

# MONEY TALKS

There are no two ways about it, weddings are pricey occasions for all involved. From navigating gift lists to pay-bar politics, **Martha Alexander** finds out how both hosts and guests can avoid being funny about finances



**E**arlier this year, a story about a Canadian woman who cancelled her dream destination wedding after her guests refused to help fund it, went viral. The former bride-to-be posted a lengthy rant on her Facebook wall labelling her friends ‘snakes’ for not stumping up \$1,500 contributions. The rest of the world watched on and duly weighed in online with myriad tales of financial faux pas in matrimonial contexts.

While this case is extreme, it does serve to illustrate the importance of how money is handled where weddings are concerned – and how easily fallouts can happen if expectations of both the hosts and guests are either too high or not met.

Of course, who pays for your wedding depends on a number of factors. Some couples are in the fortunate position to

be able to stick with tradition and have the bride’s father foot the bill. Often it’s a case of both sets of the couple’s parents chipping in. Plenty of couples pay for the wedding themselves.

Should guests ever be expected to pay for someone else to get married? In a word, no. But then of course, there’s the thorny topic of pay bars – where guests must buy their own drinks.

“Where possible, it’s great to avoid a pay bar,” says etiquette expert Belinda Alexander, who acknowledges that some people are not in a position to pay for their

friends to drink all night long. “If money is short why not give the guests a welcome drink and then if funds allow, drinks for the wedding breakfast? That’s already generous and generally no one minds if they then have to buy their own drinks later.”

Alexander stresses that the most important thing when navigating finances is communication: “Guests need to know if they should bring money for the bar, so this should be included on the invitation.”

Another area that’s riddled with row potential is that of the bridesmaid’s dresses.

“I was so honoured to be asked to be

bridesmaid for one of my closest friends from school, along with three other women,” says Lauren, 33. “She showed me the dress – which was identical to the other bridesmaids’ and nothing I’d choose to wear in a million years, but as it was her wedding I’d have worn a bin-bag if she’d asked me to. But I was pretty miffed when I realised she expected me to pay for it.”

Lauren’s story’s not unusual. But there’s a pretty good rule of thumb: if as a bride you dictate what your bridesmaid wears, you really should be the one picking up the bill.

Alexander agrees: “I think the bride should pay if she wants the bridesmaids to all dress the same because let’s face it, most of them won’t wear the dress again.”

These days, most brides come to an arrangement whereby they have bridesmaids without a strict dress code – perhaps a loose colour theme, thus bypassing any awkward financial issues surrounding outfits.

Further scope for fiscal clumsiness lies with the wedding presents. Traditionally, a couple would have a gift registry – a list at a department store from which guests could buy them things for their new home. However, in recent years the nature of gifting has changed considerably, with couples requesting money for their honeymoon fund or to save for a house deposit. Is this acceptable or gauche?

“When I talk to people with children of marriageable age, they’re beginning to understand that their offspring have co-habited and for some time have been in possession of a toaster, some sheets



and towels, and a fridge freezer. They no longer need a start-up pack for their house,” says Alexander. “If you as the donor find it offensive to give money, just say you’d prefer to give something they can keep, but do try to find out what they would like; no one needs 30 photograph frames.”

However, in some cultures giving gifts of money is expected, while ‘object’ presents being met with raised eyebrows. At Jewish weddings, for example, cash in envelopes is the norm.

“Good manners is all about thinking about other people,” says Alexander. “I think for weddings of a different culture to your own, you must give what’s right for them. That is what is thoughtful. Cultural traditions are correct and should be

adhered to, wherever possible.”

However, if you’re giving cash it’s advisable to give it ahead of time, rather than run the risk of it being lost in the chaos of the celebrations. It’s totally acceptable to go off-list, especially if you want to give something you’re uniquely placed to give – such as personal artwork.

As a guest at any wedding no matter how low key, you must absolutely give a gift, it’s really cheap not to. The only exception is perhaps at a destination wedding that has involved paying for flights and hotels. As a bride and groom being married abroad, you shouldn’t hold out much expectation when it comes to receiving gifts as well as your guests’ attendance.

As Alexander says, the key to mastering the etiquette of money at weddings lies in our ability to communicate clearly and politely – in person, on invitations and on your RSVP letters. When there’s no possibility of misunderstanding, the scope for offence and fall-outs reduces massively.

Make sure all of your money matters are closed long before the big day, so everyone can focus on the main event – love! [W](#)

