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The Bride Wore Red

These brides **ditch tradition** and make their wedding day a canvas of the unexpected.



BY SOFIA VOLTIN

“WHEN I FIRST STARTED looking for a wedding dress, I thought I’d be wearing white,” Courtney Marie Sonia, 28, says. By the time she married Robert Vaughn Gray in Georgetown, Maine, she was wearing a dark teal wedding gown, originally marketed as a bridesmaid dress by Alfred Angelo. “After trying on many white, cream, and ivory dresses, I came to the conclusion that I don’t really look that great in such a pale color! I’d already shirked tradition by choosing not to have a diamond engagement ring—I opted for green tourmaline and emerald instead. So I thought maybe I could just keep on going down the non-traditional road.”

This Western tradition of the white bridal gown is relatively new. In many cultures around the world, red, yellow, even black are customary. (Red is prominent in India and China, and Spanish brides will often wear black.) While there were occasions of famous historical brides

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wearing white dresses, it was Queen Victoria who really got the trend going with her Protestant marriage to Prince Albert in 1840. Before this, even though brides did wear white on occasion, it was more common to wear blue, black, or whatever color their best dress happened to be. White dresses didn't represent the virginity or purity of the bride but rather the wealth and status of the bride's family. White dresses were expensive and nearly impossible to keep clean. They were impractical. So if you wore a white dress, it meant your family had money to burn. Romantic, no?

Averyl Hill, 50, is the writer behind the blog "Simple Living New England." She married Wayne Johnson in September at St. Ann's church in Kennebunkport—wearing a navy dress with hand beading, reminiscent of the flapper era. "This is a second marriage for both of us. I wanted a vintage-inspired wedding dress because, as I like to say, I'm outdated by design. But as a fifty-year-old bride, I didn't want to wear a dress designed for someone in her twenties getting married for the first time. White isn't a flattering color for me, anyway."

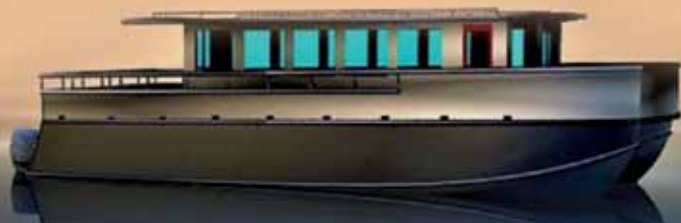
The association we still carry that the white wedding dress is for a young bride again stems from those prim Victorian ideals. Women's magazines played a key role in recasting the white wedding dress from an indication of wealth to a badge of innocence and virginity. Most notably, *Godey's Lady's Book* claimed that white was, and had always been, the "most fitting hue" for a bride as "an emblem of the purity and innocence of girlhood" in an 1849 issue. Yikes!



Joan Crawford, married four times herself, stars as Anni, a nightclub singer, in *The Bride Wore Red* (1937). Anni finds herself thrust into the glitz and glamour of the wealthy but must soon choose between love and money.

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


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The white dress did have some new practical benefits for the Victorian age. The rise of photography led to wedding portraits, and the white dress stood out in the muted black-and-white and sepia photographs. Ashley Jardim owns She of the Woods, a Maine wedding and elopement photography company. “While white is such an easy color to photograph, and it looks perfect in any environment, I absolutely love working with brides who go the non-traditional route and wear a color that has more meaning to them. Brides who wear non-white dresses tend to have more personalized weddings in every way—usually more intimate and artistic.”

Amy McCarthy, the digital marketing coordinator and senior sales consultant at Andrea’s Bridal in Portland, says, “It’s still a pretty small percentage of women who opt out of the traditional ivory or champagne wedding dress. We’ve noticed a recent influx of black dresses or black with lace detailing. I think a lot of it depends on the venue



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and vibe of the wedding. These brides...feel a full ivory dress and a long train would not fit with the venue and [vibe] they're going for at their wedding."

There's no denying that the white or ivory dress remains the iconic image of the Western bride. "A lot of women do choose white or ivory because of tradition," McCarthy says. "They still get married in churches and walk down the aisle. Some people just want to feel bridal and have that big moment."

"I think that white dresses are beautiful, but I hope women realize they have a choice. White is just a fashion trend, after all," Sonia says. "You should do what feels right for yourself and your partner. Your family and friends, your wedding planner, and your vendors may have opinions on the subject, but it's not their wedding." Are there matters to redress if you pick a red dress? "Some people expressed apprehension about the choices we were making, but in the end, it all worked out beautifully. Everyone had a wonderful time." ■

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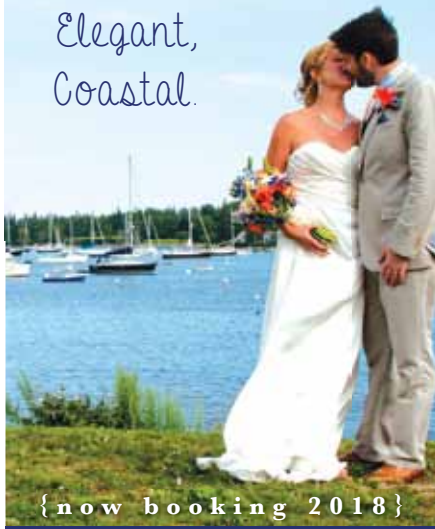
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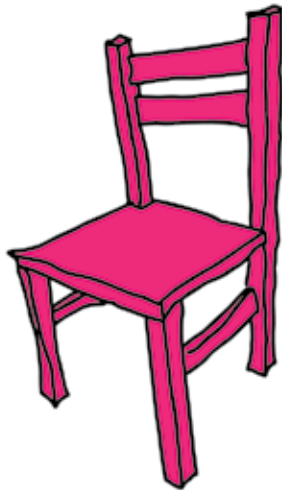


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