

For my first marriage, we chose a lovely vineyard in the south of France, with a chapel and a pretty cloister: it was exactly what we were looking for and a good match for our large number of guests. We wanted to celebrate late into the night, and the remoteness of the location made that possible. This is important to consider: the owners of many venues impose a cut-off time—particularly if it is a historic building—and will shut down the party if it overruns.

If I were to remarry, I would look for something simpler and more intimate, perhaps a romantic museum or a typically Parisian brasserie, where oysters and champagne would be served.

The theme may inspire your choice of menu or vice versa. But what I like most of all are offbeat choices, invention, creativity, and playing around with tradition. A Louis XIV theme on a barge or in a garden can be very effective. Be adventurous!

Setting the Tone: Style and Venue

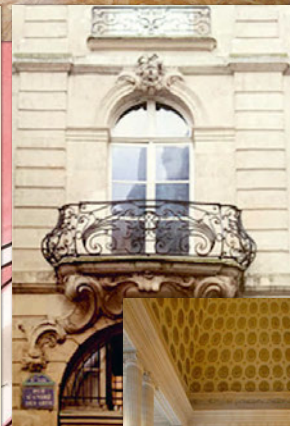
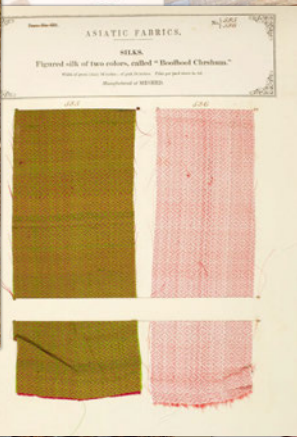


The key to celebrating your wedding in a style and setting that feel “just right” to you and your partner is to get creative. The above tour of Paris offers a variety of ideas for adding Parisian flair to your reception. You can set a tone that is classic or hip, sophisticated or bohemian, artsy or glitzy, and then scout out venues that will create the ideal backdrop for your unique celebration.

The choice of venue plays a crucial role in determining the rest of your budget. If you put all of your money into booking a wonderful location, you may not have much left over for the rest. It's always better to serve champagne and delicious food in the backyard rather than potato chips in a palace!

How far in advance you have to reserve will depend on the type of space you choose: a fashionable restaurant, the garden of a museum, a family home, a fairytale castle, or a picturesque farm—contact the places you have identified as soon as possible as you may need to reserve a year or more in advance.



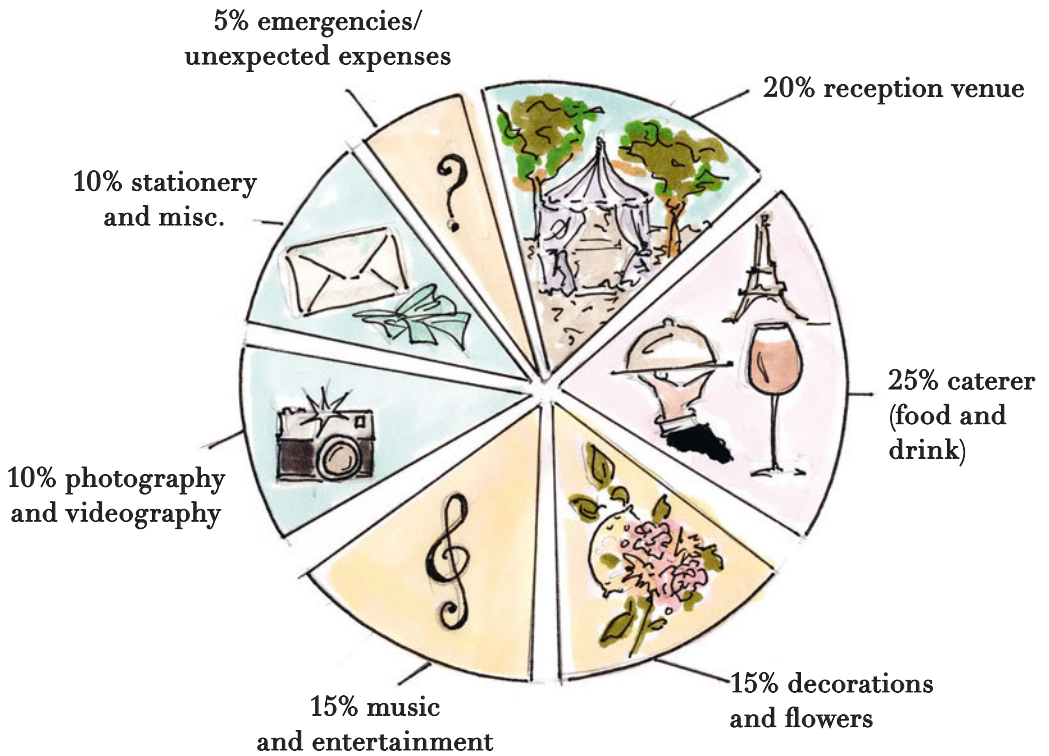


Budget and Timeline

THE WEDDING BUDGET is a sensitive matter. The total varies enormously depending on the kind of ceremony, the location, the couple's style preferences, and individual financial means—and the cost varies widely from country to country, region to region, and household to household. It really comes down to the couple's financial situation. Although it was considered customary for parents to pay for their child, today there are all manner of ways to foot the bill. Tradition once dictated which family covered the reception expenses—for example, the bride's family typically was responsible in the United States or Australia, while the groom's family paid in China and France. In recent decades, it became the norm for the families of the bride and groom to share the total. Nowadays, with people marrying later, or having more than one marriage, the bride and groom often pay for the wedding themselves. A modern approach is for each set of parents to pay for their friends, while the bride and groom pay for theirs. This last solution generates the least amount of guilt and helps to ease the stresses related to managing the wedding finances.

I suggest that you discuss the budget early on and as openly as possible. Draft a simple table to evaluate costs. Work out an amount per head for catering, broken down to include food and alcohol. Determining a budget for each category will give you a fairly accurate idea of the grand total. The pie chart on the facing page offers a guideline for balancing how you allocate your overall budget. Once you have an estimated total, simply divide that amount by the number of guests to reach a per-person budget. This will enable you to easily divide costs between families, if that is what you are

Budget Breakdown



planning to do. Of course, if financial situations vary greatly, the breakdown can be adjusted accordingly.

To lower the budget, either reduce the number of guests or the duration of the reception.

Usually, the bride and groom or their family pay for everything related to food and drink, but not guests' accommodation or transport. Occasionally, the couple will cover the cost of local transportation and accommodation for close friends and family and the wedding party. In any case, they send, by email or with the wedding invitation, a list of accommodation near the venue that covers a range of budgets. Bear in mind that your wedding will represent an expense to your guests. Have the consideration to suggest various alternatives, from simple bed-and-breakfasts to five-star hotels (for those who can splurge).

Another French tradition called for the bride's mother to pay for her daughter's dress up to the age of thirty-six, while the bride's aunt or grandmother provided the veil. Today, the French bride usually buys her own dress. If her mother wants to contribute, she might offer jewelry or an accessory.

It is just as easy to lose track of time as money when planning a wedding. Getting started about a year ahead should give you a comfortable timeline.



