

The bridal gown is still the star of the show

BY CAROL SOUTH

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Floating down the aisle in the dress of a lifetime, brides are wearing the culmination of their dreams.

Whether adorned in clouds of tulle or a sleekly elegant "destination" dress, today's bride can fulfill her

fore.

"It's almost like anything goes," said Liz Dyer, co-owner of Stella Cole in Traverse City.

Although a relatively new player in town — Stella Cole opened last August — Dyer brings decades of experience in the wedding apparel industry. Through working

little more conservative.

She credits high fashion designer Vera Wang, however, with sparking a trend three years ago: tulle ballgowns.

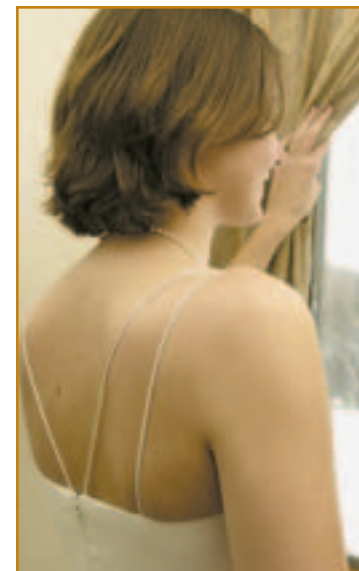
"The tulle dresses and large ballgowns are a new trend, so we [in the Midwest] are always on the backside of it," said. "Tulle gowns are

been for a long time, but I really encourage brides to work with their own personal style," she noted. "A lot of women still love that look."

"Destination gowns" are increasingly popular as brides want a simpler dress for a wedding in the Caribbean or other resort destination. Some brides

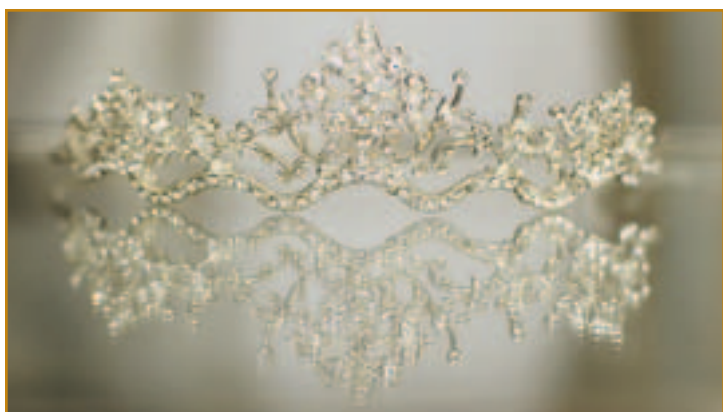
had a lot more requests for a more elegant, sleeker sort of look," said Liles, who opened the store in September with her mother and sister-in-law.

Necklines are richly varied territory for wedding gowns as designers explore different shapes and accessories. Sweetheart halters



Record-Eagle/Laura Neel

Clockwise from far left: Swarovski crystal and glass pearls mixed as wedding jewelry; the lacing on this dress offers a dramatic splash of color; wedding gowns are more flattering in ivory rather than white; Jennifer Kuula from Stella Cole models a spaghetti strap gown that is popular this season; Traverse City's Stella Cole has tiaras from the Jade Daniels collection.



vision and be stylish, too.

As she shops for what is the single most important purchase of the wedding, one that often sets the tone for the whole event, a bride is beset with a vast array of choices.

Now more than ever, personality, preference and individuality come to the

in retail, wholesale, trunk shows and trade shows across the country, she has her finger on the pulse of bridal aspirations.

When looking to bring fashions home to Stella Cole, which is managed by her daughter, she also remembers that the Midwest is a

very important in the market, but they are not as huge and bulky as the gowns of 10-15 years ago."

The ascendancy of strapless gowns, with their straight across bodice, is on the decline. In fact, Dyer deemed it passé.

"It is on the downside, has

marrying locally choose a beach setting for the ceremony and want a fitted silhouette and simpler styling," said Toni Liles, co-owner of To Have and To Hold in Traverse City.

"There's always still a demand for the princess-looking dress, but we have

and halters of all types have become very popular across the country, Dyer said. Other growing trends are spaghetti straps or top of the shoulder styling.

"I try to keep those in my high-end, the classic couture lines," she added. "It is a

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