

Aisle style



Every bride wants to look beautiful on her big day, but not all of us are blessed with perfect bodies. The secret to feeling your best is to find a gown that flatters your figure and hides your flaws. Here's a quick guide to get you started...

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SILHOUETTES

A-line

ABOUT: This classic cut is narrow at the top and wider at the bottom, just like an uppercase 'A'. It cinches the waist, skims the hips and balances the shoulders, making it universally flattering.

BEST FOR: Pear shapes and brides who want to wear a full skirt, but without the drama or formality of a ball gown.

AVOID IF: You want to stand out from the crowd – after all, it is the most popular style around.

Modern A-line

ABOUT: Similar to the standard A-line, but with a closer fitting skirt that gently flares from the hips rather than from the waist.

BEST FOR: Brides who want a floatier look and feel.

AVOID IF: You have your heart set on a sleek, sexy style – the modern A-line is soft and feminine.

Trumpet

ABOUT: A body-hugging silhouette that is fitted from chest to mid-thigh, then gently flares to the ground like a trumpet.

BEST FOR: Brides with curves, especially hourglass shapes.

AVOID IF: Your torso is apple-shaped, as this style accentuates the stomach area and waist. It can also make hips appear wider.

Mermaid

ABOUT: This form-fitting style tightly hugs the body from chest to knee, before breaking into a fuller skirt.

BEST FOR: Slender frames and hourglass body types who are happy to highlight their curves.

AVOID IF: You carry most of your weight on the upper half of your body as this silhouette can be unforgiving on the tummy! It is typically tight too, so can restrict movement.

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Ball gown

ABOUT: Often referred to as a 'princess dress', this fairy-tale favourite boasts a tight bodice, tiny waist and full, voluminous skirt.

BEST FOR: Pear-shaped body types as the large skirt camouflages the hips and thighs. Boyish shapes benefit too as the full silhouette helps to create the illusion of curves.

AVOID IF: You're petite, as such a large skirt can overwhelm a small frame.

Tea-length

ABOUT: A flirtatious dress style with a shorter hemline that falls anywhere between the ankle and knee – most typically the mid-calf region.

BEST FOR: Fun-loving brides who want to celebrate (read: dance!) without the restriction of a long skirt. Because bodices are typically fitted and skirts quite full, this style flatters all body types.

AVOID IF: You have issues with your ankles or seldom wear long dresses and might later regret not taking the opportunity to do so.

Mini

ABOUT: A thigh-skimming number that is more often associated with cocktail parties, this short dress is a favourite among modern, city-dwelling brides.

BEST FOR: Brides with slim figures and great legs.

AVOID IF: You're shy about showcasing your body – remember to sit gracefully at all times!

Column

ABOUT: This narrow design – also known as a sheath – follows the natural line of the body and doesn't flare. It usually stops at the ankle, but shorter hemlines are an option too (cue the mini or pencil skirt).

BEST FOR: Boyish figures and petite brides as the slim silhouette adds length.

AVOID IF: You're pear-shaped – a straight-up-and-down cut will only emphasise your lower body and make you look unbalanced.

Empire line

ABOUT: This versatile style has a raised waistline that begins just beneath the bust. It's usually paired with wide-set straps or sleeves and a soft, flowing skirt.

BEST FOR: All figure types, but especially brides who want to draw attention to their neckline. The empire cut can create the illusion of fuller breasts, especially if embellishment is added, or it can help to minimise a large bust. It's also useful for those who want to conceal their mid-sections, and is an elegant option for pregnant brides.

AVOID IF: You want a form-fitting, sexy dress.



NECKLINES

Strapless

ABOUT: Straight or scalloped, as the name implies, there is not a strap or sleeve in sight with this widely appealing neckline!

GOOD FOR: Straight-across necklines show off toned shoulders and collarbones, while sweetheart cuts show off the décolletage.

BAD FOR: Big arms and big busts that need lots of support. It's also not ideal for flat-chested brides as there's no hiding what isn't there!

Halter (or high neck)

ABOUT: This sculpted style has straps that wrap around the back of the neck or a high neck with deep armholes.

GOOD FOR: Small to medium busts, long torsos and broad shoulders.

BAD FOR: Brides who aren't comfortable showing off their upper arms.

Bateau

ABOUT: This elegant style, also known as the boat neck, follows the tip of the collarbone to the curve of the shoulders.

GOOD FOR: Small-breasted brides.

BAD FOR: Busty brides, as the cut enhances the chest area.

V-neck

ABOUT: A classic cut with sex appeal, the V-neck dips down between the breasts and draws the eye to the centre of the waist. It also emphasises the neckline and décolletage.

GOOD FOR: All figure types. The smaller your chest, the lower the V can go.

BAD FOR: Large busts that require solid support.

Scoop

ABOUT: A universally flattering U-shaped classic that can be cut high or low.

GOOD FOR: Almost everyone!

Sweetheart

ABOUT: A bridal classic, this pretty scalloped cut creates a natural heart shape

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fashion

across the chest, emphasising the breasts and elongating the neckline.

GOOD FOR: Brides with an attention-worthy décolletage.

BAD FOR: Flat-chested bodies.

Illusion

ABOUT: Red-hot right now, this gorgeous option covers the chest with sheer net or lace. It's particularly popular over a sweetheart bodice.

GOOD FOR: Brides who want to show just a hint of skin.

One-shoulder

ABOUT: This contemporary option, also called an asymmetrical neckline, features a single strap across the left or right shoulder.

GOOD FOR: Brides with fantastic upper arms, collarbones and shoulders. It also benefits pear shapes by drawing attention away from the lower body.

BAD FOR: Broad shoulders and boxy or straight torsos.

Off the shoulder

ABOUT: This neckline sits below the shoulders and collarbone with a portion of fabric covering the upper arms.

GOOD FOR: Almost all figure types, especially medium-chested and pear-shaped brides.

BAD FOR: Broad shoulders and fuller arms.

DESIGNER FAVOURITES

"In my opinion, brides are happiest when they choose a dress shape that they love, rather than one that's dictated by their body shape. When looking at dresses or sketches, ask yourself, 'How would this dress make me feel?' Your wedding dress is there to give you confidence." – Joss Straker, Joss Bridal Wear (jossbridal.co.za)

"At the moment, I prefer the modified A-line dress. I find it suits most people, especially as the dropped waistline can be

positioned to flatter different body types. It's comfortable and beautiful, and also allows me to present many options for the bottom part of the dress." – Jana Meintjies, Silver Swallow (silverswallow.co.za)

"I don't have a favourite bridal silhouette – our collection encompasses everything – but I do find I get asked more for soft mermaid gowns, which are fitted dresses with a flick. Strapless necklines are a classic, but V-necks are gaining in popularity, as are sleeves and low backs. When it comes to choosing, remember that it's your shape that matters, not your size. Be open-minded and try on everything – often what looks best is not what you thought." – Elbeth Gillis (elbethgillis.com)

"My favourite silhouette for a wedding dress is a perfectly fitted corset, coupled with a flared A-line skirt that sits well on the hips. This line has a flattering effect on all shapes and sizes, skipping the widest part of the hips and creating the illusion of a narrow and longer body. I advise brides to take into consideration what part of the body they want to emphasise and what part of the body needs to be minimised." – Vesselina Pentcheva (vesselina.co.za)

"The most common requests we receive are for soft, flowy, bohemian wedding dresses; they suit relaxed celebrations and are so comfortable to wear. I personally love light, silk chiffon gowns, which gently move as the bride walks, almost like liquid! A-lines are a favourite silhouette of mine as they're widely flattering." – Jacelyn Gozadinos, White Lilly Bridal (whitelillybridal.com)



S Empire
N Off the
shoulder

ILLUSTRATIONS courtesy of White Lilly Bridal, a bespoke bridalwear studio in Parkhurst, Johannesburg. Call 011 268 0187 or visit whitelillybridal.com for further details. wi