I do

SPRING/SUMMER 2021

Your guide to planning a beautiful Lancaster County wedding
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From shorter styles to reimagined lace, here’s what’s trending in 2021

Many little girls picture themselves in an elaborate dress marrying a handsome prince. Well, the dream of a real prince usually dissipates in time, but the vision of a wonderful wedding gown remains. Even when a pandemic upends all plans for gatherings.

“When COVID first hit, I got frantic calls from brides,” says Janell Berte of POSH Bridal in Lancaster. “Should they call off the wedding? Delay it? Go for a less important dress? In the end, all but one decided to keep the date, limit the guest list severely and still go for the dream dress. Absolutely the right decision. After all, many couples have spent more than a year planning their wedding, but let us face it, on that big day the main components are the bride, her fiancé and the dress. And that fiancé has been looking forward to seeing his bride in that gorgeous dress.”

Many COVID-era brides, however, are learning to reconfigure their wedding wardrobe. For example, a welcome dinner outfit might become the look for a civil ceremony, a reception gown might transition into an anniversary party dress for a bigger gathering next year and with changes of accessories, the after-party mini will be right for lots of social gatherings.
GOING SHORT?

Top fashion magazines are touting the return of the short dress to the wedding scene, with top designers claiming that showing off legs and pretty shoes shouldn’t be just for civil ceremonies or after-parties. Pair any ankle-length, midi or even mini with a veil, and they become ceremony-appropriate, fashion editors say.

But Page Olsen of Cocoa Couture in Hershey doesn’t see this happening. “Brides in our area are more traditional,” she says. “They still go for long dresses and elegance.”

Berte doesn’t believe short gowns will catch on, either. “Designers are calling us about them,” she says. “But it isn’t minis they are offering. They are mid-calf, more along the lines of Dior’s New Look of the 1950s. And about those pretty shoes: we’re seeing brides going for comfort in a big way. Yes, they may wear an elegant shoe for the ceremony itself, but the minute that’s over, they’re wearing chucks. We’re seeing brides wearing these high-top sneakers with crazy decorations, such as princesses or rhinestones. Even professional women wear them. Heck, Kamala Harris wore them in that recent Vogue cover photo.”

“Bold shoulders are back, and interesting sleeves. Puff sleeves. Blouson sleeves. Bishop sleeves. And capes. All add a romantic feel.”

— JANELL BERTE, POSH BRIDAL
This gown is demure in the front, but dips in the back.

**STYLES AND COLORS**

Blush has been a mainstay for the aisle for quite a while, but creams, whites and a color called diamond are replacing it. Berte describes it as an off-white, bordering on the cool tone charge led by Vera Wang and Oscar de la Renta. These designers show a lot of soft, watercolor shades, including the palest blues, greens and lavender. On the 2021 runways, these cooler hues showed up in all forms, from full ball gowns to sheaths.

Not surprisingly, boho styles are going strong in the Lancaster region. It’s a look that’s perfect for the outdoorsy weddings so popular in the area. But, of course, the style is evolving. Olsen calls it sweeter and more romantic, with some added polish, such as bishop sleeves, smocking and empire waists.

Lace shows up in bridal collections across the board, but in many new forms that leave basic Chantilly far behind. For example, recently Tom Ford has showed off patchwork lace and Dior introduced a formal riff on romantic guipure lace. There are so many versions to choose from, but Berte recommends that a bride consider the setting of her wedding. Floral and nature-inspired designs feel outdoorsy and effortless, while unusual graphic versions feel more contemporary and urban.

Both Berte and Olsen see more brides interested in less-is-more styles that nevertheless make definite statements. “These brides want clean lines and sleek, body-conscious shapes,” Olse says. She warns that this look requires impeccable tailoring.


As for looking ahead until we can party again, many top designers, including Lanvin and Valentino, are betting on bridal gowns that interpret Gatsby-era chic and luxe. The styles are dramatic, and in seasons past, they would surely have been seen as too theatrical, but perhaps the designers are right. After all, the Roaring ’20s followed the Spanish flu. Perhaps we, too, will feel like epic parties and over-the-top dressing when the pandemic is behind us.
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MEET THE OWNERS
“Our goal as owners is to provide a family-friendly atmosphere with quality food and service for people of all ages to enjoy.”
- Jason & Gabrielle.

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Small, but special

Microweddings were already growing in popularity before COVID-19 made them a necessity for some.

Lush greenery became the setting for Helen and Chris Brubaker’s wedding held at the Lancaster farm where she grew up.

PHOTO: JEFF FRANDSEN PHOTOGRAPHY
Yes, COVID-19 restrictions have diminished guest lists severely, but smaller weddings have actually been trending for a while anyway, planners say.

“Minimalism is in,” explains Michelle Hare of the JDK Group, a Camp Hill firm that plans weddings throughout southcentral Pennsylvania. “People like to be simpler. … Simple in living, dressing, eating. And now weddings are following suit, with couples opting for smaller, more intimate gatherings.” Called microweddings, they typically involve 50 guests or less, mainly family and close friends.

“Couples tell us they particularly love being able to spend more time with their guests,” Hare says. “And then there are the budget considerations. A microwedding can be cost-friendly, with less food to buy, fewer tables to rent and so forth. On the other hand, with a smaller guest count, some couples go the opposite way, opting to really spoil their guests with over-the-top specialty drinks, custom menus and great music.

“Of course, this trend suits the COVID restrictions to a T. It means proper safety regulations can be followed and elderly family members are more comfortable attending these small events. So, all in all, a microwedding is perfect for sharing a beautiful moment with family while also keeping guests’ health in mind.”

Small but sweet

COVID-19 played havoc with Heather and Nathan Bond’s Nov. 28 wedding and reception at Springside Barn in East Earl, prompting them to whittle down their guest list from 180 to 50.

“Travel restrictions and COVID exposure hit our guests, but we didn’t want to let the pandemic stop us from starting our married life together,” Heather says. “Our wedding was not all we had hoped for, but it was still the happiest day of our lives. I stayed with my original winter wonderland vision for the wedding. Evergreens, pine cones, white lights, silver berries. It was beautiful. And at the same time we were able to social-distance and keep everybody safe.”
For the benefit of guests who couldn’t be there in person, the wedding was livestreamed, and cards were sent to them explaining that a larger celebration will take place when the pandemic is over.

Helen and Chris Brubaker had imagined an extravagant destination wedding, but then COVID-19 hit and they had to reimagine their big day. So they headed to Lancaster County to the beautiful farm where Helen grew up. There, on a gorgeous summer day, they tied the knot. Eighteen guests celebrated with them.

“A microwedding, yes,” notes Hare, whose firm helped plan the event. “But all of the grand details of a large celebration were there: Helen’s dream bouquet, unique menu cards, escort cards, hand-tied bouquets for each table, romantic candlelight and lush greenery. With this intimate setting, a more casual food station packed with flavor and fun was just right, and it included an adorable cookie for late-night snacking.”

Local support

The trend toward supporting local businesses was never stronger. COVID-19 helped do that, but all those small weddings held in backyards and gardens, on terraces and in fields, did the rest, Hare says.

“From food to beverage to floral decorations, sourcing as locally as possible appeals to so many couples,” agrees Deb Kepiro, a Strasburg photographer, who’s a keen observer at numerous weddings. “It limits carbon emissions to transport products short distances and, of course, everybody understands how important it is to support small businesses that have struggled so during the pandemic.”

It’s hard to think of a wedding more neighborhood and family-sourced than that of Lexi and Kevin Stauffer. After COVID-19 scuttled their original plans, they went from 180 to 25 guests, and while the ceremony still took place at Sickman’s Mill in Pequea, they moved the reception to Lexi’s backyard.

Her father, who is a pastor, officiated at the ceremony. The couple’s four grandmothers were flower “girls.” Lexi’s grandfathers made the wedding arch and the table decorations. Family put together the mojito and teas, charcuterie boards, cheese steaks and fruit trays. And the bride and groom personally picked up and delivered the pizzas from Pizza City in Strasburg.

“Initially, we were disappointed that our day wasn’t going to be what we envisioned,” Lexi says. “But we could not have asked for a better day. We got to spend much more time with each guest than you would have at a typical wedding, and we loved that all our family members were included in some aspect. It was such a meaningful day, and we couldn’t be happier. I got to marry my best friend surrounded by the most important people in my life.”
COVID-19 restrictions whittled Lexi and Kevin Stauffer’s wedding guest list from 180 to 25, but they still call their wedding day joyous and memorable.

PHOTO: DEB KEPIRO, ANNIE SHARP PHOTOGRAPHY
“We got a cheesecake from the Cheesecake Factory and we also got a smaller cake from Country Table Bakery in Mount Joy that we’re planning to eat on our one-year anniversary!”

My closest friend, Michaela, did my hair and makeup! She has done my hair and makeup for every school dance and special occasion that we had since we were freshmen in high school, so it was really special to have her also work her beauty magic for our wedding day!

“I spent a lot of time looking at different websites and browsing Pinterest looking for a dress. All I knew was that I wanted something fun, unique and whimsical, but also simple and something that I could wear with no shoes necessary! I actually ended up finding it in the bridesmaid dress section of Anthropologie’s Wedding Website (BHLDN). I made an appointment at their Devon location to try on a few dresses, but my appointment got canceled when their in-person shopping was put on hold. I looked around more but just kept going back to this particular dress because I loved it so much, but when I tried to order it online it was out of stock! I actually ended up finding it on a different website (ASOS) and ordered two so that I could compare the sizes. Thankfully it fit me perfectly, so I didn’t need to alter it at all!”
CAKE
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How did COVID-19 affect your wedding plans?

“We got engaged in late February 2020 and were planning on having our wedding sometime in the fall of 2020. A month or so into our engagement, we started looking at venues, vendors and trying to make plans for a fall wedding, but that was the time that everything started shutting down and businesses were closing, so it became super difficult to make any plans, let alone even hear back from most businesses due to the unknown of COVID-19. It became almost impossible for us to make decisions/plan anything because even the biggest details were so up in the air.

“(Neither) Dj nor I had ever really dreamed of having a huge wedding, so after a few weeks of going back and forth on what to do, we were really just at a loss. My parents threw out the idea one day of, ‘Why not just go for it and get married soon?’ At first we thought it was just a funny idea until we actually thought, ‘Hey, I mean what are we waiting for, really?’ It’s not like we were waiting for a specific venue or had anything set in stone, so we decided to just go for it and planned our wedding for the first weekend in June.

There were definitely times when we considered just waiting until after the pandemic was over, but because COVID-19 was so indefinite, we decided to just have a tiny ceremony instead of waiting to see how long it would be otherwise.”
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Would you have changed anything about your wedding day?

“Honestly, I was so happy with how everything turned out. Since we didn’t have any expectations going into wedding planning, there was really nothing that could have made us feel let down or disappointed, which made everything that much better. Even the gazebo that we chose for our ceremony was picked on a whim. We went for a walk on the Northwest River Trail that runs near Breezyview Overlook one day, and there’s a small path that you can hike to get to the gazebo and overlook that we had never been on. So, we decided to hike up it to see what was at the top, and when we saw how beautiful the scenery was and the view of the river from the gazebo we said to each other, ‘This would be a cool place to get married!’ and went with it! It was also really special to be part of the entire planning process. Everything was up to us, since it was just the two of us and our families who were attending the wedding and picking out all of the decorations, flowers, food, etc. We hand-picked every single detail of our wedding, which is probably something that would have overwhelmed me if we had a traditional, larger ceremony.

“At the same time though, we were still able to have traditional elements to our unique wedding day. Dj’s dad is an ordained minister and was able to perform the ceremony, my dad still walked me down the sidewalk ‘aisle,’ we took family photos and a limo took us the few miles from Columbia to Mount Joy for our reception dinner, so there were small pieces of ‘traditional’ sprinkled in throughout the day.

“There were times during the days leading up to our wedding day that I thought I would regret not having a big wedding in the future, but looking back now, I wouldn’t change a single thing about it.”

What advice do you have for couples planning a pandemic wedding?

“Pick the few things that are really important to you for your day and keep those held tightly, but give yourself the freedom to relax and enjoy the uniqueness of this time! The most important part about any wedding really is the fact that you get to marry your best friend and begin your life together, so if you keep that at the center of your attention, all the other details seem insignificant and not worth getting upset about. Plus, one day it’ll be pretty cool for all of us COVID-couples to say we got married in the middle of a global pandemic.”
Weddings can be expensive, but one of the biggest purchases comes before you even start planning that walk down the aisle. The average amount spent on an engagement ring in the U.S. is $5,500, according to the financial resource CreditDonkey. Wedding bands can cost an additional $1,000 or more.

The cost of jewelry underscores the importance of learning how to care for it so you can preserve its value for years to come. Here are some tips from the online jewelry guide Jewelry Notes:

**Regular checkups**

Twice-yearly visits to a jeweler can ensure that prongs are in proper condition and the setting isn’t loose, according to Martha Stewart Weddings. The last thing you want is to look at your hand and discover your ring is missing its diamond.

**Look, don’t touch**

Avoid touching diamonds and other gemstones as much as possible when putting rings on and taking them off. Precious stones often are magnets for dust, dirt and body oil, according to Taylor Lanore, diamond consultant and engagement ring designer for Lauren B. Fine Jewelry and Diamonds. Grab the ring by the band.

**When in doubt, take it off**

When you do certain hands-on activities like cleaning dishes, moving furniture, gardening or diving through waves at the beach, you risk losing your ring, damaging it or making it unnecessarily dirty. It’s better to remove the ring and store it in a safe location until you can safely wear it again.

**Insure your investment**

One of the most important steps to safeguard wedding and engagement rings is to insure the jewelry. You will need a certified independent jewelry appraisal, which will include a description of the ring, its cut, carat weight, metal and other information. Take a close-up photo of the jewelry as well. You may also qualify for insurance discounts if you have a laser inscription or a home security system. A homeowner’s or renter’s insurance policy can also include a jewelry rider.
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Love conquers all, even closed venues, canceled flights and social distancing. In the past year, couples have learned to look beyond all that and still celebrate their big day in front of family and friends. Some opt for a Zoom wedding, while others choose livestreaming. And technology doesn’t stop there. For example, invitations are emailed, guestbooks are signed electronically and occasionally drones fly overhead to capture gatherings.

And never fear: Virtual weddings can be every bit as chic and elegant as a traditional wedding. Invitations can still feature meticulous calligraphy, the settings for the ceremony and reception can still be memorable, and the guests, whether attending in person or virtually, can still be all dressed up. As Tara L. Folker, owner of Splints & Daisies Floral Design, says: “Other than not needing 15-20 floral centerpieces, weddings are pretty much the same. Couples still want to feel in the moment, and, of course, beautiful details are still important to look back on in pictures.”

Rose Conwell and Grant Sweitzer rave about their Zoom ceremony and reception at the terrace of The Excelsior in Lancaster. “We got married on the originally scheduled day in August,” Sweitzer says. “But instead of having 200 guests as originally anticipated, we wound up with 10 plus the photographer and a two-member band. The Zooming process was handled by Wedfully, a startup in Colorado. Rose’s parents are co-owners of two new Lancaster restaurants, C’Est La Vie and Josephine’s, and we ended up having dinner at their business partner’s home downtown. The head chef was in charge of the lovely dinner. We certainly feel that while our wedding was much different than what we had imagined, it was a very special and unique experience that we’ll never forget.”

Virtual Vows
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Sharing via streaming

The relatively new technology of livestreaming has saved numerous weddings during the pandemic, and Ben Reeder of Live Stream Lancaster believes it will become a staple element even after normalcy returns.

“I’ve actually been thinking of this way of sharing and memorizing weddings for a couple of years,” Reeder says, “but the technology wasn’t quite there yet. Now it is, and it’s terrific. I did 40 weddings last fall and saw how much it meant to couples to share their big day with loved ones who couldn’t be there in person. We’ve had relatives and friends from Korea, Australia and Israel attend Lancaster weddings virtually. That’s a worthwhile concept for weddings even past-pandemic.”

Jenny Lynn Gilbert and John-Paul Leonard, both born and raised in York, decided to go virtual at their November wedding at Stoltzfus Homestead & Gardens in Gordonville.

“We had family members from every state watching the ceremony and reception,” Jenny says. “We had invited 170 people, but due to travel restrictions, COVID-19 exposure, compromised immune systems, etc, only 65 could attend in person. Technology also came to our rescue when it turned out that John-Paul’s brother couldn’t attend the ceremony. He was supposed to be best man. He did come to the venue and stood outside, but Reeder solved the problem by rigging up an iPad on a tripod. This enabled John-Paul’s brother to wave hello and then FaceTime in. This way he was able to still ‘stand’ next to his brother during the ceremony.”

Tech talk

Reeder uses a platform of his own when livestreaming and provides a private link for virtual guests. No special login or app needed, he explains. Couples also get a digital master of the ceremony so they can revisit their big day whenever they want.

JKM Productions of Lititz uses single- or multiple-camera equipment plus wireless microphones when they livestream weddings. The company, a veteran in the wedding videography and photography business, also uses drones for aerial takes. John Morfesis, owner of JKM, says couples celebrating their big day love the drones for capturing wedding scenes in Lancaster’s picturesque countryside.

“A drone adds dimension to photos, both figuratively and literally,” Morfesis explains. “This is the way to capture a crowd of guests or to show off the beauty of a venue.”

Couples tying the knot virtually are grateful for all this technology, calling it awesome, and yet it is surprisingly affordable. Both Reeder and Morfesis quote rates starting at $400.
How to keep your fresh bouquet for years to come

Flowers can have sentimental value, and your wedding bouquet is no exception. While it’s true that fresh flowers have finite life spans, pressing them can preserve them for years to come, say the experts at ProFlowers.

Flower lovers can invest in a flower press, but other heavy objects also can be effective at pressing flowers. Start by choosing flowers that are either still in bud form or are freshly bloomed. Dry the flowers out as quickly as possible to prevent browning. Place the flowers between two pieces of white, nontextured paper. Then place all within the pages of a book. Depending on the size of the book, you may be able to press more than one flower at a time. Place other books on top to weigh down the book with the flowers inside. Change the moisture blotting sheets every few days. After two to three weeks, the flowers will be completely dry and flat. Remove the flowers carefully using tweezers or fingertips. Store the fresh flowers in a cool, dry place or consider framing them in a shadow box as a keepsake from your wedding day.

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NINE MONTHS BEFORE
8
Set date
8
Prepare a budget
8
Determine the time and place of the wedding and reception
8
Draw up a guest list
8
Choose members of the wedding party
8
Buy a wedding gown
8
Shop for bridesmaids' dresses
8
Interview photographers, videographers, florists, musicians, caterers and bakers

SIX TO NINE MONTHS BEFORE
8
Shop for wedding invitations
8
Decide on attire for groom and groomsmen
8
Start planning honeymoon
8
Decide on florist, caterer, bakery, photographer, videographer and entertainment

FOUR TO SIX MONTHS BEFORE
8
Register with a bridal gift registry
8
Reserve rehearsal dinner location
8
Arrange accommodations for out-of-town attendants and book a block of rooms for other out-of-town guests
8
Select a wedding ring for the groom

THREE MONTHS BEFORE
8
Address invitations
8
Meet with caterer
8
Firm up honeymoon plans
8
Shop for attendants' gifts
8
Make appointment with a hairstylist

TWO MONTHS BEFORE
8
Mail wedding invitations
8
Meet with musicians
8
Get together documents for marriage license

TWO TO FOUR WEEKS BEFORE
8
Set time for wedding rehearsal
8
Get marriage license
8
Have a final gown fitting
8
Keep track of invitation responses
8
Give caterers solid estimate of number of guests
8
Draw up a seating arrangement for rehearsal dinner and reception and make place cards
8
Make name and address changes on bank accounts, credit cards, driver's license, etc.

ONE WEEK BEFORE
8
Make final checks with officiant, florist, caterer, photographer, videographer, bakery, musicians, etc.

THE DAY BEFORE THE WEDDING
8
Pamper yourself
8
Rehearse ceremony with wedding party
8
Get a good night's sleep

Bride Groom

to-do list
Make sure you've got all the major wedding day elements covered with our at-a-glance checklists
Bride

NINE MONTHS BEFORE
- Set a date
- Prepare a budget
- Determine the time and place of the wedding and reception
- Draw up a guest list
- Choose members of the wedding party
- Buy a wedding gown
- Shop for bridesmaids’ dresses
- Interview photographers, videographers, florists, musicians, caterers and bakers

SIX TO NINE MONTHS BEFORE
- Shop for wedding invitations
- Decide on attire for groom and groomsmen
- Start planning honeymoon
- Decide on florist, caterer, bakery, photographer, videographer and entertainment

FOUR TO SIX MONTHS BEFORE
- Register with a bridal gift registry
- Reserve rehearsal dinner location
- Arrange accommodations for out-of-town attendants and book a block of rooms for other out-of-town guests
- Select a wedding ring for the groom

THREE MONTHS BEFORE
- Address invitations
- Meet with caterer
- Firm up honeymoon plans
- Shop for attendants’ gifts
- Make appointment with a hairstylist

TWO MONTHS BEFORE
- Mail wedding invitations
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- Get together documents for marriage license

TWO TO FOUR WEEKS BEFORE
- Set time for wedding rehearsal
- Get marriage license
- Have a final gown fitting
- Keep track of invitation responses
- Give caterer solid estimate of number of guests
- Draw up a seating arrangement for rehearsal dinner and reception and make place cards
- Make name and address changes on bank accounts, credit cards, driver’s license, etc.

ONE WEEK BEFORE
- Make final checks with officiant, florist, caterer, photographer, videographer, bakery, musicians, etc.

THE DAY BEFORE THE WEDDING
- Pamper yourself
- Rehearse ceremony with wedding party
- Get a good night’s sleep

Groom

NINE MONTHS BEFORE
- Set wedding date
- Draw up a guest list

SIX TO NINE MONTHS BEFORE
- Ask family/friends to be in the wedding
- Decide on wedding attire
- Start planning the honeymoon

FOUR TO SIX MONTHS BEFORE
- Select wedding ring for the bride
- Reserve site for rehearsal dinner
- Arrange accommodations for attendants
- Help bride with bridal registry selections
- Shop for attendants’ gifts
- Apply for passports if needed for honeymoon

TWO TO THREE MONTHS BEFORE
- Firm up honeymoon plans, final payments

FOUR TO SIX WEEKS BEFORE
- Be sure to have all blood tests & paperwork needed for obtaining marriage license
- Make necessary changes to insurance

TWO TO FOUR WEEKS BEFORE
- Apply for marriage license
- Give wedding party, close friends & family all information regarding rehearsal/rehearsal dinner

ONE WEEK BEFORE
- Give restaurant or caterer firm number for rehearsal dinner attendees
- Double check honeymoon plans
- Begin packing for honeymoon
- Attend your bachelor’s dinner

THE DAY BEFORE
- Rehearse your ceremony with bridal party & enjoy rehearsal dinner

THE DAY OF THE WEDDING
- Bring the marriage license to be signed
- Give your best man the officiant’s check to handle
- Remember to bring your bride’s ring
- Arrive an hour before the ceremony
- Have fun & congratulations
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