

Invitations still best on paper

Trends include letterpress printing with softer colors

By Dave Sorter

The Internet has changed the way people communicate: Email is taking huge bites out of the U.S. Postal Service; video streaming is affecting how people watch television and movies; some people read books on e-readers instead of the bound, ink-on-paper volumes; and the concept of money is now largely virtual.

But one thing seems to have avoided the digital age: elegant, finely lettered and designed wedding invitations.

"People will do an (electronic invitation) for not-so-formal occasions, but not for formal events," said Cindy Spechler, owner of Dallas-based Invitation Company and an etiquette specialist. "People like to start a theme or build anticipation with the invitation. That same anticipation can't be duplicated online."

Some couples and bar/bat mitzvah parents do use the Web for some stages of the invitation/RSVP process — just not the invitation itself.

"Although the Internet is becoming a large part of the wedding planning, I do not suggest the actual wedding invitation be sent that way," said Patty Traub, owner of the Life's a Party event-planning company. "I feel it is acceptable to email the save-the-date information, accommodation information as well as any other parties their guests are invited to."

The nature of the invitations themselves have been changing, as well, with old-fashioned styles re-emerging as favorites. Even the way type is placed is reverting back to the "old days."

"People are not engraving anymore; it's too costly," Spechler said. "We're seeing more use of letterpress. It's a beautiful process; the letters are embedded into a thick, sophisticated paper."

And they might not be so busy.

"In Jewish weddings, I see more Hebrew writing on the invitation and a tendency toward more simple, classy and not-too-elaborate invitations," said Ruth Spierer, owner of Weddings and Events by Ruth. "I recommend my clients have the invitation tie together the other decor elements they choose, so it all comes together to represent them and the wedding they are planning."

Spechler added that the font used for lettering could help with the theme.

"Brides are using very ornate fonts, very scripty script," she said. "Bar and bat mitzvahs are using more block fonts and using emphasis fonts" to make the name of the celebrant more prominent.

Another trend is using a softer color for lettering, such as mocha or charcoal, instead of the basic black, Spechler said. That ink is placed on white or ivory paper, she added.

One thing that's a must, according to Traub: "Handwritten addresses are a must for weddings since lots of mailings now include mailing labels."

The design of the invitation all depends on the couple, according to Jennifer Watkins, owner of Tie a Bow party planners.

"I think the biggest trend that I am noticing is that there is not a standard set of rules anymore," Watkins said. "People are open to finding just the right invitation package that suits their taste and budget, and not necessarily sticking to the firm traditions of even just a few years ago."

A couple of other trends that Spechler sees:

- RSVP cards are often postcards, instead of including an extra envelope.

- Wedding websites continue to gain popularity and are often used for RSVPs, but a phone number, at the least, is required for those who might not be computer savvy.

- "The back of the invitation card is developing its own personality," Spechler said. Patterns and designs — often the same as the envelope lining — are being placed on those backs. Also, pockets are being put in that location that holds the reply card or travel/accommodation information.

- Save-the-date cards should be sent as soon as the date is set, up to one year before the event, and should include wording such as "formal invitation to follow." Invitations should be ordered four to six months before the event and mailed eight weeks prior. Guests should be asked to RSVP three to four weeks before the event.

Save-the-date cards and invitations are usually the first opportunity to set a tone or theme for the upcoming simcha.

"That's when the fun begins," said Laura Schindler, owner of Events Planning and Design. "I think the party begins once the invitation arrives. It sets the tone for the entire weekend. It's your first

impression and should be carried throughout the event, whether in theme, text or color."

Added Spechler: "It's really fun because the couple's personalities come out. If you do letterpress with mocha or charcoal lettering, then you don't even have to put in the dress code. You know it will be formal and elegant. But if you have colors like pinks and oranges, you'll think, 'That's the Tommy and Sue I know ... I know we'll be dancing the night away.' It's more informal but also shows their personalities."

Again, though, the celebrants don't have to begin the theme with the invitations.

"I do not necessarily feel that the invitation has to reveal the theme," Watkins said. "It is a matter of preference for the client. I have had more clients choose not to have a thematic invitation, or even choose an invitation that matches the event color scheme. With that being said, I have also seen and helped design some amazing theme invitations. Again, no rules — what the client is comfortable with and excited about is the most important thing to me."

Cost is an important factor, which has some people going to online sources to order. Spechler's company helps reduce the cost by giving a 30 percent discount on everything. Some couples save money by having no envelope lining.

Cost can range from \$500 to \$3,000 and more, depending how many sets are ordered and how elaborate they are. And that's before postage.

"I tell my clients to select an invitation that reflects who they are and the kind of wedding they wish to have," Spierer said. "Budget is also going to determine the kind of invitation one may choose."

Finally, many couples are choosing to create a special stamp, logo or monogram to use throughout the event, Spechler said. That design can be used on invitations, the event program, the thank-you cards — even with the lighting. For example, the logo could be projected onto the dance floor during the bride and groom's first dance.

One advantage of that service: "The celebrant usually keeps the plate (off which the logo is printed)," Spechler said. So, for example, it can make its return at the 25th anniversary party.

There is one piece of advice that fits all couples and simchas celebrants, all the planners said, with Spechler saying it most succinctly:

"Plan ahead, plan ahead, plan ahead."

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