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“My job is to help them zero in on what reflects their style and spirit.”

ARLENE CRONK, STATIONER



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STATIONERY | THE LADY OF NOTE

Invitations are just paper, right? Wrong. Local stationer Arlene Cronk explains why the right design makes all the difference.

BY TERRI TRESPICIO

AN INVITATION is just another letter like a wedding gown is just another dress. And as with your attire, the process of finding the right one can be fraught with challenges. Why is such a little thing so important? According to Arlene Cronk, a 20-year industry veteran who owns Invitations & Company in the city, it marks the start of the wedding itself. "This is where the excitement begins," she says. "You want people to say, 'There's no way I'm missing this!'" Here, she explains how to pick the right combination of pieces without driving yourself bonkers. >>



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EXPERTS | STATIONERY

It seems like a simple thing: You let people know you're getting married, and they say whether they're coming. But what else can an invitation accomplish?

The best invitations reflect the soul of the couple—and the style of the wedding itself. If it's a Saturday night at the Boston Harbor Hotel or the Four Seasons, you don't want the casual-looking invite you'd use for a beach wedding. Otherwise there's a disconnect, like wearing sneakers with a ball gown.

When should you start thinking about wedding invitations? As soon as you get engaged?

It's best to visit a stationer about six to seven months before the wedding. Save-the-date cards need to go out six to nine months in advance, and invites should go out eight weeks prior to the event—six weeks at the very latest.

How long does it usually take for couples to find *the one*?

Don't expect to get it squared away during your lunch break. Give yourself a few hours to browse, and take some time afterward to think about it. I worked with one couple for six months to create an invitation in three different languages that featured an original oil painting of the couple created by the groom. Obviously, that took some time and planning.

But most stationers have books and books of invitation designs! How do you narrow down the choices quickly?

I ask couples what kinds of things appeal to them, what wedding invitations they've seen and liked (or didn't). The conversation can go beyond stationery; I might even ask what type of furniture they like. My job is to help them zero in on what reflects their style and spirit.

Are people still sending confetti in a tube? What are today's hot styles?

Ha! Well, it used to be white or cream with formal script and centered text—end of story. But color is big today. Chocolate brown and light blue were very popular a few years ago, then chocolate and pink, then lavender. Now, instead of chocolate, we're seeing gray and taupe with an accent color. Black-and-white brocade is hot now, too—it's a vintage, damask look.



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EXPERTS | STATIONERY

Custom is also big. Today's couples
want something that's one-of-a-kind.

What requests get your eyes rolling?

I try not to jump out of my seat when a couple tell me they want to do an RSVP postcard instead of one with an envelope. I tell them that if someone wants to send their regrets, they may also want to send a check. They usually go with the envelope.

What makes a high-end invite worth more money?

It could be the printing method: Engraving and letterpress are more expensive. The quality of the paper, the ink color, a custom envelope, design time—those all affect price. So do embellishments like silk, ribbon, or crystals, because of the cost of materials and the labor involved.

When is it worth it to splurge?

The invite is the first thing people see. If you're having a high-end wedding, you want to set the right tone.

If clients are torn between invitations, how do you break the tie?

Sometimes the bride will ask her groom, "Which do you prefer?" And I jump in and ask how important the invites are to each of them on a scale of 1 to 10. If he thinks they're a 1 and she thinks they're a 10, it's clear who should have more say in the decision.

Any tips for filling up the room without over-inviting?

Some couples have an A list and a B list of invitees, meaning if they get regrets, they'll send out more invitations. If you go that route, don't make the RSVP date too early, or else the person invited late will know it. Date the RSVP card four weeks in advance of the wedding so you'll have more leeway.

Ever worry about competition from Web-based DIY services?

There are clear advantages to working with a professional: They know the etiquette, and they know the printers. Sure, people may go online to do housewarming invites, but weddings? I don't lose sleep over it.

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