

Finding the ‘right’ dress is a special experience at Brandi Michelle’s

“My favorite part of this business is that moment when a bride puts on the ‘right’ dress. You can see it on her face. She doesn’t want to come out of the dress, so you know you’ve done what you were supposed to do,” says Michelle Grinder, owner of Brandi Michelle’s Bridal Boutique at 1439 South First St. in Union City.

The popular bridal shop is the first such undertaking for Ms. Grinder.

“I wanted to bring something to the area that we didn’t have. I’ve always loved fashion and clothes, jewelry and shoes, but this area already has quite a few boutiques. I wanted to do something the community needed, something that would bring people into town, as well as into my store,” she says.

And the business is doing just that.

“This is the only bridal shop between Paducah, Ky., and Jackson and the only one that is 100 percent bridal, even beyond those areas. We do bridal gowns, mother of the bride dresses, bridesmaids’ gowns, flower girl dresses and accessories for the bride and bridal party like jewelry, shoes and veils. We also do walk-in visits with brides, but in that situation, they won’t really get the service we are designed for and want

to give. We really like to have private consults with each bride, so we can make choosing that special gown the best experience possible,” says Ms. Grinder.

Such visits can be arranged with a simple call to 599-1555 Tuesdays through Fridays from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. or by stopping by the bridal boutique and setting up a time for a longer and more personal opportunity to find the perfect dress.

“I want to offer one-on-one service to every bride and to be able to say to each one that we will help her look her best, taking all things into consideration. When a bride walks in, we want her to know we are really a ‘down home’ place and we look forward to having fun with brides. Jared Hamlin and my daughter Delaney and I work well with each other and with our brides. She may end up with one of us or two of us or all three of us, but we’ll all be involved in making it an experience just for her,” says Ms. Grinder, who encourages brides to bring along family and friends and members of the bridal party.

“Brandi Michelle’s is a place to create a beautiful memory for a bride, not just a place to walk into and back out of. We sit down

with her and go through sort of a bridal survey, finding out the day and time and venue for the wedding, what colors will be used and the details that help us get a feel for the wedding. That helps us figure out a look. If a bride already has her own ideas about a gown, they can try on what they like, but I have seen every wedding dress in the store on someone, so it only takes a couple of tries at it for me to figure out exactly what to offer her, as well.

“Of course, ultimately, it doesn’t matter what I think, because my goal is to help the bride look her most beautiful. The end result I’m really looking for is that she should ‘know’ that is her dress, because everything in the wedding centers around that dress.”

Brandi Michelle’s Bridal Boutique is basically a shop filled with samples of gowns and each special wedding dress is custom ordered after specific measurements are taken for each bride. That is why it is important to start looking for the perfect bridal gown a minimum of three to four months before the wedding.

“Typically, a group of four come in for the experience. If it’s a larger party, we just shut the store for a while and make it all about

the bride. If they are looking for dresses for other members of the wedding party, we deal with those choices first and save the bride for last, so it is all about her. She puts the gown on and walks all around the store in it and the whole floor is hers,” says the owner of the attractive shop which boasts plenty of full-length mirrors, comfortable seating and an air of elegance.

Sizes are available from 0-32 and a couple of designers Ms. Grinders works with will also ship dresses that may not be on display in the store but can be viewed online and sent to the bride to try on.

Prices range from \$500 to \$2,500 and there are no resales or rentals in the shop.

Brides who don’t have very long to wait for a dress can also buy off the rack from among the samples. Brandi Michelle’s offers alteration services, or bride’s who buy a sample gown can choose their own seamstress, if changes need to be made.

The popularity of Brandi Michelle’s Bridal Boutique owes much to the careful preparation of its owner before she ever opened the doors of the business.

“I did some research on brands and companies and designers and then I reached out to them and asked questions. The only bridal designer I knew for

sure I wanted was Maggie Sottero, and before they would let me represent them, they had to do a walk-through of the store and I had to do an interview with them. Once I got their approval, it all fell into place and I turned over a lot of things to Jared,” says Ms. Grinder.

“We are very knowledgeable about our wedding dresses and the designs, as well as the designers. I carefully picked who we brought in and we carry two lines that brides can’t find outside of New York or Florida or Texas. We are the only store in this area that carries these private collection lines, so we have brides who will drive hours to get here for this one-time experience. I kept that fact in mind (about a clientele that would extend beyond the immediate area) when I opened the store, so we brought in dresses that might not normally sell to brides right around here.”

While the staff at Brandi Michelle’s Bridal Boutique may see 10 brides a week, the owner says they all want each bride to feel as though she will be the only customer there that week and the attention is being focused just on her.

“When I opened the store, I wanted it to be about the bride. Her wedding day is the most important in a woman’s life. I just want each one to feel like that and have that kind of experience. It’s not just about a sale to me. I want each bride to have exactly what she wants, so it’s about giving her the right thing and not about making a sale. That approach allows us to end up putting a girl in just the right dress,” she says.

A look at Brandi Michelle Bridal Boutique is available online at brandimichelle’s.com.

The site features all designers available through the store and links to their websites and collections.



EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE — That’s what the staff at Brandi Michelle’s Briday Boutique offers each bride planning her special day. To arrange a once-in-a-lifetime experience in choosing the perfect wedding gown, call 599-1555. Located at 1439 South First St., the place to find the gown of a bride’s dreams is open Tuesday through Friday from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Treat guests to personalized vows

Couples who choose to write their own wedding vows recognize how special such personal gestures are.

Writing one’s own vows can impart a personalized and special touch to the ceremony. But as anyone who has stared down a blank piece of paper or blinking cursor can attest, a case of writer’s block may encourage couples to abandon the idea of writing their own vows.

Writing vows can be nerve-racking. Many couples are unaccustomed to speaking in front of crowds, and then there is the challenge of turning life-altering feelings into language that will appeal to the masses.

But couples struggling with their vows need not throw in the vow-writing towel. With some practice and guidance, anyone can write cherished vows that will be remembered for all of the right reasons for years to come.

- Skip the schtick. Jokes may pop up in speeches throughout the evening, but wedding vows can be your chance to truly speak from the heart. Humor may come across as insincerity. Rather, list the words that describe your feelings

for your future spouse, and build on that.

- Tell a story. If you need inspiration, look to a moment in your relationship when you really knew this was the person with whom you wanted to share your life. Relay the story, but keep it brief. Try to be as specific as possible, and recognize that it’s acceptable to be playful with your words. When it’s really coming from the heart and not the head, you’ll know it.
- Borrow from traditional words. Take traditional vows and tweak them to make them your own. This works especially well for those who have trouble getting started or are unsure of which format to follow. Incorporate key words, such as “partners,” “love,” “friends,” “joy,” and “forever.”
- Be sure the officiant is on board. Depending on the type of ceremony, the officiant may have final say over what can or cannot be included in your vows. Religious ceremonies, for example, may be limited to certain scripture readings and traditional vows. Before you devote any time to writing vows, ensure that it’s alright to include them. Otherwise, save personal-

ized sentiments for a special toast at the wedding reception.

- Decide on a mutual structure for the vows. If you and your spouse will not be writing the vows together, agree on a format that you both will follow. Otherwise, you might be writing about your unending love, and he or she may be promising to keep updated on favorite sports teams or television programs. You want the tone and style of the vows to be cohesive.
- Dig deeper. Look into the future and project how you hope your life to be in 10 or 20 years. Explain all of the reasons you want to be together for the duration.
- Read the vows several times. Read over your work and make sure the language is clear and there are no glaring errors. It may take a few versions to get the final version right where you want it.
- Get a second opinion. Ask someone you trust to listen to the vows and offer feedback. This needs to be a person who will be honest and not just tell you what you want to hear.

Personalized vows can add an extra special touch to wedding ceremonies.

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