

# GEN WED

## 1 YOU'RE EXCHANGING IDEAS

Thanks to blogs, social-networking sites, message boards, and camera phones, brides are sharing inspiration and photos with duos around the globe. As a result, **weddings are evolving at warp speed.** "We used to tell a bride what to do," says celebrity event planner Colin Cowie (colincowie.com). "Now she's coming to us with ideas she found online."

## 2 THE WEDDING IS ALL ABOUT YOU

From naming tables after your fave rock bands to having your Hawaiian auntie teach guests the hula, you're doing your day your way. **"Weddings have become a true reflection of couples, their families, and their hobbies, rather than just a routine ceremony and dinner,"** says San Diego event planner Aleah Valley (valleyandco.com).

## 3 YOU'RE PAYING FOR IT

Whereas it was once tradition for the bride's parents

to foot the bill, a 2010 Wedding Report survey found that **couples now cover 58 percent themselves.** This shift has been spurred on by economic uncertainty, rising costs, and an uptick in the ages of the bride and groom (in 2010, a median of 26 and 28, respectively, according to the U.S. Census Bureau). One silver lining: "Since couples are taking on more financial responsibility, the day can really be about them," says New York City event planner Xochitl Gonzalez (alwaysabridesmaid.us).

## 4 YOU WANT THE CEREMONY TO BE MEANINGFUL

For years, brides and grooms saw the service as a pre-party formality. No longer. **"Couples are taking the time to craft personal, heartfelt ceremonies,"** says Philadelphia party planner and stylist Beka Rendell (styledcreative.com). You're writing your vows, riding in on horseback, and leading guests in celebratory sing-alongs. And then there's the "friend as officiant" phenomenon: Fifteen years ago, it was almost unheard of to have a loved one who wasn't a judge,



COURTNEY BEAUX/ARTS PHOTOGRAPHY (Bride); JODI MILLER PHOTOGRAPHY (Groom); EIRIN HEARTS COURT (Shoes); AUBRIENNE GUNDE (PARASOLS).

a pastor, or another ordained official preside over your union. Now, whether because of their diminished affiliation with organized religion or an amplified desire to fill their day with meaning, couples are increasingly turning to a friend or family member to perform their ceremony. At present, the Universal Life Church Monastery (themonastery.org) receives about 750 requests *per day* for online ordination—more than twice the number it did in 2002.

## 5 YOU WANT TO HAVE FUN

While keeping it meaningful, duos are also giving themselves permission to play. **These days, no one blinks an eye at a Dr. Seuss reading or a cocktail-hour bouncy castle.** And lawn games and photo-booth sightings are almost as common as that long white dress. In a complicated world, building the party of a lifetime around the simple pleasures of childhood has major appeal, but

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## making history

WE CHART THE COURSE OF THE GEN-WED REVOLUTION

1990

The World Wide Web makes its debut, paving the way for a new generation of connected couples.

1992

Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love marry in Hawaii; other antiestablishment couples reconsider the relevance of putting a ring on it.



1996

JFK Jr. and Carolyn Bessette wed their way, with intimate destination vows on Cumberland Island, Georgia.

1997

An episode of *Sex and the City* kicks off the cupcake craze.



1999

The word *blog* is born, setting the stage for legions of online wedding chroniclers.

2000

Newly relaunched *Us Weekly* reports that Jennifer Aniston promised to always make Brad Pitt his "favorite banana milkshake" during their vows.



2001

After 9/11, a new era of meaning and introspection is ushered in. A year later, 36 percent of New Yorkers say they are more interested in marriage, according to a 2002 *New York* magazine article.

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Gwen Stefani rocks a pink ombre wedding dress; *The New York Times* becomes the major U.S. publication to publish a same-sex wedding announcement.

historian Neil Howe, co-author of *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, thinks it's about more than that. "This generation is customizing a ceremonial institution so it's relevant to their guests," he says. In other words, you want to make sure all your peeps have fun, too!

## 6 YOU'RE THINKING BEYOND THE BANQUET HALL

Though they remain a popular choice, catering halls are no longer the be-all, end-all site.

"Couples want their guests to experience a once-in-a-lifetime location," says celebrity event planner Bryan Rafanelli ([rafanelli.com](http://rafanelli.com)). Many twosomes are planning parties at offbeat sites (doughnut shops! organic farms! schoolyards!) that say something about them.

## 7 YOU'RE DIY-ING IT

Tight budgets aren't the only reason brides are doing it themselves. **Our nation has become obsessed with handmade goods.** Perhaps this was prompted by the backlash against the plastification of the American lifestyle, but there is a great sense of nostalgia for simpler times and all their homespun goodness. Meanwhile, the Internet has increased access to crafters. As a result, the artisanal trend has hit it big: For example, the Etsy community, purveyor of all things handmade, has sold



\$680 million worth of goods since 2005, and the American Distillery Institute reports that the number of small-batch distilleries almost quadrupled between 2006 and 2010. So while many brides are printing their own invites to save cash, others do so simply for the tactile experience of arranging bouquets and whittling that wooden sign. What better way to put a personal stamp on the big day?

## 8 YOU'RE CHAMPIONING SAME-SEX WEDDINGS

Gen Wed is more accepting of nontraditional lifestyles. "Celebs are coming out, and more people know someone's who's gay," says Bernadette Coveney Smith ([14stories.com](http://14stories.com)), a planner specializing in same-sex I do's. **Five states and Washington, D.C., have legalized gay marriage,**

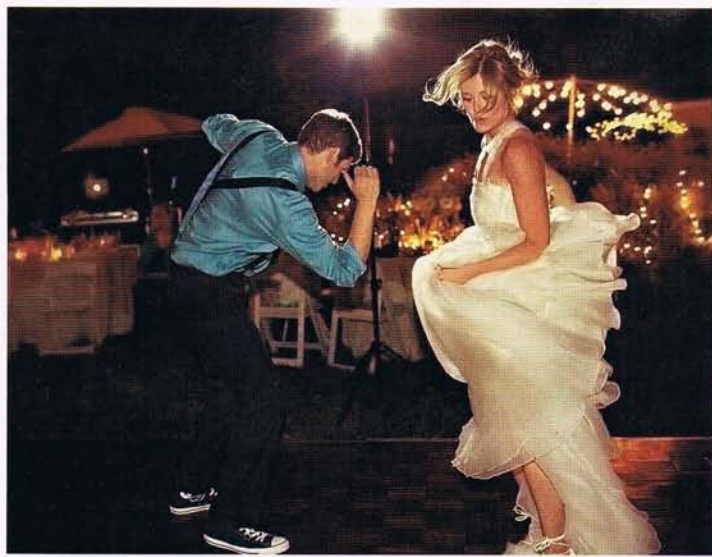
a number that will surely rise as your generation enters the halls of power—hello, Barbara Bush and Meghan McCain!

## 9 YOUR WEDDING IS A GROUP PROJECT

Social-networking and wedding sites are allowing friends and fam to take part in every step of the planning process. And when couples take it offline, their nearest and dearest stay by their side: Mom makes jam favors, a cousin plays processional music, and the MOH pitches in with makeup duties. "There's a teamwork ethic today at schools and at work," says Howe. **"This generation feels that any experience is enhanced when it's done as a group."**

## 10 YOU WANT TO GIVE BACK

According to Howe, you're the most altruistic bunch in decades, so making socially conscious choices for your vows is a no-brainer. You're donating to your favorite charity in your guests' names instead of passing out favors, and you're handing over your centerpieces to hospitals and nursing homes post-reception. Some of you are even suggesting that guests give to charities rather than buy wedding presents. (Props, Will and Kate!) How big is the trend? **In the past 10 years, 250,000 couples have raised more than \$10 million through [idofoundation.org](http://idofoundation.org) and [justgive.org](http://justgive.org).** Now that's something to celebrate.



2002

Gwen Stefani rocks a pink ombre wedding dress; *The New York Times* becomes the first major U.S. paper to publish same-sex wedding announcements.

2005

YouTube is launched; Etsy begins linking artisans to couples hungry for handmade items.

2006

Weddingbee hits the scene, giving brides a friendly forum in which to share their tips and ideas.

2007

Apple sells its 100 millionth iPod, ensuring that *iPod wedding* will remain part of the bridal lexicon for years to come.

2008

BRIDES showcases hot pink heels on the cover, the first reported Twitter proposal takes place, and the global economy collapses, turning millions of brides into DIY-ers.

2009

The "Forever" wedding video hits YouTube, inspiring the crew from *The Office* to dance down the aisle at Pam and Jim's I do's.

2010

Ready-to-wear retailers show their love for brides: White House Black Market and The Limited launch wedding lines, and J.Crew opens its first bridal salon.

2011

Will and Kate prove that even royal Gen Wedders are doing it for themselves. (After-party!)