

Calendar

History Says "I Do"

Historical Wedding Attire



Elizabethan Renaissance



German Medieval



Italian Renaissance

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The bride who chooses a theme wedding probably knew from when she was six years old that she didn't want a traditional dress," says Diane Barr of Oceanside, designer of historical wedding attire. "She knew she wanted Cinderella or Marie Antoinette or whatever it might be. It struck a chord in her soul."

Barr draws on her knowledge of 1500 years of bridal-fashion history, "from medieval through the 1910s," to create these clothes, which she hesitates to

call costumes. "Historically, 'costume' meant 'ensemble,' the fashion of the era." A costume was simply what a woman wore. In our contemporary world a costume is considered a bizarre alter attire. I don't create that. I don't do Halloween. What I create is accurate, authentic, and documented by research. I sleep with my books," says Barr, whose current bedfellows are volumes for wedding clothes from the pre-World War I era.

Rose D'Zynes, as Barr calls her business, outfits grooms as well as brides. The guy can't show up in a boring tux if his betrothed is decked out as Guinevere, can he? Bridesmaids and other wedding-party members may also want to be dressed in kind. Barr can outfit guests, too, if they're game.

She sells outright, and she rents.

Either way, she has learned to include instructions. "Some don't know whether the bustle or the petticoat goes on first. One bride wore an entire Elizabethan thing backwards, because she had seen movies where it laced up the front instead of the back." What her customer didn't realize was that a noblewoman's bodice is back-laced, while a peasant's is necessarily front-laced, since peasants lack ladies-in-waiting to help with those laces. Barr doesn't have a peasant in her repertoire. "Some women feel free to be wenches. I prefer to work in brocade and velvets. I don't like working in woolens. Life is too short to be a peasant."

Though Hollywood foiled the backwards bride, films have helped to create demand for Barr. "When a movie with period costumes occurs, I have to go see it, because I'll start getting requests."

She mentions *Maverick* and *Tombstone*, whose Western themes have inspired clients to order frock coats for their grooms. *Braveheart* and *Robin Hood* have motivated others' imaginings. She can understand Scotland's appeal, but questioned Sherwood Forest's. "I said, 'What do you want? Kevin Costner wore a rag around his neck in Robin Hood.' But you see, it's a feeling they want. It's not the clothing. Creating your dream — that's where I come from."

Until seven years ago, Barr would have described herself as "primarily a seamstress." She had "spent a lot of years sewing things, doing community theater

and work for the Society for Creative Anachronisms." Then, at age 50, she went into the bridal-consulting business after designing the clothes for her own wedding with an Italian-Renaissance theme.

Distinguishing between Italian and Elizabethan Renaissance, she says, "Italian can be more flattering. Although it still compresses the bosom, it has a shorter waist." For reference, see the movie *Ever After*, she suggests. Elizabethan, by contrast, has a long pointy waist. "That's *Shakespeare in Love*."

"Italian can make large women look very beautiful," says Barr, who speaks from experience, having herself been a size-20 bride.

Large brides and small ones. Older brides and young ones. Alaskan brides who wanted to be Victorians. Ones from New Jersey and Illinois. Barr has dressed many sorts of brides, but not a San Diegan.

"San Diego has never bought me, not in seven years." Not a single wedding? "One, maybe. But that was really early. A little biker couple came in. They were part of the beginning of Gothic. And they bought me for the man. And then I had one other couple almost to the altar, and they cancelled for personal reasons two weeks before."

The trouble is, San Diegans are "do-it-yourselfers," Barr says. They are also conservative. "Daughters of engineers and retired military, they don't

think in terms of theme weddings."

Maybe they'll change their minds Monday evening, when Barr gives a presentation sponsored by the San Diego Creative Stitchery Guild. Her talk will be illustrated with samples worn by models and mannequins. One creation she will show was inspired by the movies made from Jane Austen's novels (*Emma*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*). Another was on the cover of *Philadelphia Bride Magazine*. It's a recreation of Princess Diana's white, beaded, so-called Elvis Dress, with the high collar. "I don't do contemporary gowns, unless it's for family," says Barr, but she felt that this reproduction was an appropriate job for her, "because Diana had already passed away. She already was a historical personage."

Barr rarely attends the weddings she wardrobes. "It's not the place I want to be. The frantic energy that occurs before a wedding is like the frantic energy that occurs before a theater production. I'm a good audience, but once I got caught between the cast and the dressing room, and I think they trampled me."

— Jeanne Schinto

Presentation by Diane Barr
"Designer of Dreams Come True"
Monday, May 8, 7:00 p.m.
University Towne Centre
Forum Hall
Fee: \$5
Info: 760-753-7896