

What to wear to the wedding

Since retiring in 2013, I have officiated at only two weddings. One was a neighbouring young woman and the other was that of my cousin. To say that I miss the pageantry, the style show, the opulent tastes is an over-statement.

In Ireland, a priest, minister or lay person who officiates at a wedding, has to be registered by the state. In order to officiate at a wedding here, I have to get authorization to become a solemniser for each occasion. It can be quite a hassle.

Recently, I took my nineteen year old niece to the city during her break from college. On arrival in the city, we agreed that it were better for both of us to go our own separate ways as far as shopping was concerned. Of course, we had to facilitate different tastes and experiences. We agreed to meet at a certain time for lunch.

I called her to see if she was ready for lunch. Instead she invited me to meet her at a particular store. It was then that I discovered I was being invited to take part in a very unusual experience with her. She told me that she was looking for a certain piece of clothing to compliment the dress she would be wearing to an upcoming wedding. She invited me to search for the complimentary piece of clothing. To say the least, I was shocked by the invitation. Years earlier, she had invited me to help her find shoes that matched her outfit for prom. We were successful.

As a priest who would be officiating at the wedding, my own outfit was a no-brainer. It was just basic black. But for a woman, it was a totally different challenge.

So our journey began through various stores to find the right outfit. Obviously, our journeys ended up in the women's department of each store. Here was a young woman accompanied by a man who was old enough to be her grandfather searching through racks of clothes. Piercing eyes of women shoppers fluttered as they observed an old man asking a young woman questions and asking things like "What do you think of this one?" "Would this one compliment your dress?"

As we walked down the avenue of shops, I would stop and ask, "What about this shop?" Often the answer came, "That store only caters for older people like Mom." Or "That store only caters for people who like to dress in the eighties and nineties."

We ventured into an upscale and very exclusive store. Impeccably dressed lady shoppers and well-manicured attendants surveyed the wares. An old man in jeans entered with a confident young woman. Some may have thought the old man might have been suffering from dementia but he, too, surveyed the wares and found the answer to our search. Of course, the price was hidden inside the sleeve. Sticker shock followed as we discovered it only would cost 650 euros. Obviously, we didn't want to deprive anyone else of the chance of purchasing the item. A few minutes later, we found the ideal complimentary item for only 25 euros. With an air of satisfaction, we headed home with our prize.

At the wedding, the old man in a basic black suit took a photograph of a young woman decked out in her complimentary outfit.

The wedding was a tapestry of blues, greens, pinks, lavenders, woven together by ladies of the cloth. As I looked out over the rainbow of colours, I realized how difficult and painful it must be for a woman attending a wedding because of the complicated process of choosing the perfect outfit to wear. For a man, it is so simple – just a basic suit and tie.

It is no wonder that women get the most compliments at a wedding and deservedly so. One hears comments like, "Wasn't the bride just stunning." "Whoever did her makeup, nails and hair did a wonderful job. It just suited her. "I loved the outfits the bridesmaids wore. They were really elegant." Then, of course, the mothers have to be complimented with words such as, "Wasn't the mother of the bride stunning. That colour really suited her." The mother of the groom was missed, physically, but she did show up in her celestial wedding garment. She had died years earlier of a brain aneurism when the groom was a little boy.

Now I am going to demote my basic black suit to the closet. And I don't anticipate any old man being invited to join a young woman in search of the perfect outfit for any future wedding.