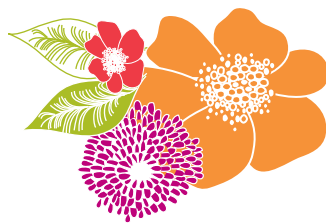


good indian girls do design!



For nearly a decade I worked with excited brides and grooms (and their families) to custom design wedding invitations, announcements and save-the-date cards. My job was a whirlwind, working on 40 to 50 weddings a year, often seeing couples more than once when they returned to me for birth announcements and anniversary parties. What I found was most helpful with clients was offering advice, a helping hand, a sympathetic ear. I learned a lot about wedding planning, mostly through the mistakes made and horror stories relayed.

The following is a guideline of things to concern yourself when ordering invitations. My best advice is to plan early, whether you are making your own invitations or ordering them from a specialty printer. Your invitations are important, they set the tone for the event ahead whether it's a formal engraved cotton stock from France or a funky packet-style that you made yourself. Beautiful invitations come in all colors and styles and paper choices and envelopes. What they have in common is a style of etiquette that simply cannot be made up.

Invitation Do's

Order Extras. Your invitation supplier should remind you of this and one hopes they threw a few more envelopes in the box, but chances are they won't and they don't. If a box says 100, the count is pretty exact. I suggest ordering at least as many extra invitations as guests left on the "maybe" lists, typically 25 to 50 extra. You'll want to squander away a dozen for keepsakes and a few extra will likely go out because of incorrectly addressed envelopes being returned to you. Then there are the last minute invites and a few friends you just met that simply have to attend because you know you'll be friends forever. Order extra. Trust me, it's cheaper now than after the printing is done when an extra 20 will cost you an additional fee equivalent to half your budget.

Allow plenty of time. Start thinking of invitations immediately, get cost estimates, design samples, color swatches and choose a designer/printer early. Even before you have all the details. This is especially important if you want custom invitations. Many invitation companies can initially work with tentative details, printing up mock samples so any corrections can be done to the color or style. All companies will charge you rush fees if you wait until the last minute, it's a nightmare and a headache to avoid. Plus, it takes longer than you thought to address envelopes whether you're doing it yourself or you've hired a calligrapher.

Check Postage. As soon as you have a sample of the invitation, including the envelopes, reply card, map, and all extras you should take this to the post office to have it weighed for postage. If you cannot get all the printed elements of your invitation, get similar card stock and sizes from your printer to have an accurate weight so you buy the correct postage. When you mail the invitations, it's much easier to stamp them in your clean and relaxed home atmosphere (trust me), saving the international cards for when you arrive at the post office for their individual country rates to be applied. Know this: all square invitations will require extra postage as will cards larger than 6x8 inches. Visit www.usps.com for additional information and to view current stamp designs.

And...

Think about where you want responses sent. Consider who will be dealing with caterers or seating and will need accurate and up-to-date counts. Typically this is either you, a member of your family or a member of his.

Use the correct names of your guests, even if it means calling your best friend to find out who she is currently dating and why the last one is over. Use the correct titles for names, The Reverend, The Honorable, Miss or Ms. When in doubt, ask.

Double check spelling, dates and times. And have someone double check your proofreading, too.

Invitation Don'ts

Registry or Gift Information. It is in extremely poor taste to include any registry or gift information in an invitation - wedding, party or otherwise. Leave it up to your guests to ask and inform your family & attendants where you've registered.

"No Gifts." Often a bride or groom will feel like they have everything, whether it's a second marriage or a merging of two complete households. Telling your guests you don't want gifts is unacceptable, letting your family and attendants know to tell guests who inquire is within etiquette guidelines. Same goes for charitable donations and such. Good intentions, surely, but inform with tact.

"No Children." I know this can be a big deal to a bride who expects her day to be free from the wailing of a child, I completely understand. However, printing "Adults Only" or similar on the invitation is not the way to go. If you wish to invite specific members of a household, print each name on the envelope, the way an invitation is addressed, whether on the inner or outer envelope, indicates exactly who is, or is not, invited. If the whole family shows up, there is nothing you can do but smile.

And...

Don't invite your second tier of guests less than three weeks before the wedding or you risk hurt feelings.

It is unnecessary to put "alcohol free" or "cash bar" on the invitation. It is a wedding, not a cocktail party. Your guests should understand and be prepared to purchase their own beverages if that is the case.

Don't underestimate the time it will take to get your invitations back from the printer. Plan accordingly, even if it means nailing down the time of the wedding despite your mother's protest that she can't decide between three and four o'clock.