



Photography: Jez Dickson



Photography: Steve Poole



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The Best of Everything

ANNABEL HARRISON meets Bruce Russell: wedding planner extraordinaire, expert on all nuptial matters and the man with London's ultimate little white book of contacts

Photography: Kate Neilen



"I USED TO THINK a wedding was a simple affair. Boy and girl meet, they fall in love, he buys a ring, she buys a dress; they say 'I do'. I was wrong. That's getting married. A wedding is an entirely different proposition." So said Steve Martin's character despairingly in the definitive 90s wedding film, *Father of the Bride*, which most of you will know is funny, heart-warming, nostalgic and, actually, ridiculous at times because of scenes involving Franck, the flamboyant

wedding planner with an accent of indeterminate origin. Thankfully, if you got engaged over the Christmas and New Year period (the most popular time of year for proposals), the Royal Borough has a rather less eccentric and much more confidence-inducing alternative to Franck and this man goes by the name of Bruce Russell.

After spending an hour in his company, I can confirm that Bruce is everything you'd hope a wedding planner would be; immaculately turned out, impeccably polite, extremely experienced in the wedding planning arena and, most importantly, he just gets 'it'. I'm going to ten weddings in 2015, the most significant of which is my own, so the delights, logistics and pitfalls of planning these wonderful events are firmly on my radar and I agree with George Banks that a wedding is many things but certainly not, in most cases, "a simple affair". Bruce sums it up neatly: "There is no other day a bride will plan that will be as personal as her wedding day; there can be a lot of added pressure and anxiety and the process can be overwhelming when everyone has an opinion."

Happily though, Bruce is a dab hand at steering a bride (and groom) through the process and the big day

itself, even if there are last-minute changes to the guest list, kosher wine which isn't really kosher or a drunk photographer; these are all instances that Bruce has dealt with, the happy pair none the wiser. "My aim is to satisfy couples with an unrelenting pursuit for perfection – from the moment of proposal to choosing the right couture and covetable gifts, creating the perfect wedding day to planning the honeymoon of a lifetime".

So how, I wonder, did a man from a small town in Canada end up in the UK planning the world's most wonderful weddings? Bruce laughs. "I grew up in a place where everyone knew everyone, so whenever there was a wedding, we all got involved. I remember such a sense of occasion but the one memory which stands out vividly is making flowers out of tissues! These were

"We'd planned all the details but it was made really special by how happy the bride was"

used to decorate the bridal car and the cars of family members attending the wedding. Simple but it still makes me smile today." A sense of occasion, and making each event unique and personal, clearly matters a great deal to Bruce; he says that the best weddings are not always those with the biggest budgets but those when "the bride and groom are just so happy! One of the best weddings [I've ever done] was in 2013. We'd been planning every single detail for 18 months but, at the end of the day, what made it really special was the bride; she was the happiest bride I'd ever seen. This filtered down to the guests, who were so appreciative of everything the couple had planned. Even the venue's staff commented that this was the best wedding they'd ever seen. When you get those comments on the day, you know it's a good event!" ►



► With five years of wedding planning experience under his belt, Bruce has now launched a luxury bridal website called The Bridal Room. His extensive network means he has access to exclusive products, services and suppliers, destinations and experiences and has curated a marketplace of these, meticulously sourced from the 'best of the best', whether from Great Britain or further away. Bruce only deals in superlatives, it seems, for every supplier; the prettiest, most beautiful, the best! Four Belgravia-based experts have been singled out so far to do masterclasses for Bruce; candle-maker Rachel Vosper, florist Philippa Craddock, champagne house Laurent Perrier and make-up artist Kate Hughes. "In the coming months we'll be branching into other aspects; the art of 'tablescaping', etiquette and how to craft the perfect groom's speech. Watch this space..."

I point out that we're fortunate to have a whole host of bridal delights across the whole Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Jenny Packham, Caroline Castiglioni and Philippa Lepley are creating the dresses that dreams are made of.

Bruce singles out several more local "creative artisans who are truly talented and passionate"; namely, cake maker Peggy Porschen, dress designers Stewart Parvin and Sassi Holford,

Neill Strain Floral Couture and bridal hairdresser Errol Douglas. As a bride-to-be, this kind of list makes me excited and apprehensive in equal measure, I tell Bruce, because it's just the tip of the iceberg in terms of how many brilliant suppliers there are for every element of a wedding and the possibilities seem endless.

Bruce smiles in a reassuring fashion (he does this often; it works) and reminds me of the most important piece of advice. "Enjoy it! A wedding is one of the most important days that a bride and groom will ever plan for themselves; make sure the day reflects you, as a couple and give the day a real sense of your personalities. And be realistic; think carefully about the aspects of your wedding day that matter most to you. Prioritise these in terms of timings and budgets, and be creative. Being able to make decisions is also integral – an indecisive bride makes planning rather difficult!"

As I know full well, working out a budget, sticking to it and finding the best supplier within the specified price bracket is tricky at the best of times. If money is no object, Bruce advise couples to focus on individual elements, such as chauffeured transport for all guests, immaculately designed 'tablescaping' and as many personal touches as possible; "your wedding day is very

much about the 'guest experience' and considering every 'touchpoint' that they will have throughout the day. You want the day to be genuinely magical to the senses. For those on a limited budget, pick the aspects of the day that are most important to you and focus on these, be it stunning flowers, a wonderfully-lavish meal or a band that you've set your heart on." Bruce highlights that it's worth keeping an eye on the costs of stationery, flowers, and the evening bar; the first because "couples often don't think of the impact that a fabulous invitation has. It's the first impression and you know what they say... first impressions count!"; the second because "most people don't understand the cost, time and effort that goes into stunning floral arrangements" and the third? "You should know how much your guests can drink!"

Just this piece of advice sums up Bruce as a whole; he's exceptionally organised and process-driven, with a fabulously creative eye for detail and a great sense of humour, balancing the enjoyable and less so elements of a wedding with equal flair. "For me, the

most fun part of planning a wedding is coming up with the creative brief and visual. The most difficult aspect can be managing suppliers and staff on the day, which is why it's essential to work with reliable suppliers."

Bruce is also, if your wedding is likely to attract columns inches and paparazzi, brilliantly discreet; despite the fact that in this day and age, it's possible for any wedding, no matter how low-key, to be splashed over social media within hours, thanks to snap-happy guests and the ease of Instagramming, I don't think Bruce would ever divulge a wedding secret, celebrity couple or not.

However, high-profile celebrities have no chance of keeping *all* details under wraps and there are several of these weddings that have impressed Bruce in recent years. He loved the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's wedding – "a Royal affair but they kept it real!" – and the fact that, despite the global media attention, George Clooney and Amal Alamuddin were able to make theirs "so personal". As for Kim Kardashian West and Kanye, "sometimes 'over the top' is just fabulous!"

On that note, whether you're an 'over the top, luxurious, extravagant' or 'low-key, beautiful, elegant' kind of couple, if you want your dream wedding to take shape before your very eyes, without having to stress over details and planning yourself, Bruce is your man. ■

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