



Color in gowns has become increasingly popular, said Anita Shepard, owner of Acme's The Formal Affair. Colors can range from subtle like champagne gold like the pictured gown (viewed from different angles with varied accessories) to vibrant hues like turquoise to red.

GOWN

Wedding dress trends are sleeky and colorful

◀ Continued from Page 10

Bridal consultants like Shepard and Natalie Johnson, the manager of Fashion Formals in Traverse City, regularly attend shows in larger cities to keep current with the latest trends in bridal wear. For 2004, one of the more dramatic trends is color in wedding dresses. While the vast majority of brides will favor the traditional white wedding dress, it is becoming more acceptable to see dresses in varying

shades of red, turquoise and purple, along with subtler shades of cream, mocha, ivory and champagne.

"You've seen these colors in accents for years, but now they're being used for the entire dress," said Shepard. "Other trends that are catching on include a split front, a lot of chiffon and organza overlays, wrapped fronts that drape around and are a very flattering look that every body shape can wear, and the use of more silver and gold tones."

Johnson says that she is seeing more "sleek and sexy styles" in wedding dresses for 2004, and the use of fabrics that feel and look more like a sensuous piece of lingerie.

"This year, we'll be seeing a lot of the mermaid look, which is a snug-fitting gown

that opens up into a fuller skirt," said Johnson. "There are also some new materials that feel more like a slip that is very clingy, lightweight and comfortable, and colors that run the gamut from fire engine red to vintage gold and rum pink. A lot of the formality and convention is being taken out of wedding dresses and replaced with styles and materials that are more about individual expressions of personality."

Both Johnson and Shepard agree that classic looks still dominate, and in northern Michigan, the majority of their customers favor more conservative, traditional designs for wedding dresses.

"By far, the most popular and universal look is a ball gown that's fitted to the waist with a full skirt and long train," said Johnson. "Right behind that is the classic A-line and then an Empire design with a seam under the bust line. Now, you're seeing more detail added to the waist of these three styles, perhaps

with a wrap, some twists in the fabric or more embroidery. Whichever way you go, pick a style or dress that makes you happy and don't make any decisions without trying everything on to see how it all looks on you."

Shepard added that most of her customers gravitate toward the classic A-line

rhinestones continue to help complete the ensemble, as does a veil detailed with crystals or jewels.

"When most brides come in, they're looking for the dress of their dreams and the choices can sometimes seem a little overwhelming," she said. "That's why we recommend giving yourself plenty of time to look for a dress, make a decision and then go through the alterations process. You can come in and get things done at the last minute, but your choices are much more limited."

Shepard concluded, "A lot of women see this as the most important dress they'll ever buy, so do yourself a favor and take your time finding the one that you believe is best for you. On your wedding day, you'll be glad you did."

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**Anita Shepard,
owner, The Formal Affair**

style, which she believes everyone can wear successfully. The most prominent bodice cut remains the strapless look, with halter styles running a close second. Headpieces with tiaras and

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