

Interview With A Bridal Expert...

Sara Silva, Co-Owner, Vestidus Atelier, Lisbon, Portugal

Time In Business: 11 Years

How did you get into the bridal industry? I entered the bridal industry while working in hospitality, 11 years ago. I was always fascinated by fashion design and wedding planning. I worked in fashion retail during college. But what made the difference was the opportunity I had, during my work in sales at the hotel, to help plan several weddings.

I always felt compelled to start a project of my own. As a bride in 2007, I experienced some challenges on how to choose the right dress. The question popped in my head. What would I do differently if I owned a bridal salon? I never stopped after that.

How has your business evolved since then? We changed facilities for a better and bigger store, right in Lisbon city center. We increased our staff, especially in the alterations and fitting department. In the beginning, it was just myself and a seamstress. We have more, and better brands and our online presence grows stronger and stronger with our new website and social media community.

How has the industry evolved over the last 3-5 years? We started to feel the pressure of online shopping. The wedding retail industry seems to be the last one to feel the pressure of online sales, while hundreds of shopping malls all over the world, especially in the US are starting to close. But things are changing in Europe too. Brides are looking for better prices since their focus has started to change. We experience a decrease in our bride's budget. The wedding dress is not the more important thing in the wedding anymore. The honeymoon, the photography or the venue are now the stars that steal most of the wedding budget. On the good side, the destination wedding trend brought more brides to Lisbon and we started to have more brides purchasing from overseas.

What are the most important things that are influencing brides of today? Instagrammable effect: brides want to look good, especially on social media. The dress must be photogenic, attractive while being photographed and posted. And Price... Keeping the budget in mind is as important as quality. Brides want to spend less on the wedding dress but still want perfect fit and quality fabrics.

Gold Premier Retailer of Maggie Sottero

How have you changed and evolved your business to combat the changes in buying behaviours and the market in general? Working hard at Social Media Marketing.

PINSTABOOK = Pinterest+Instagram+Facebook

Having better quality dresses, working with better suppliers, offering less expensive collections for budget brides (such as the Rebecca Ingram collection).

What has been the biggest obstacle that you have had to overcome in the last 3 years? The seasonality of the business. When we started, marriages were more evenly distributed throughout the year. It was possible to have three months less busy, but we could work regularly throughout the year. Now, most weddings occur between July and September, so keeping the business off-season and managing human resources throughout the year is a bigger challenge.

What is your most important piece of advice to brides of today? While there are many options, a bridal salon will offer you original designer dresses and dedicated bridal assistants to help you choose the one right for you. With no pressure, no surprises or hidden charges. We will be with you in the joy and enthusiasm of the choice, in the nervousness of

the fitting appointments, but also, because life happens, whenever doubts arise, whenever the dress does not fit, whenever you need to change your wedding day and in so many other situations that life can deal you. Seek peace of mind when choosing your wedding dress.

What is your most important piece of advice to your international bridal peers? Our value lies not only in the dresses we sell but in the service we provide. Think about your company culture. What sets it apart from others? What can you still do in your market that no one is doing? Where can you improve? What is your added value? Do your clients know it? One of the things that has worked so well with us is when we begin to focus our communication on our values and on our strengths, crossing it with bride's reviews and their testimony on our business. Maybe it will work for you too :)

