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WEDDING BLUES

Caviar, Chrysanthemums and Chaos

From designing a spaceship to begging sarkari offices for permission for a Sea Link baraat, wedding planners in India have to do some strange things

Shamila Ganesan-Ram TNN

In the 1960s, the piano was to Bollywood actors what Playstation is to modern boys a venting machine. Almost every time a technicolour hero wanted to convey betrayal, he would assault the black-and-white keys of the delicate instrument, tilt his head in dramatic closeups and pout in pain.

The emotions on the face of the pianist, who was playing at a ground wedding in South Mumbai recently, were not very different. He felt betrayed by his audience who were craning their necks to catch a glimpse of the ten Bollywood stars, including Priyanka Chopra, performing at the adjacent wedding venue. The persistent announcements of famous names and the pounding beats of the latest remixes were fast drowning his efforts at subtle melody. The saxophonist beside him, too, could no longer deflate his lungs. The host was growing increasingly desperate and made a snap decision he ordered his wedding planner Dhawal Oza to get the guys at the nearby wedding to lower their volume, somehow, anyhow. Immediately, Oza got multiple speakers at his venue, making the otherwise soft jazz tunes sound unnaturally harsh.

Had this wedding taken place somewhere in the US, the planner would have politely wriggled out of the situation, saying that fulfilling the request was not within his/her purview. But it doesn't work in India. The scope of work of a planner is still a large grey area in India. Peoples expectations are far higher, says Candice Pereira of

Marry Me Wedding Planners. Indians tend to approach planners with the same logic as bosses do: interns harass them till they get their money's worth. So, from picking up guests 15 days in advance to arranging for caviar at a day's notice, everything is considered part of the territory.

Pereira remembers one wedding in particular, in which the host changed the shade of the backdrop flowers at the last moment. With barely three days to go before the wedding, the businessman's wife informed the planner that the reception theme had changed and now demanded blush-pink chrysanthemums. Though such flowers are available in India, they have to be booked well in advance, as they need to be imported, says Pereira, who somehow managed to source them from Thailand. It's the last-minute changes that are unnerving, laments the planner, who has even got a brand of Single Malt Whiskey (Glenn Barclays) flown in from Scotland for another client at a week's notice. Most people, who opt for a planner, are those whose wedding decor budget itself is in the region of Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. Among these, planners have observed an inevitable tendency

they tend to approach weddings like corporate projects. Some of them hold endless meetings to discuss arrangements with barely two weeks to go. These go on for hours and are a sinful waste of time, one planner says. Here, they can be exasperatingly particular about what they want.

Nikhil Bhide, who starts planning for each wedding at least six months in advance, recalls an NRI client who wanted a chandelier from her mother's house in Hong Kong to be placed above the mandap. Bhide showed her a chandelier of nearly the same kind which was available locally. But she was very keen on getting the Hong Kong one. The trouble which we had to go through to get that chandelier to India, and that too in one piece, was too much, confesses Bhide.

Another client of his wanted an absolutely spotless horse for his wedding. We ordered the horse and were told it matched our requirements. But when it arrived, I noticed it had a brown spot on one of its hind legs, recalls Bhide, who, wisely assuming this could lead to trouble, got some white wall paint and painted over the spot. Luckily no one came to know, he chuckles.

At times, the run-up to the glamorous union of souls may even entail meetings with the souls in various unglamorous settings. Especially in Maharashtra, where getting licenses can be a painful affair, planners sometimes have to wade through a sea of paperwork and civic officials. Last year, for instance, in the heat of the Bandra-Worli Sea Link hype, a businessman from South Mumbai approached Girish Thapar of A2Z Events And Wedding Organisers, with a request. He wanted the baraat and the band to pass through the Sea Link on open buses, says Thapar, who met officials of the BMC, RTO and the MMRDA to seek permission, and was, unsurprisingly, subjected to much buck-passing. His new project is more outré but he's relieved that there's nothing sarkari about it: he is designing a spaceship for a couple that wants to surprise guests by descending on their reception stage in it.

Although most decisions are a compromise between the client's creative streak and the planner's practical expertise, there are some things that are just too difficult to improve upon. At the behest of his client, for instance, Dhawal Oza has to now get T-shirts printed for a court wedding. While the friends will wear T-shirts with the wordings (

S)Crew where S stands forshaadi,the groom will enter the court in a T-shirt that says Screwed.The bride,on the other hand,will arrive in one that says,Guilty as Charged.Following that,the couple will go on to serve the toughest sentence marriage.



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