

Frocks that rock



1. Cotton-mix, £60, Oasis; 0845 899 0009
2. Silk, £85, Mint Velvet at House of Fraser; 0845 602 1073
3. Silk, £110, Kalkr; 01582 399809
4. Silk, £325, Libelula; 07966 583238
5. Linen, £129, Hobbs; 0845 313 3130
6. Silk, £425, Suzannah; 020 7286 8280
7. Silk, £150, Whistles; 0845 899 1222
8. Chiffon, £1,825, Donna Karan at net-a-porter.com
9. Silk, £125, Jaeger; 0845 051 0063

Sail forth into wedded (and wardrobe) bliss

The going-away outfit is a bride's chance to kick back. Celia Walden savours designing her own to wear after her wedding to Piers Morgan

Tradition doesn't do women many favours on their wedding day. Once you've decided which gown is the least unflattering – white or cream, rigid satin columns or great tulle puffs – there's still the alarming bridal footwear and princess headgear to negotiate. Small wonder that a growing number of women are now more excited by the "going-away dress" than the wedding gown itself.

Besides the relief of slipping into something less constrained and more personalised at the end of the day's formalities, it's the romantic symbolism of the going-away dress that appeals most. Representing transition and the start of a new life (which is why, historically, a horseshoe, anchor or sailboat pattern often featured), the dress the bride dons as she departs on honeymoon with her new husband is the first piece of the (sadly defunct) bride's "trousseau" to get an airing, a tradition which peppers the works of Gustave Flaubert, Anton Chekhov and Edith Wharton.

"The fun of the going-away dress is that it can be as expressive and exotic as you like, and in any colour, shape, or material," says designer Allegra Hicks. That used to be true in the 1800s, too, when the dress could be made from a variety of luxurious fabrics, and was often accompanied by an embroidered jacket

Directoire coat (fitted under the bust, falling loosely below) in silk or satin. But from 1918 until the late Seventies, the dress or suit was pared down to a more austere design, the keynotes of which were simplicity and durability.

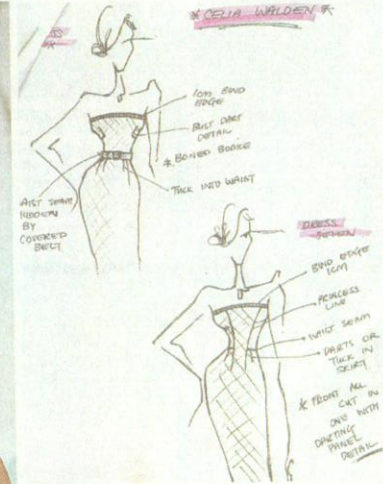
An etiquette guide written in 1922 states that the bride should "choose her going-away dress according to the journey she is to make. If she is starting off in an open motor, she wears a suitably small motor hat and a wrap of some sort. If she is going on a train or boat, she wears a 'travelling' dress, such as she would choose under ordinary circumstances. She should not dress as though she is about to join a circus parade or the ornaments on a Christmas tree, unless she wants to be stared at and commented upon in a way that no one of good breeding can endure."

Tempting as it is to drive off at the end of my wedding day in circus attire, and having tried in vain to secure a small motor hat, I opted to design my own going-away dress, with the help of Designer Alterations, a dressmaking service favoured by the likes of Elle Macpherson and Jemima Khan.

Having selected a vintage-inspired damson and cream Liberty sailboat-print fabric, I head down to the company's Batterssea offices, where head dressmaker Minnie Ee Gin takes my measurements and asks me to describe the dress



Hand-drawn designs: Celia is fitted for her going-away dress, thought out by her 'to the last stitch' (inset)



style three-quarter-length number – I have tailored in my head down to the last stitch. A few days later, a selection of hand-drawn designs land at my door, and I am able to decide on every last detail, from the built-in corsetry and lining, to the piping and front, back or side slits. After a lifetime of stylistic compromise (most women will agree that not a single item in their wardrobe is without a niggler), being able to customise a dress as one might a wedding gown, only with the knowledge that it will be worn again, is bliss. "Because weddings have become so much more about the gown, the going-away dress can be like a second wedding dress, only much more affected by current trends," says Astrid Joss, the shopping editor of *Brides*

magazine. "In the Sixties, people went for that *Breakfast at Tiffany's* look with a high-collared neck. In the Seventies you had big sleeves. Nowadays, women who don't have one made might go for a Temperley dress or whatever else is 'in' and practical. You'd look ridiculous in a wedding dress at Heathrow, but something not too far removed from the elegance of the day with a matching cover-up needs to be chosen for those who plan to escape immediately afterwards."

Hicks's spring/summer 2010 collection has a selection of lengths and shapes, as do Libelula (a label created by Sophie Cranston, who worked with Alice Temperley). On the high street, Oasis and Jigsaw have tailored designs with matching shrugs or jackets.

Celebrities, so often templates for such trends, are rarely spotted in their GADs, unless sold in a package to a glossy magazine. However, Grace Kelly was pictured in her going-away outfit of a two-piece suit, gloves and hairpiece, while Princess Diana wore a customised pink ensemble by David Sassoon of Belville Sassoon as she and Prince Charles headed to the Mountbatten family home in Hampshire.

While the resurgence of the going-away dress will be welcomed by most women, a more worrying wedding trend may be afoot. "In our metrosexual world, it's very possible that men's going-away outfits will be the next thing," cautions Joss. Which may be where the circus attire comes in.

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