



# Tense wedding tales

From outrageous requests to tearful brides, agitated family members and ill-omens, wedding planners have seen it all. **MEERA MURUGESAN** finds out the lengths they go through to make someone's day special.

**P**ICTURE this. You're at a wedding and you have to handle everything from hostile relatives and a crying bride to sulky flower girls and complaining guests. And the irony? Well, you're not even a member of the family.

Welcome to the world of wedding planners. They're not even on the guest list but it's their behind-the-scenes work that is so important. After all, the event may be joyful but it can also bring out the worst in people.

"Weddings are stressful and that is precisely why many couples rely on wedding planners these days," said Leticia Hsu from Events Wizard Son Bhd.

Having been in the industry since 2001, Hsu has seen her share of drama and last-minute hitches on the eventful day.

"No matter how well you plan, there will be something extra the family wants or some last-minute problems to fix. Anyone who thinks this is a glamorous job better think again," she said.

Wedding planners wear many hats, taking the roles of counsellor, confidante (to the bride), butler, seamstress, florist and even babysitter.

Unlike wedding planners in the

West, Asian wedding planners have the added challenge of dealing with customs and rituals which must be followed and ill omens that have to be avoided at all costs.

At one Chinese wedding, Hsu was told to get two live chickens — a hen and a rooster — and keep them under the marriage bed until the couple entered the room.

The chicken which came out first when the couple entered was supposed to indicate the sex of their first-born.

"Do you know how difficult it is to restrain two squawking chickens under a bed?" in the end, both chickens came running out together," said Hsu, laughing.

Many couples are also influenced by romantic images of weddings from movies and they want to emulate such scenes to the letter without realising how difficult it can be, said Hsu.

Couples who wait doves released on their wedding day, for example, may not be aware of just how "unconventional" the birds can be.

"They're more likely to fly out, make a U-turn and head for the buffet line rather than fly gracefully into the sky," said Hsu, smiling.

Hsu (left) and Chang are always prepared to take on the unexpected.



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Leticia Hsu of Events Wizard Son Bhd.

And when last minute problems crop up, wedding planners pull out the tissues and prepare to calm tearful brides and agitated family members.

One bride, added Hsu, went for a facial a week before the wedding and ended up badly scalded when the beautician used hot water in an attempt to extract blackheads from her face.

The injured area turned a deep maroon by the wedding day. Hsu had to rise in a good mood and to cover it up while reassuring the panicky bride.

Sometimes, couples make such outrageous requests but are not willing to spend, said Cindy Chang, creative planner of Hugs & Such, which specialises in destination weddings.

One couple wanted a wedding in Bali at a five-star hotel with everything thrown in for just RM35,000.

"Can you imagine pulling that off? But when we're talking people that, they say we are being difficult or are only interested in the big clients," said Chang.

And even if wedding planners sort matters out for the couples, there are the relatives to contend with.

"There's always an aunt or an uncle who are not on good terms with each other and won't sit next to each other. Or it could be a large group of people who suddenly turn up, with masts and children in tow. Malaysian don't believe in RSVP said Chang.

Sometimes the stress of the wedding can cause the couple to break up.

Endless arguments over preparations and the guest list bring out the worst in some couples and they end up calling off their wedding.

Others break up, only to return to the same wedding planner a few months later to plan another wedding with a new partner.

"Every time we meet a couple, do wonder whether that relationship will stand the strain of the wedding. Sadly, some do not," said Chang.

Amu Kohlan, a wedding planner with over 20 years of experience, has seen her share of problematic couples.

Some couples actually go through with the wedding but break up a few weeks or months later and their once-cherished wedding photos remain uncollected in the wedding planner's office.

"It's sad but they marry for all the wrong reasons. As a wedding

planner, sometimes you're there as a shoulder to cry on," said Amu, who runs Amu's Academy of Bliss and Beauty.

Amu has handled her share of last minute hitches, from priests and wedding cars that never make it to in-laws in conflict over ill omens.

One bride fractured her leg on the eve of the wedding after an accident while delivering last minute invitations. Despite having her leg in a cast and being in pain, it was too late to call off the Hindu wedding.

"We somehow managed to fix her same and get her ready. She could hardly move and the poor girl was in so much pain that the priest had to cut short the ceremony," said Amu.

As a wedding planner, one has to go to great lengths to iron out problems, because nothing should spoil the happy day for the couple, she explained.

Amu once had to convince a goldsmith to deliver a new "Thai" Hindu wedding chain at short notice after the bride's family refused to accept the original one from the groom's side following a death in his family shortly before the wedding.

"Problems will always crop up but the key wedding planner will tell you, no matter how challenging the problem, knowing you are missing someone's day, special keeps you going," said Amu.

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Couples naturally want the picture perfect wedding.



Amu believes wedding planners must go that extra mile for their clients.

Making your happy day special takes a lot of effort, for their clients.