

Britain's not-so-blushing brides

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Although the number of marriages is falling, the value of the traditional wedding dress market grew by some 18% between 2000 and 2005 to reach Â£112 million. Meanwhile the amount spent by brides on outfits that are not specifically designed for their wedding day (the non-traditional market) stayed constant at just Â£3 million.

What is more, the average price of a traditional gown is now an extravagant Â£826, up by an impressive 32% since the start of the millennium, when the average spend was just Â£625. And while non-traditional wedding outfits are gaining popularity the average price has fallen 18% over the same period to Â£175, just a fifth of that spent on the traditional dresses.

In line with this more flamboyant approach to weddings, MINTEL's exclusive consumer research shows that in the everchanging wedding market the desire for a traditional gown is a clear constant. Indeed, although some 46% of women say that 'weddings have become too commercial and expensive', over half of these ladies still hanker after a traditional dress. Similarly, of the one in three (27%) women who 'want a simple and inexpensive wedding', the customary white dress remains an essential, with half desiring one on their special day.

"The market for wedding dresses is more often than not led by emotion and aspiration rather than rational decisions and financial constraints. As such designers continue to persuade more brides to trade up to increasingly expensive and luxurious dresses so pushing up the average price of a traditional dress. While there has been a general decline in the number of people choosing to get married, Britain's brides are clearly happy to splash out ever more cash on what for many will be the focal point of any fairytale wedding," comments Claire Birks, senior market analyst at MINTEL.

Overall, MINTEL estimates that the market for wedding dresses was worth Â£115 million in 2005, a rise of 17% compared with sales in 2000.

Although the non-traditional bridalwear sector is set to grow 37% by 2010, the value of the market will only just top the Â£4 million mark. Meanwhile, over the same period the value of the traditional dress market will continue to rise, and is estimated to reach as much as Â£126 million (a rise of 12%), so holding on to the vast majority of the bridalwear market for the foreseeable future.

"The outlook for the bridalwear market appears good, helped by the availability of low cost loans and the fact that couples are now prepared to borrow money to fund the big occasion. Additionally, more and more people are delaying their weddings until their late 20s or early 30s, which means that when couples do get married they are likely to be better off," explains Claire Birks.

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