



A Cambodian model wearing a wedding gown by That Special Occasion which was featured at the soiree.

Wedding wizards

Should you handle the arrangements for your Big Day all on your own or do you get a wedding planner to help? Two wedding coordinators shed some light on their duties and what to look for if you decide to hire one.

By OLIVIA LEE
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EVERY girl has probably day-dreamed about her wedding day – her beautiful dress, her hair and makeup and, of course, her Prince Charming standing at the end of the aisle.

What she probably wouldn't have paid so much attention to is the nitty-gritty: the venue, decoration, flowers, wedding cake, entertainment ... the list is endless.

So when a girl gets engaged, the panic usually sets in. Where does she begin? Can she do it on her own or should she engage some help to ensure her dream of a perfect day is realised?

Over the years, wedding planners or coordinators have become increasingly popular and most couples headed for matrimony would have contemplated hiring

them at one point or another.

A big plus point in working with a wedding planner is that it offers you an extra set of hands. That can take away some of the stress as a planner can walk you through the process and help you make sure you get what you want.

The downside, of course, is the cost. You also have to ensure you pick the right coordinator or you might end up debating over every detail.

Malaysians Eileen Lui and Leticia Hsu, each with their own companies that deal with nuptials, describe their roles as offering "a helping hand".

"Hiring a wedding planner ensures deadlines and budgets are scrutinised and followed carefully. It also eliminates the stress and worry of having to deal with different suppliers.

"It ensures that the couple and their families get to fully enjoy



A tube pleated A-line wedding gown made of satin. Also by That Special Occasion.

Currently, AWP has 25 members, consisting of wedding planners, service providers (like photographers, florists, hair and makeup artists), product providers (cake, favours, stationary), venue providers and related industry partners (travel, finance, website developers).

"We are professionals and want to be treated and recognised as such. The stringent criteria in membership application ensures only the best are accepted, so AWP becomes a pool of credible vendors," Hsu explains.

Any complaints from clients will be dealt with and a vendor who receives more than three complaints will have his membership terminated.

Hsu says: "A client can always check with AWP on the vendor's credibility, reliability or for their portfolio and testimonies. We want to protect the industry and by doing so, we are also protecting the clients' interest."

As for response to AWP, Liu says: "I wouldn't be so bold as to say that everybody is supportive of the association. There are some who think, 'Oh it's Leticia and Eileen. Who are they?' But we are very very confident

that the association is for the benefit of the members."

Membership fee is RM500 per annum, and members get to share trends with similar industries in other countries as well as attend workshops, seminars and courses.

Spreading their wings

They may be competitors but Hsu and Liu both recognised an ability to work together during events so they created The Wedding Planners in Phnom Penh, this year.

"We are able to discuss, brainstorm, share resources, ideas and trends," Hsu says during an interview at the high-end Restaurant 112, housed in a charming colonial villa in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, last month.

Liu adds: "We are comfortable and confident with our work styles and since this is a small industry, it will only serve us better to work together rather than against each other. We have more to gain and so will our clients."

Liu saw a market for their services in Phnom Penh and proposed the idea to Hsu, who was agreeable to

setting up shop there.

"Wedding planning is almost unheard of here. During the wedding season (from November to April), an average of 50 to 60 weddings can take place on an average day," Liu tells.

And a majority of the weddings are done in the same style.

"If you're a guest at more than one, you'll see the same style, same decoration, same design, same colour (scheme). We want to bring something new, fresh and different whilst still respecting the Khmer traditions," Liu states.

The ladies are optimistic that the locals are ready to accept new ideas but they believe it may take them some time to convince couples to hire someone to plan their big day. Once their business takes off, Liu and Hsu plan to offer their services in Vietnam and Laos.

So is planning someone else's wedding really worth the effort?

"When you're at a wedding and someone comes up and thanks you, it really is a nice feeling. That makes it worth it. That's what keeps us going," Hsu concludes.



ប្រូម៉ែលេសជាដំបូងពេលវេលាគ្រួសារធ្វើផ្លូវដំបូងសិរសម្រាប់ការងារថ្មីនិងសំខាន់របស់អ្នកហើយ....

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Business partners Leticia Hsu (left) and Eileen Liu.

this important event to the fullest," explains Hsu.

She says a couple can plan their own wedding, but often, they don't have the time, expertise or know-how.

"Like if you tell me you want petals to fall as you walk down the aisle, all you have to do is tell me how much you're willing to spend. I'll figure out the technicalities, logistics and make sure the petals flow down in a soft flowy motion," says Hsu.

Liu adds: "The bride is supposed to enjoy herself. Our job is to make sure she doesn't fret and that everything is well-coordinated."

And what about the budget? Both Lui and Hsu advise a couple to spend within their means. They both charge a minimum of RM5,000 per wedding but say some brides have "unrealistic expectations" of what they can do with their budget.

"They build castles in the sky and when they realise their budgets do not meet that vision, they will pout," says Hsu.

"Being on a tight budget doesn't mean you cannot have a beautiful wedding. There are many ways to make it memorable although there may be sacrifices you will have to make. But you will still have your dream wedding," shares Hsu.

What's important is that first meeting between the wedding planner and couple. There are no

obligations and you may ask all the questions you need. Think of it as an interview.

"The couple has to feel comfortable with us because we'll be your best friend for the next few months. Money and reputation (of a coordinator) aside, you need to see whether you click and whether the styles proposed are suitable," Hsu adds.

Check before you hire

Lui, who is forty-something and currently based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, is the founder of Nupts & Such Malaysia and the editor of *Journeys for Two*, a wedding magazine for the chic and stylish. She plans "destination weddings" – nuptials in exotic settings – and has planned such events in Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam and Indonesia.

Hsu, 30, is founder of Events Wizards Malaysia (AWP), an organisation created to set industry standards and curb price wars and shoddy services. For those tying the knot, this ensures a higher quality of products and services and reliable, professional vendors.

Both ladies have been in the industry since 2001 and began as event organisers.

Last year, they formed The Association of Wedding Professionals Malaysia (AWP), an organisation created to set industry standards and curb price wars and shoddy services. For those tying the knot, this ensures a higher quality of products and services and reliable, professional vendors.

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