



Beware the attack of groomzilla

Linda Watanabe McFerrin, Special to The Chronicle
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She wore a traditional ivory-colored gown. He wore a worsted wool kilt in the family tartan complete with woolen socks, flashes and sporran pouch. She selected the wedding invitations. He hand-lettered them, wearing gloves so as not to leave fingerprints and smudges on any of the surfaces. She wanted a full bar. He insisted on having tiny rosebuds frozen into each ice cube.

Look out, wedding planners and guests - there's a new breed of man under that orchid-curtained gazebo, and he's insisted on miking the bride because he thinks her voice doesn't project and her vows will be lost on the crowd.

The media has dubbed him groomzilla - the masculine counterpart to the high-maintenance bridezilla often portrayed on reality TV shows. Groomzillas are creatures of recent genesis, their origins arising in part with the advent of the metrosexual male - a heterosexual guy who has no obvious aversion to fashion.

According to Rob Johnsen, one of the four male founders of Mywedding.com, a groomzilla is a guy who's gone over the top in preparing and planning his Big Day. He's taken participation to the next level and become obsessed with everything from the flower arrangements and decor to the food. In his zeal, he's assumed control and may be overdoing it. Johnsen should know. Married in August 2008, he admits he got a little carried away with the wedding arrangements. "Our first designer quit," he recalls. "We were stressing her out. I wanted to make it an incredible day; I think I went overboard."

In the end, he influenced the location, seating arrangements and decor of his wedding - he describes it as "1920s-Chinese-Opium-Den-Hipster-Saint Tropez-Club 55."

Johnsen believes groomzillas are well-meaning males who want to express their excitement about the day down to the smallest detail, something that's becoming more common with men marrying later and sharing some of the wedding costs. Many also have definite opinions when it comes to personal style and are secure enough to debate the relative attributes of tulle and organza.

He remembers battling with his bride over the size of the dance floor, the location of the tent, smoking areas and tables. Even an aisle runner. ("I ended up winning," he says.)

"Grooms tend to stress in a different way than brides," observes Steve Sarna of Wine Valley Catering, who has been in the business for 20 years and says he has had to wrestle with groomzillas. Some of the problems men face during wedding planning arise from heightened expectations, he says.

"Girls grow up dreaming of their weddings," Sarna says. "For the most part boys grow up dreaming of going to the Super Bowl. The women are well informed. They know what they want, and they are more attuned to how to achieve those goals."

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Grooms, Sarna claims, are usually not as well versed in the process. They might know what they want, but they are often shocked by the cost. They think they can negotiate everything, and they sometimes take "getting a deal" to extremes.

Experts say the groom's involvement in a wedding is often motivated by a conviction that he is a better bargainer. He might feel protective. For many couples, a wedding is their first large spending venture.

"It's natural and normal for people to be obsessive at times about their weddings," Sarna says. "Grooms are no exception. We walk them through all of the details so that they feel more at ease. We make it a point to explain everything line by line."

Derek Falconer remembers the planning process as somewhat stressful, even though he and his bride-to-be weren't paying for their wedding.

"She's more of a see-it-and-buy-it person," says the 28-year-old electrical engineer who describes himself as more cautious. "My wife and I learned a lot about how to plan together. It was my first time doing a budget with someone else."

Many planners feel that an involved bridegroom is an improvement over the guy who doesn't engage and isn't emotionally present. Celebrated chef and restaurateur Ranjan Dey, who has been catering weddings from New Delhi Restaurant in San Francisco for years, sees the trend as a welcome change from the days when a groom's behavior might include crude reception antics or a general disregard for the importance and sanctity of the day.

"Overall, I'd say that the groom's involvement is a very good thing," says Jan Brenner, editor-in-chief of the Bay Area-based "Here Comes the Guide" print and online wedding resource. "There are women who don't want their spouse involved because they don't want to relinquish control. Others would love to have that partnership extend into the wedding planning. I know I would."

Other women concur, insisting that groomzilla behavior is a small price to pay for a man's participation in the most symbolic day of most couple's relationships. So most brides adore their groomzillas, but what about the men themselves? Is lending a hand in the wedding worth the risk of a possibly unpleasant transformation?

Falconer, who kept his role in perspective and participated in management of the nuptials without taking over, says it certainly is. Naturally, there were expenses he didn't deal with, such as the thousands of dollars of flowers. But he handled the invitations, the band and the drinks, selecting the wine and finding great beer from a local microbrewery.

"Everyone important in your entire life is gathered together for just a few short hours," he points out, stressing that at the same time he wanted to relax, be sensitive to his fiancé's frustrations and have fun. "It's a bit of a blur," he confesses, "but we really had a great time!"

Minimizing the groomzilla effect

-- **Communicate clearly.** It's best for couples to talk about expectations before the planning process begins.

-- **Focus on the familiar.** Channel a talent for technology, entertaining, love of food, or musical expertise into handling the Web site, the band, the dinner or drinks. The more familiar he is with the task, the more likely he is to feel a sense of accomplishment rather than frustration.

-- **Designate a wingman.** In the face of wedding stress, the groom might need a calming influence. Recruit or assign a friend or family member.

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-- **Enlist the help of professionals.** Often groomzillas are just jittery dudes with great ideas, lots of questions and limited resources. A patient wedding planner can work wonders, running interference or acting as referee.

Listen. Frustration and confusion can escalate quickly. Make sure everyone stays tuned in to his needs as well as hers.

- L.W.M.

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