

Your wedding dress – store it or sell it?

Your wedding dress has been chosen with such love and affection that it would be a tragic shame to store it without consideration or care, which may lead to damage or deterioration over a period of time. It may become stained or discoloured and suffer permanent creasing and be spoilt forever which would be a terrible loss if you had hoped to hand it down as a family heirloom!

Storing your wedding dress

Joy Hepworth, proprietor of Memory Boxes in Nottingham, says: 'In our throwaway society it is important to try to preserve the past and I consider it very important to have memories to treasure and pass down to future generations.'

Factors that will affect the condition of the dress

Light: Direct exposure to both artificial and natural light can hinder the longevity of fabrics. Ultraviolet light is the most damaging type and causes the greatest degree of damage in the shortest time.

Temperature/humidity: These environmental factors are interconnected. Extremes in both temperature and humidity (moisture levels) can cause permanent damage. Moisture will encourage bacteria and insects and cause water staining on silk, and mould growth will occur when humidity levels are very high. If the temperature fluctuates fabrics can become discoloured.

Pests: Moths are a well-known hazard to garments, as are beetles, silverfish and mice.

Poor cleaning: If the gown has not been cleaned to a sufficiently high standard, stains such as perfume, perspiration, make-up and wine will create permanent marks.

Bad handling: The storage of gowns on hangers is not recommended. The dress may become misshapen and metal or wood hangers may increase acid pollution. Never hang the dress in a plastic slip cover as this is the worst medium for the wedding gown. The plastic chemicals react with the fabric causing excessive yellowing and tarnishing of white gowns and fading of coloured fabrics – the plastic is also a trap for moisture.

Wooden chests: Those made from natural wood have high acid content and will cause rapid deterioration and discoloration.

Acid-free storage boxes: Many suppliers will provide acid-free storage containers for wedding dresses. However, be wary of the styles which are decorated, printed or covered in fibrous paper, as this may eventually seep through into your dress. Also, do not use any colour other than white acid-free tissue to wrap the dress with; never blue or black. The box should protect against light and dust to reduce any risk of contamination.

Travel boxes: These boxes for carrying the wedding dress are lined with acid-free unbuffered (untreated) tissue to keep the gown in tip top condition until you safely reach your destination. They are specifically designed to fit comfortably in the overhead compartments of airplanes, so that brides are able to keep their precious garment with them at all times. They can even be made to fit the airline compartments that do not conform to a standard measurement.

These boxes are also available for the groom's waistcoat in order to preserve his clothing in perfect condition. They are also suitable for storing incredibly delicate and fragile vintage garments.

Selling your wedding dress

You may not be sentimental about your wedding gown and would prefer to put the profits of the sale of the dress to an item in your new home or use it to help celebrate your first anniversary! In this case, there are many ways of selling your dress (or buying a once-worn design for your big day). One popular avenue is the internet: there are many websites specializing in advertising once-worn wedding dresses in the UK and abroad. These sites will publish an advert of your dress and some will ask for photographs of the garment; it will be online for an agreed period of time. You will also be able to sell your bridesmaids' dresses by the same process.

Other options include Ebay, designer sales and advertising in the local and national press. Some wedding dress shops will take once-worn dresses from their collection and sell them on your behalf, taking a commission.