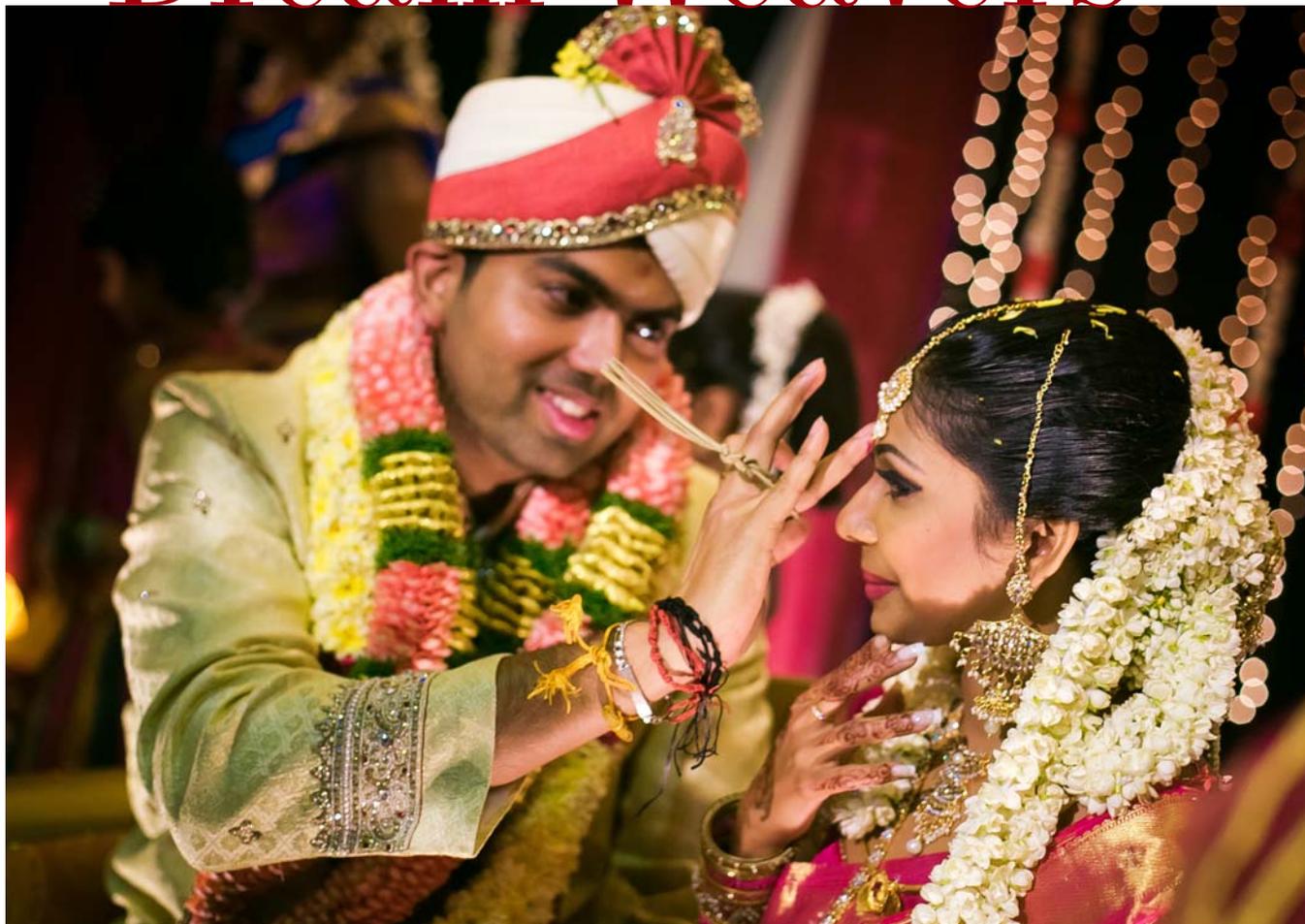


Dream Weavers



AMAR RAMESH

EXPERTS SHARE THEIR MANTRAS OF PLANNING THE PERFECT WEDDING

By SARANYA CHAKRAPANI

So, you've found your match, decided to get married and announced the big news to the world. As the most important day of your life nears, the only thing more beautiful is the countdown to it. But the runway to the wedding needs time, energy and of course preparation, say Vidya Singh and Rekha Rangaraj of Sumyog, who have put together together over 200 weddings in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa.

"The big fat Indian wedding is called so for a reason. We have

clients with varying budgets but what they all want is a large wedding with lots of festivity," says Rekha. The cardinal rule of a smooth wedding day is good organisation, says wedding planner Shruti Ravindran.

"Foresight is extremely important when you're preparing your wedding. As soon as the date gets fixed, get your hall and your caterer booked. They're the hardest to get hold of. For brides, if you're planning to work out, give your cloth measurements to your tailor at least a month in advance of your wedding," she says.

The cultural influences

Two major cultural influences that have found a spot in a typical South Indian wedding are Bollywood and the West. Today, it's hard to find a South Indian wedding without the sangeet and mehendi ceremonies. Though these are not inherently part of a Tamil wedding, a number of traditional nuptial ceremonies are preceded by them.

"We've even sent choreographers to weddings that are organised in the couples' native or temple towns. It is how the new South Indian wedding is turning out to be,



EA BRIDAL LOUNGE

‘Pan Indian’,” observes Rekha. Echoing this trend is Lakshmi, who along with her sister Saraswathi, quit a career in television to start their own wedding planning company, Event Art.

“The Bollywood influence is unmistakable. Couples living abroad come down days in advance along with their foreigner friends, who are more than happy to prepare for the sangeet with a choreographer. For them, it’s fascinating,” she says. From a time when weddings were meticulously planned and executed by the parents, we’ve reached an age where youngsters, coupled with the best of technology and exposure to different cultures, want to plan their weddings themselves. Elaborate rituals that extended for days are being replaced by shorter ceremonies with fun events, classy themes

and intimate gatherings.

“There’s a large shift in the way this generation is viewing itself. Today, kids go abroad, become more articulate and even finance a large part of their wedding,” says Rekha. “They come to us with their iPads and tablets and are very upfront about how they want their weddings orchestrated,” she adds.

Although in most cases, the main wedding ceremony still remains traditional and is supervised by the family elders, the pre-wedding and post-wedding events are getting quirky and creative. One big metamorphosis is the elimination of the conventional reception.

“Young couples don’t like the concept of people standing in long queues to see them in a

reception. They want the after-wedding party to be casual, smaller and more intimate. A unanimous choice for many people is a classy ballroom setting or a cocktail evening in an alfresco setting,” says Lakshmi.

Tip “Executing the wedding can take up a lot of energy and time. So, a simpler and more intimate after-wedding party is the best way to celebrate with loved ones and unwind. It’s your time,” says Shruti Ravindran.

🌀 The charm of the traditional

But for a good share of youngsters, nothing can substitute the charm of a wholesome, traditional wedding. Singer Saindhavi, who got married to music director GV Prakash last year, had dreamt of a traditional wedding all her life and that’s what she got. “There’s nothing stressful about going traditional. I was brought up in a Tamil Iyer family and grew up watching lengthy weddings spread across two-and-a-half days. And they were completed by warm, meaningful rituals and lots of special moments with loved ones,” she says. She recalls her dream wedding and says, “I got married



ALIPH' BY GATSBY



into a Mudaliyar family; we incorporated a bit of our rituals with theirs and that made it so heartwarming and special. Only our wedding and reception were high-profile; all the other ceremonies were private and took place at home. It was exactly how I wanted my wedding to be – warm, big and chaotic. I would relive it all over again, if given a chance,” she says.

Gayathri Girish, one of the leading Carnatic vocalists in the country recalls, “Traditional weddings are sacred because of their Vedic importance and I had an elaborate four-day wedding. We had *homams* going on at home throughout and we saw it as a special family get-together, more than a social function.”

Tip “It’s always nice to dream exotic, but it’s also good to create a balance between tradition and modernity. We must remember that we have a rich cultural heritage and there’s no better place to showcase it than our weddings,” says Saraswathi Krishnakumar.

Love across boundaries

As more youngsters find love across communities and even countries, the number of inter-community and inter-nationality marriages are on the rise, says Rekha. At times, such weddings need to be

conducted two different ways and the planning only gets more advanced and researched. “Our culture is quite rich. So, when they marry a foreigner, the bride or the groom wants to have a big, ornate wedding, complete with all the customs and gala. They want their non-Indian spouse to experience this culture,” she says. On certain occasions, Rekha and her partner Vidya have even organised church blessings for the spouses and their families.

Tip “Plan rituals and events that are fun and engaging. When the occasion is interactive and inclusive, it makes it special for people who are also new to the culture,” says Shruti Ravindran.

Walk the aisle in style

Today, wedding and sangeet ceremonies have moved out of the four walls of the *mandapam*, and are being celebrated around carefully planned themes. From the

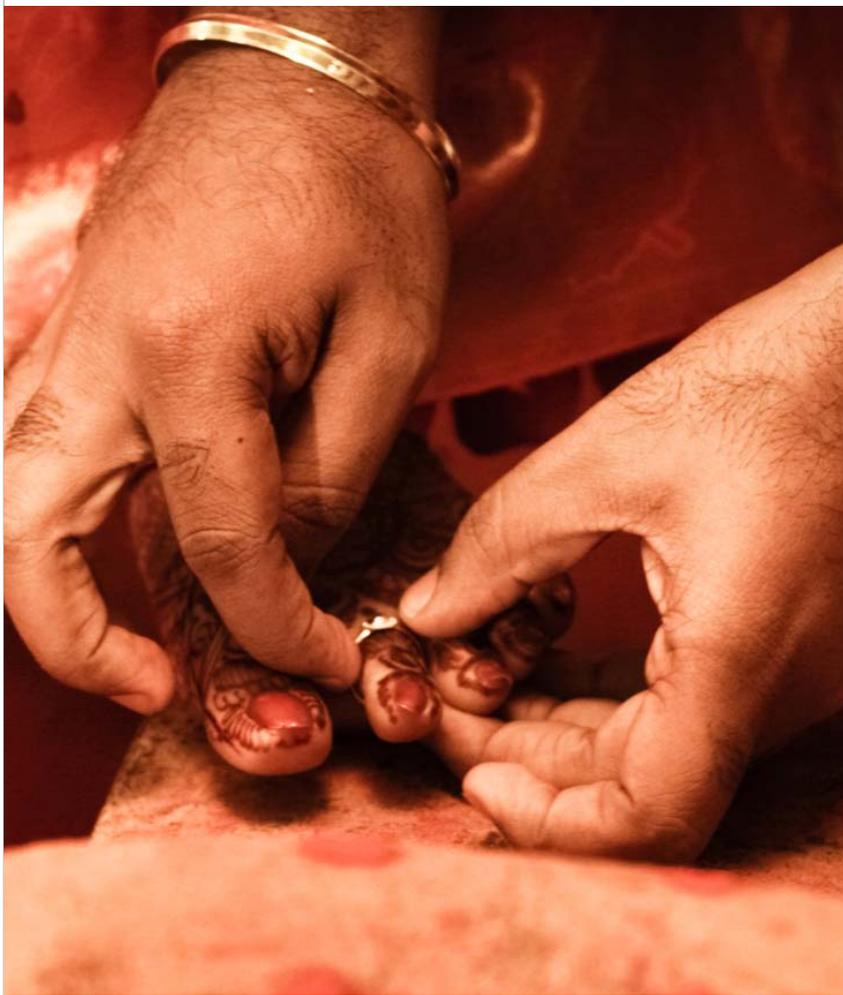
Taj Mahal to the Jaipur Palace, any set can be erected according to your specifications, with the help of wedding planners and their team of craftsmen. These elaborate sets can accommodate seating for guests, the kitchen and dining area, the washrooms and even chambers for the bride and groom. Lakshmi and Saraswathi recently replicated a family’s ancestral home in Chettinad for a wedding. “We recreated the background of their Chettinad home with the help of reference photos. It had the same elaborate doors and pillars on the *mandapam*, against which the bride and the groom sat,” says Lakshmi.

In another new trend, conventional marriage halls, due to their tough availability for most part of the year, are fast making way for plush hotels. According to Rekha, Taj’s Fisherman’s Cove is a classic for beach weddings.

Among the list of newer hotels, the ITC Grand Chola is turning out to be a popular venue due to its sheer size and extravagance. As Chennai’s only 7-star hotel, it is a preferred location for those who like having two to three events, each with a different setting and ambience. The new Leela Palace and the renovated Taj

CREATIVE WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY





CREATIVE WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

are also ideal, thanks to their open natural spaces, which give a lot of scope for open air pool parties and cocktail evenings.

Tip "In a hotel, you can have the wedding, cocktails and dinner in a ballroom, banquet hall or by the pool respectively. Also, good food is guaranteed without a caterer," says Rekha Rangaraj.

Wedding planners

Lakshmi Ravichander and Saraswathi Krishnakumar – Event Art

Lakshmi and Saraswathi have grown from being household television names in the 90's to one of the city's most sought after event managers today. After directing a number of successful television serials like *Savithri* on Sun TV and *Minsara Poove* on Vijay TV, this sister-duo left their television background to start Event Art in

2004. "We were already doing a number of corporate events and weddings for close friends. After we were called by a high profile client to do a wedding, we decided this was what we wanted to do," says Saraswathi. "The most important thing in this job is to be hands-on. We never delegate a job and leave it there; we make sure we're updated at every step." In the last nine years, Lakshmi and Saraswathi have done over 100 weddings and boast of a famed clientele. They have erected sets of temples and magnificent Rajput and Chettinad palaces, as part of their design portfolio.

Tip "It's always nice to dream exotic, but it's also good to create a balance between tradition and modernity. We must remember that we have a rich cultural heritage and there's no better place to showcase

it than our weddings."

Address Event Art, 2B, Rahul Apartments, 104, Chamiers Road

Tel 9841266654

Vidya Singh and Rekha Rangaraj – Sumyog Wedding Planners

After working together on some of the most high-profile fashion shows and talk shows for IWA (International Women's Association), a socio-cultural organisation, Vidya Singh and her best friend and confidante Rekha Rangaraj decided they can do wedding planning just as well. They got themselves registered in 2005 and since then have planned ceremonies for a number of the city's A-listers, as well as a loyal clientele that keeps going back to them.

"The best thing about this job is that it makes people happy. And this is what earns us all the goodwill," says Rekha. "We create all our props and we have all our labour in-house – from the florists to the decorators," she adds.

Tip "Visualise your wedding, list out the most important things and start working backwards. There's nothing more vital than being organised."

Address Sumyog, 38, Poes Garden
Tel 9840747561

Shruti Ravindran – Vida

Shruti's connect with wedding planning really began with her job as a fashion designer and stylist, where she prepared brides for pre-wedding photo shoots. But her real inclination for the job came during her own wedding in January this year, when she pulled off a demanding event schedule with ease. That's when she realised that her resourceful network of decorators, stylists, make-up artists and fashion designers could be put to use for professional wedding planning. And early this year, she started her brand, Vida.

"I literally planned my whole wedding to my liking. I think my greatest advantage lies in the fact that I can relate to the needs of a young couple because of my age.

I know just what to do when I'm asked for something new-age and quirky," she says. Shruti's strength lies in her knowledge of the important traditional aspects in a wedding that could strike a balance with more innovative ideas. "My aim is to provide A-Z solutions; I start with pre-wedding packages, including fitness, salon and spa services, diet patterns and fitness regimes, and go all the way up to customised trousseau, catering, decorating and shopping," she says.

Tip "People tend to spend a lot of time and money on the decoration, wedding halls etc., but miss out on personal grooming, which takes time and is extremely essential. Things like hairstyle, make-up and photography must be planned well in advance, as these are what remain as lasting memories in your album."

Address 11/2C Supraba, 96/43, 2nd Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Adyar
Tel 98848 34737

Trousseau

Omar Sait-Gatsby

Omar started working on new-age designer solutions for men under the label Gatsby in the mid-90's, but his family has been in the business for over a 100 years. Their latest collection *Aliph* offers a stylish and classy range of ethnic, western, formal and casual wear, hand-crafted with premium fabrics. The collection features sherwanis, kurtas, bandgalas, Jodhpur pants, turbans and mojiris for the modern groom to choose from. "The trends have definitely evolved. Earlier it was just the brides who put in time and care into their trousseau, but now grooms get inspired by the runways too," he says.

The trend is to match the groom's trousseau with the bride's sari in terms of colour, motifs and themes. "The grooms want to make their wedding day memorable, long after it is over. While black is mostly avoided for the ceremony, shades of blue and wine are perfect when you want to synchronise your outfit with the bride's. Gold, light greys and charcoal are



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great for sherwanis," says Omar.

"Bollywood and the red carpet culture play a huge role here in the form of long, dressy sherwanis with heavy embroidery work. Receptions were earlier confined to suits, but now we're seeing a lot of tuxedos, open bandis and dressy shirts with jeans," he adds. Gatsby can even customise the entire wardrobe for the groom and also the guests to a theme, design or requirement but the order for this needs to be placed well before the wedding day.

Address 34, Khader Nawaz Khan Road, Nungambakkam
Tel 28331677

Erum Ali-EA Bridal Lounge

Erum Ali, who has been exclusively crafting luxury bridal wear for over a decade, observes a significant change in tastes and preferences today. "The young Indian bride has become very discerning. I seldom come across brides today who zero in on their costumes as early as the second time. I'm encouraged by



how much we've grown," she says.

Having grown up watching the women of her family adorn exquisite Indian handwork and embroidery, Erum's affinity to ethnicity reflects heavily in her work. Her signature style incorporates long, flowy *anarkali* gowns complete with yoke, gold thread and kundan work. She loves accentuating the borders and the lower ends of her garments with ornate Indian motifs. She recommends lightweight outfits in soothing tones of beige and white.

"Young brides don't want clothes that look too typical. They want something wearable, funky and most importantly, light. Long, flowy skirts could be worn with jackets and saris can be teamed with corsets to give a hip look," she says. Erum's classic designs include regal Victorian gowns with a heavy use of natural tapestry.

Address 4-5, Shyam's Garden, 17, Khader Nawaz Khan Road, Nungambakkam
Tel 42323032

Kodak Moments

Amar Ramesh—AnRb Photography

While assisting some award winning photographers in the US, Amar Ramesh found scope in bringing down the contemporary style and work culture to India and in December 2010, he shot his first wedding in Indore. “Weddings are such an emotional affair in India and you can see families really coming together. As a photographer I’m al-

CREATIVE WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY



lowed to immerse myself in a family and share the experience with them,” he says.

According to Ramesh, couples are increasingly going for candid photography. “Social media has played a very important role. Everyone wants Facebook shareable pictures today,” he says. His style of photography blends photojournalistic and creative fine art portraits. While Ramesh started off with a primarily candid/photojournalistic style, he found his love in fine art and portraiture. “I’ve found a

way of incorporating all of that into my work,” he says.

Tip “The stage/mandap is actually the only place the couple should pay attention to. In terms of themes and locations, it’s always good to go for simple, uncluttered décor; fewer colours instead of an entire rainbow of shades and fewer people on stage. Most importantly, be happy on your wedding day.”

Address 64, CP Ramaswamy Road, Trustpakkam, Mandaveli

Tel 42037218

The best way to go about it is to have pre-wedding portrait and engagement shoots, scheduled much ahead of the wedding week. “Though it’s hard to make time, we always insist that our clients give their wedding photography its fair share. Our approach is to create images that depict their love; for instance, we try to shoot at the place they first met or have shared special moments,” he adds.

Hari and Yadhav are known for

Hari and Yadhav—Creative Wedding Photography:

Hari and Yadhav found their true calling in wedding photography in 2007 and took a plunge into it full-time. “Hailing from an advertising background, we possessed the cumulative skill set including architectural, fine art and fashion, which are key here,” says Hari. From a time when wedding chronicling was confined to standard event documentation and formal portraits, couples today insist on natural, candid shots, he adds.

their night and twilight shoots, with creative use of speed lights to mimic the street lights and ambient lights. Their style is non-directorial and they follow the natural course of the event, to give you the most honest and candid images.

Tip: “We suggest an open lawn, hillside or a sea side shoot, where there are numerous photo opportunities. Any place the couple associates with is also great. After all, the photos should be a reflection of their character and chemistry.”

Address 11B, Chandrabagh Avenue, 1st Street, Mylapore **Tel** 9884345618