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ou don't need me to point out what a miserable year this has been financially. And if you or your parents had your wedding money tied up in the stock market, dreams of an arrival in a horse-drawn carriage, caviar, a celebrity appearance, or the fireworks farewell may no longer be a reality. "Everyone is feeling the pinch, not just the bride," says wedding planner Toni DeLisi of Memorable Events in Ramsey. "Businesses are willing to work with couples as long as they're realistic."

Many of you have even postponed your weddings or put off getting engaged, but don't wait too long. DeLisi points out that what seems like a financially prudent decision by delaying your wedding until 2010 could turn New Jersey brides and grooms into pumpkins before the ball has even begun: "The problem is that there will be twice as many couples all vying for the same locations, dates, and vendors, which will ultimately drive up the cost for these services—simple supply and demand," she says. "Couples who chose to wait may be settling for something other than their dream location due to the increased demand, or they may even have to push their date to 2011."

So our advice is to go ahead and plan your wedding...the wedding you've always dreamed about, while keeping an eye on your budget with modifications here and there. And to help you plan your ideal wedding, we've asked experts from around the state, the ones who plan weddings every day, for their advice and tricks on how to keep costs down, while keeping your original vision and level of quality intact.

Perhaps the best advice of all is to "keep it simple," says Katherine Rodriguez of the Crossed Keys Inn in Andover. "Simple is not the same as cheap and will keep you in budget!" That's sage advice that we could all use in every area of our lives right now. Here's what the experts suggest:

Photographs (this page and opposite) by Black Lab Studio



A Sunday brunch wedding is a great way to reduce costs. Paul and Dina Biscione held theirs on November 11, 2008, at the Bernards Inn in Bernardsville (above and opposite).

Trim down your guest list. Cutting out even 20 guests will save you thousands. Fewer guests also means fewer linens, chairs, favors, and centerpieces to rent or purchase. —CANDICE BENSON, THE FINISHING TOUCH

Dream big: Small ideas get small results, so put budget aside while envisioning your dream wedding, then figure out what you can afford.

—COLIN CRANE

Limiting the number of types of flowers in your bouquet will be both elegant and economical.

—KATHERINE RODRIGUEZ, CROSSED KEYS INN

Keep the bridal party small, which will reduce your floral budget and eliminate the need for bridal-party gifts.

—TONI DELISI, MEMORABLE EVENTS

Hire a good photographer for the photos only, and return later to do the album. —MARIE PAPP, MARIE PAPP PHOTOGRAPHY

Celebrating your wedding during the day is a wonderful way to save. Or a Friday or Sunday night wedding will also afford you a break.

—DIANE CAIRN, THE BERNARDS INN

Consider a destination wedding: Weddings can take place anywhere, so think beyond the exotic beach and think about a B&B or country inn.

—COLIN COWIE

Hire a trolley bus instead of limos. —JEFFREY VOOK, JEFFREY VOOK PHOTOGRAPHY



RECESSION- PROOF *your wedding*

Instead of having five courses and a slew of fancy upgrades, stick to the basics and go for what's in season or local.—KISHA BARNER, PURE AMBIANCE

Use a clear glass vessel with crystals on the bottom and a jumbo gerber daisy floating in it.—KATHERINE RODRIGUEZ, CROSSED KEYS INN

Personalize and print your own paper items for the wedding.—RHONDA BASSAT-RIVERA, BRIDE IDEAS

The internet can serve as a very useful tool for wedding planning, so couples should compare costs and look for sales in this tough economy.—ROBERT HUTH, DAVID'S BRIDAL

You can book now at minimums and then enhance your menu and décor later as the economy begins to recover.—JERRY FRUNGILLO, FRUNGILLO CATERERS

Skip cutting the cake. Instead, order a small traditional cake for pictures and a large sheet cake to be served to your guests.—TURRY LEMIRE, ONE ATLANTIC

Opt for a fantastic deejay who can create great background music and just as easily keep the guests moving on the dance floor.—COLIN COWIE

Cut costs on decorating the ceremony area. The focus should be on the couple not the space.—KATHERINE RODRIGUEZ, CROSSED KEYS INN

Replace the typical floral centerpiece with a beautiful tablescape created with mirrors and candles in all sizes.—CANDICE BENSON, THE FINISHING TOUCH

Ask if your vendor offers a payment plan.—MAHE PARI, MAHE PARI PHOTOGRAPHY

Seat the maximum number of guests at each table so you don't have to order more centerpieces than you need.—TONI DELISI, MEMORABLE EVENTS

Consider fruits and/or vegetables as a part of your centerpieces, bouquets, and place-card holders. They are natural beauties and can truly add a different and unique element.—KISHA BARNER, PURE AMBIANCE

Time and time again I see Champagne being wasted for the toast. Ask those who are making toasts to say, "Raise your glass," and your guests will raise their glass with whatever they are drinking.—KATHERINE RODRIGUEZ, CROSSED KEYS INN

Invest in a trusted wedding planner: A professional is there to ease some of the pressure while bringing your vision to a reality.—COLIN COWIE

Don't eliminate video; simply eliminate all the bells and whistles from the production for now, and have it produced when you have more money.—TONI DELISI, MEMORABLE EVENTS

A four- or five-piece band can sound great.—JEFFREY VOCK, JEFFREY VOCK PHOTOGRAPHY



Sunday brunches eliminate costly bar bills, along with the need for expensive dinner entrées.



Cluster flowers of the same kind into a simple container; add votives for instant atmosphere.



Utilize decorations and furniture that already exist at your location.

...and still create the event of
your **DREAMS**
by MOLLY TULLY