

# One-of-a-kind gowns – designed just for you

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**B**ridal gown designer Barbara Kerner of Style des Rêves in Accord created a custom wedding dress for a client last year that was based on an outfit worn by Doris Day in a 1960s movie classic.

“The bride was surprising her groom with this iconic look, which complemented the wedding-day itinerary of activities at classic New York City locales, such as The Plaza Hotel, Rockefeller Center and Central Park,” Kerner said.

“I am privileged to work with women at a very special moment in their lives and their stories are all as warming as they are diverse,” she added.

Sarah Betty, of Sarah Betty Designs in Walden, agreed.

“I think that the word of mouth is spreading as to what a special and personal experience it is having a custom wedding dress made, making it an up-and-coming revolution in how a bride now shops for her gown,” she said.

“I think that there is something to be said for the experience of having your gown handcrafted by a local designer/seamstress, rather than ordered through a store where your gown is made (in many cases) overseas,” said Betty, a fashion designer who specializes in custom evening wear. “It’s an experience unique to an in-store option, for you get to be a part of the development and creation of a gown that most women dream of for years.”

Kerner said, “Most brides who choose a custom-made gown want a completely unique look for their very special day or a look that is suited to



STUDIO 1 PHOTOGRAPHY/COURTESY PHOTO

Barbara Kerner of Style des Rêves redesigned Brittney Diorio’s mother’s wedding gown by removing the sleeves and replacing with updated tulle sleeves embellished with lace motifs that were recovered from the original gown. She also removed the original button-up dress back and replaced it with a low waisted, open back outlined in lace trim and shaped to meet the original high-necked lace collar.

their personal style. Another driving factor is that manufactured gowns are only available in limited colors, sizes and for a limited time. Some of my custom gowns are therefore based on gowns that cannot be obtained from a store.”

Kerner recommends allowing three to six months to have a custom gown made.

So how should you begin to describe your dream gown to a designer?

“My clients typically have photos they show me of what they are looking for in a design,” Betty said. “In many cases, my client will like one aspect of one dress and another from a different dress, and come to me asking if I could combine designs. I then usually ask them questions and find inspiration in their ideas, contributing my own flair to the overall design-making for a gown unique to them.”

“Some customers know exactly what they want me to make, while others have a less-formed concept,” Kerner said. “In the latter case, we work from a group of photos of gowns and other fashion looks that she has collected to arrive at the final design. Because a custom-designed gown involves a process, the design can even be developed over the course of our



STYLE DES RÊVES/COURTESY PHOTO  
Brittney Diorio of Wappingers Falls said she always dreamed of wearing her mother's 1980s wedding dress, but it needed a little updating first.

## Custom gown resources

- » Style des Rêves: Owner Barbara Kerner; [www.styledesreves.com](http://www.styledesreves.com); 845-626-5353; [barbara@styledesreves.com](mailto:barbara@styledesreves.com)
- » Sarah Betty Designs: Owner Sarah Betty; [www.sarahbetty.net](http://www.sarahbetty.net); 845-527-3623; [sarahbettydesigns@gmail.com](mailto:sarahbettydesigns@gmail.com)
- » By a Thin Thread: Owner Allyson Vermeulen; [www.byathinthread.com](http://www.byathinthread.com); 845-288-0178; [allyson@byathinthread.com](mailto:allyson@byathinthread.com)

meetings and early muslin fittings.”

Betty added that she loves the whole process of creating the wedding gown, but thinks the most memorable part of the process in creating the gown is at the stage of first fitting in the chosen fabrics – lace, satin, organza, etc.

“The bride can finally see her vision of her dress and can see the beauty and potential that her gown will be, once completed,” she said. “It’s the first time that the bride gets to actually see the dress she’s been dreaming of and it is always a beautiful moment to watch her face light up.”

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STYLE DES RÊVES/COURTESY PHOTO

This off-the-rack gown was redesigned by Barbara Kerner of Style des Rêves.

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### Cost comparison – custom vs. retail

“The cost of a custom-made wedding gown can be comparable or more than buying a gown at the local bridal shop in that there are steps in creating a custom gown unique to ordering a gown from a store,” Betty said. “You are measured and a pattern is made that is then fit according to each individual bride. Once this pattern is perfect, the bridal gown is made in the real fabrics and then trimmed and finished. This is a process that requires several custom fittings over the course of months. In the end, the attention to detail and personalization is what makes having a custom gown made something special and memorable.”

Betty also added that fabric and trim costs could vary greatly, making the overall gown price vary quite a bit as well from gown to gown.

Kerner said she gives some very broad price estimates early on.

“If a bride has a particular budget, and most do, I can direct her to custom



STYLE DES RÊVES/COURTESY PHOTO

Barbara Kerner of Style des Rêves redesigned an off-the-rack gown by creating an embellished bodice with pleated trim at neckline, rhinestones and silk flowers. An underskirt of embroidered douppioni with bubble hemline was added and the outer skirt layers were lifted and tucked to display an embroidered skirt. Silk flowers and ribbon bows top off the design.

choices that will fit her budget,” she said, adding, “the cost of a custom-made gown does not start as low as some budget-priced gowns at retail, but there is this to consider: an off-the-rack gown will almost always need altering to fit well and the cost of alterations can easily be hundreds of dollars. A custom gown is fitted during the process so there is no additional cost.”

Kerner agreed with Betty that the experience is worth the expense.

“Another feature of the custom gown is the way the bride is involved in every step of the process. The time we spend in the studio together becomes an important piece of her journey to her wedding day. One cannot purchase such moments off the rack,” she said.

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### Trends in custom gown design

What types of styles of gowns are trending right now?

Sarah Betty of Sarah Betty Designs in Walden said, “Soft, ethereal gowns with illusion backs and a fit and flare silhouette seem to be trending quite a bit right now, however in the world of custom bridal gowns, I can get requests of all sorts. I’ve done an extravagant ball gown to a simpler empire-waist beach gown. That is the beauty of the bridal market. While it has its own trends, it doesn’t have the same fast pace as ready-to-wear women’s fashion. It is slightly more steady and distinctive to each bride.”

Barbara Kerner, of Style des Rêves in Accord, said she sees many requests for gowns with layers, especially in skirts, of tulle, lace and organza. “Gowns with lace or sheer sleeves — beautiful and so welcome after years of strapless!” Also trending? “Lots of gorgeous laces everywhere and all manner of fabric embellishments creating textured surfaces. Heavy use of beads and stones — pure luxury.” Styles abound to suit all tastes, from minimal to classic, bohemian to “Portlandia” and the Roaring ‘20s.

Seamstress Allyson Vermeulen, owner of By a Thin Thread, Alterations & Custom Work, in Beacon, said, “Fitted bodices with full, Cinderella-style skirts (either in tulle or in satin over crinoline) are a perennial favorite. I’ve also seen a ton of pale pink bridesmaid dresses this spring. I think Pinterest must have something to do with this. I really think Pinterest has changed the way people plan their weddings these days, and how certain trends can spread like wildfire.”

“My business is predominately alterations, and another trend that has boosted my business is people buying their dresses online,” Vermeulen said. “More and more brides seem to be skipping the boutiques and bridal salons altogether and getting their dresses directly, then looking for alterations a la carte.”

“A custom gown (could cost) less than a store-bought one if the design is fairly simple and does not require excessive yardage of fabric. Most of the gowns that come through my shop for alterations are far more complicated designs and would cost significantly more to be made custom than they do off the rack — especially if it has multiple layers of tulle or crinoline to create a full skirt or beading, and/or embellishments on the bodice or skirt.”