

A photograph of a bride and groom at a wedding. The bride, on the left, is wearing a white lace wedding dress and smiling broadly. The groom, on the right, is wearing a blue tuxedo and a white rose boutonniere, and is kissing the bride on the cheek. In the foreground, a three-tiered white wedding cake is decorated with various fruits like strawberries, blueberries, and kiwi. A white pillar candle is partially visible on the left. The background is dark and out of focus.

the knot

Real Weddings Study

2026

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Key Findings



WEDDINGS PROVE RESILIENT

Around 2 million U.S. couples got married in 2025, contributing to more than \$100 billion in total wedding related spending. Even amid ongoing economic uncertainty, weddings remain a non-negotiable life milestone. Key indicators including average spend, guest count, and vendor count remain remarkably consistent year-over-year, signaling a stable and committed market that continues to prioritize celebration.



WEDDING PLANNING ENTERS THE AI ERA

AI is rapidly becoming part of the wedding planning toolkit. In just one year, adoption jumped from approximately 20% to 36% among engaged couples. Couples primarily use AI to spark inspiration, answer early-stage questions, and draft communications, before turning to trusted industry platforms to validate details and make final decisions. As AI becomes more embedded across planning tools and platforms, adoption is expected to accelerate further.



BUILDING THE WEDDING “DREAM TEAM”

On average, couples hire around 13 vendors to bring their day to life, reinforcing that weddings remain deeply rooted in human connection. When it comes to finding the right fit, chemistry is key. Personality is a top deciding factor for guest-facing vendors like DJs and planners, while clear communication and responsiveness are essential for building trust across all vendor relationships.



GEN Z REDEFINES THE CELEBRATION

Gen Z now represents 41% of the wedding market, and their influence is unmistakable. Traditional, cookie-cutter weddings are giving way to celebrations centered on authenticity, intention, and personal expression. Couples planning for 2026 are increasingly choosing one of two paths: going all-out or going ultra-intimate, with both approaches focused on crafting highly personalized experiences that reflect who they truly are.



THE LAB-GROWN DIAMOND TAKEOVER

The engagement ring market has fundamentally shifted. Nearly 9 in 10 proposers pop the question with a ring in hand, and lab-grown center stones account for 61% of all engagement ring purchases, a 239% increase since 2020. Driven by economic pragmatism and evolving values, this shift has led to larger average carat sizes (1.9ct) and lower average costs (\$4,600), reshaping expectations around luxury and meaning.



Methodology

About The Knot Real Weddings Study:

The Knot Real Weddings Study is one of the largest and longest-running study of its kind, produced by The Knot's Insights & Research Team and fielded annually for nearly 20 years. It is based on data from US couples who got married in the past 12 months, providing a retrospective view of weddings held in 2025. Because wedding decisions evolve throughout the planning process, from inspiration and budgeting to guest count and final trade-offs, this study is grounded in real outcomes rather than initial intent, delivering the most accurate, reliable, and up-to-date view of how weddings actually come together.

The Research Methodology:

The Knot Real Weddings Study captured responses from 10,474 US couples married between January 1 and December 31, 2025; respondents were recruited via email invitation from The Knot and/or WeddingWire membership throughout the year 2025. Respondents represent adult couples from all over the country with various ethnicities, income levels, race, age (18+), sexual orientation and gender identity. To provide the most comprehensive view of 2025 wedding industry trends, this report also includes statistics on weddings from ad hoc studies conducted throughout the year, among both engaged and newlywed couples. In a typical year, The Knot Worldwide conducts research with more than 100,000 couples, guests and wedding professionals globally.

About The Knot Worldwide:

Across North America, Europe, Latin America, and Asia, The Knot Worldwide champions the power of celebration. The company's global family of brands provides best-in-class products, services, and content to take celebration planning from inspiration to action. Through its wedding brands, including The Knot, WeddingWire, Bodas.net, Hitched.co.uk, Mariages.net, Matrimonio.com, and others, the company offers an extensive database of hundreds of thousands of wedding professionals to assist couples in organizing the happiest day of their lives. We have a brand for every kind of celebration—from booking a birthday party, to planning a wedding, to preparing to become a parent, and every moment in between.

An Overview of 2025 Weddings

Around 2 million US couples got married in 2025, contributing to more than \$100 billion in total wedding event spending last year. Couples, engaged for an average of 14 months, spent 2025 planning a diverse array of weddings that were as unique as the couples themselves.

WEDDINGS OVER THE YEARS

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Average Guest Size	131	66	105	117	115	116	117
Wedding Party Size	10	10	8	8	8	8	8
Average Vendors Hired	15	12	14	14	14	14	13
Went On Honeymoon	71%	56%	73%	73%	72%	69%	71%
Destination Wedding	21%	9%	19%	18%	19%	18%	17%
Cost Per Guest	\$214	\$244	\$266	\$256	\$304	\$284	\$292
Cost Of Ceremony/ Reception	\$28K	\$19K	\$28K	\$30K	\$35K	\$33K	\$34K
Average Age	32	-	34	31	32	33	32

Dating & Pre-Engagement

Engagement and marriage are important relationship milestones, but they aren't the first. Dating couples dive into marriage-focused behaviors pre-engagement, showing that the majority start thinking about, dreaming of, and discussing their future wedding before there's a proposal.

★ Dating

- One-third of couples who got married in 2025 met their partners through online dating sites/apps, up from 27% in 2024. Meeting online has consistently held the top spot for the last four years.
 - Other common ways 2025 couples first met their partners include meeting through friends (14%) and at school (12%).
- Before taking the step towards marriage, the majority of 2025 couples experienced important life milestones together, including spending holidays together (86%), attending a wedding together (73%), vacationing with families (69%), and even owning a pet together (50%).

★ Pre-engagement

- The majority of couples are having important conversations before getting engaged to prepare for their future. 9 in 10 talk about finances and managing money, 85% discuss the possibility of having kids, and 85% talk about their mental health.
- Dating couples are also having conversations with their partners about their future engagements and weddings. Top wedding-related topics couples discuss before they get engaged include the overall size (64%) and time of year (60%).

DATING BY THE NUMBERS

3 years

Avg. dating before engagement

70%

Live together before engagement

57%

Discuss marriage or engagement over a year before proposal

7 in 10

Take wedding-related actions before engagement

TOP PRE-ENGAGEMENT WEDDING-RELATED ACTIVITIES:



Proposals



The majority (85%) of proposals are now intentional, planned events, with half of couples proactively discussing preferences, such as the setting or the guest list, well in advance. This shared approach doesn't just lead to the 'yes'; it effectively kicks off the wedding planning journey.

★ The Proposal

- The most popular month to get engaged continues to be December, with Christmas Day being the top day of the year, followed by Christmas Eve and Valentine's Day!
- Over half of proposers feel pressure to make the experience highly unique, which is why nearly 70% of proposals are planned more than a month in advance.
- Over 25% of proposers hire professionals to make the moment extra special (like photographers, florists, and planners).
- In 2025, over half of couples (53%) prioritized intimacy with a private proposal setting. Those opting for a public reveal favored experiential and sentimental locations, such as scenic outdoor spots or vacation destinations, to create a personal and memorable life milestone.

★ Selecting a Wedding Date

- Nearly 60% of couples start planning their wedding within less than a month of getting engaged.
- Roughly 40% of couples are engaged for 11-18 months, with the average being 14 months.
- 76% of couples get married between May and October, with fall continuing to be the most popular season.

PROPOSALS AT A GLANCE

81%
of proposals
are a surprise

72%
of proposals take
place outdoors

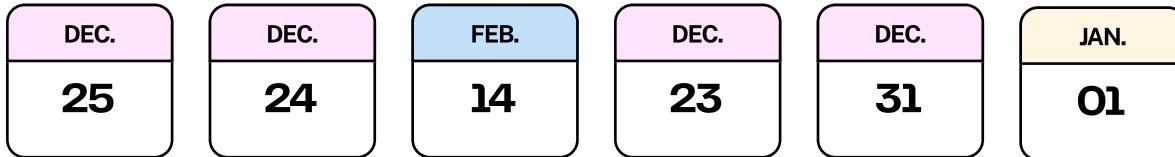
26%:
hire a vendor to
help with proposal

51%:
discuss proposal
preferences with
partner beforehand

28%
have an
engagement party

TOP DATES TO GET ENGAGED

Around 40% of proposals take place between Thanksgiving and Valentine's Day



The Ring

Nearly 9 in 10 of proposers have a ring in hand when they pop the question and almost all couples (96%) exchanged rings as a sign of their engagement. This tradition remains important, and proposers continue to put in time and energy to get it right.

★ Ring Shopping

- Ring research starts early, with 57% of proposers beginning their ring search more than six months before the proposal.
- Selection and purchase takes place much closer to the proposal date. 77% say they spent four months or less on the selection/purchase process and 63% purchased the ring within two months of proposing.
- Ring selection is increasingly a joint effort, with 79% of ring recipients participating in the process. Only 21% of rings are selected without any input from the recipient, and 1 in 4 couples now shop at a retailer together before the proposal.
- More than half say it is important to shop for rings in person. On average, proposers visit two retailers in person and look at 10 rings in person as they shop for a ring.
- Most proposers choose to make their ring purchase in-person (64%), but one-third make the purchase online.

★ All the *Shiny* Details:

- Lab-grown center stones now account for 61% of all engagement ring purchases, a +239% increase since 2020. This shift is driven by economic pragmatism and evolving values, with 40% of couples stating it is specifically important that their stone be lab-grown.
- While clear diamonds are the most popular center stones, moissanite and sapphires are the most popular non-diamond stones.
- The most popular shape is round (26%), followed by oval (25%). Other top ring shapes include emerald (8%), princess (8%), pear/teardrop (8%) and marquise (8%).
- Yellow gold (39%) continues to rise in popularity, up 140% over the last five years, while white gold continues its steady decline.
- Couples rank cut/shape (#1), style/setting (#2) and metal (#3) as the most important features of an engagement ring.

JEWELRY AT A GLANCE

88%
Made custom edits or custom designed a ring

83%
Clear diamond

38%
Solitaire stone setting

1.9
Average carat weight

\$4,600
Average spent on engagement ring



NATURAL STONE VS. LAB-GROWN STONE

Shape: Round
Cost: \$7,000
Carat: 1.6
% solitaire: 41%

Shape: Oval
Cost: \$4,300
Carat: 2.0
% solitaire: 40%

Planning

With an average engagement lasting 14 months, wedding planning is a long process filled with a multitude of decisions, large and small. As couples juggle time, budgets, priorities, and opinions, many of those decisions are guided by a single goal: putting the guest experience first. In fact, 96% of couples say they are most grateful simply for the ability to celebrate their wedding in person with friends and family.

★ Top of Mind:

- Couples share that their attire, photographer and venue are the wedding elements that matter most to them. However, throughout planning and decision making, it's their guests that remain top of mind.
- The majority of wedding celebrations now span 2-3 days (71%), necessitating planning for multiple events beyond the main day, such as the popular rehearsal dinner (75%), welcome drinks (26%), after-party (27%), and day-after brunch (21%).

KEY PLANNING ACTIONS

7 hours

Average time couples spend planning per week

41%

Of planning is done on a mobile device

13

Number of vendors hired

90%

Create a wedding website

82%

Set up a registry

MOST IMPORTANT TO COUPLES WHILE PLANNING

❶ #1

Guests are well taken care of and have a good time

❷ #2

Cost/budget

❸ #3

Personalization/planning a wedding that is a true reflection of our relationship

❹ #4

Food and beverage

❺ #5

Overall look and vibe

★ Roles + Support System:

- One partner carries the majority of the planning burden, responsible for roughly 64% of tasks, while the other handles about 17%. The remaining planning is divided among family, the wedding party, and/or wedding planners.
- While their support system primarily offers input/guidance (73%) and emotional support (66%), parents frequently provide financial assistance. In contrast, the wedding party is more likely to execute tasks like coordinating logistics, DIY projects, and planning wedding-related events.

“

The way [my loved ones] supported me was that we divided and conquered, because for a wedding, there's so much to do. So everyone took a role. We had one person working on finding the cake vendor. One person worked on finding the food. We had another one that worked on things that were behind the scenes as far as the aesthetics. My husband and I focused on the venue.” -2025 BRIDE

Next-Gen Resources

As 90% of couples aim for an authentic, highly-personalized wedding, they are increasingly relying on diverse resources (including AI, social media and wedding-planning sites) to spark ideas, answer questions, and bring their unique vision to life. This shift is being led by the 41% of couples who identify as Gen Z, whose intentional and tech-forward approach is redefining the planning journey for a new era.

★ Digital Planning Evolution

- Data shows that 71% of couples prioritize the advice of friends and family when planning their day. Social media and dedicated wedding-planning sites round out the top three most-used resources for planning and inspiration.
- The social media landscape continues to shift as couples diversify where they find inspiration. As momentum moves toward short-form video, TikTok and Instagram play a larger role in the process. This shift is amplified among Gen Z, whose TikTok usage far outpaces that of all couples and signals how the next generation is redefining planning.

★ The Growing Use of AI

- By the end of 2025, roughly 36% of engaged couples were using AI for wedding planning, nearly doubling the rate seen back in February (~20%). Compared with 2023, when adoption was under 10%, this represents a +225% increase in usage. As AI becomes more embedded in planning platforms, adoption is expected to accelerate rapidly through 2026.
- Users mainly rely on AI for a dual function during the wedding planning process, utilizing it for functional tasks like writing, answering questions and etiquette, while also unlocking creative personalization for their vision, attire, and guest experience.

GEN Z: MAKING IT THEIR OWN

32%

Include religious, ethnic, and/or cultural elements

28%

Include eco-friendly/sustainable options

22%

Include locally-sourced products

15%

Intentional about the vendors they select

GEN Z SOCIAL PLATFORM USAGE FOR PLANNING



Photo: Kir2Ben

Financial Impact & Budgeting

Despite the challenging macroeconomic and socio-political landscapes in 2025, couples remain deeply committed to their wedding celebrations, with 84% saying they were looking forward to their wedding day more than anything else that year, and three in four agreeing it is financially worth the investment.

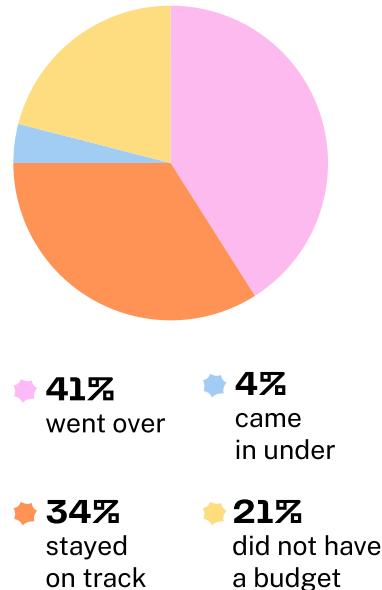
★ Biggest Challenges & Economic Concerns

- Planning within a budget remains the number one challenge for couples during wedding planning.
- While decision-making and knowing where to start also present challenges, couples planning 2025 weddings are also feeling the strain of economic pressures, especially inflation and rising costs.
- Over 85% of couples reported the economy had impacted their planning and decision-making.
- In fact, nearly 55% of couples found themselves reworking parts of their original vision, making changes such as altering floral arrangements, removing favors, or reworking décor elements.
- One in three couples getting married later in 2025 said the impact of tariffs affected their planning, but instead of cutting back, many took proactive steps: about one-third bought items earlier than anticipated, others chose local or US-made products, and 62% consulted wedding professionals to stay on budget.

★ Managing the Budget

- About a quarter of couples are adjusting their wedding budget as a result of the economy, and 31% have sought additional financial support, including help from family or using credit cards and loans.
- Of the 1 in 4 couples who said they were making changes to their budget, 77% are increasing their wedding spend/budget as a result of the economy. Only 16% said they are decreasing budgets.

THE BUDGET REALITY CHECK



Roughly 1 in 2 couples say their initial budget feels lower than the reality of what a wedding costs.

WHO'S PAYING: % OF TOTAL WEDDING COST COVERED



- 52% parents/family
- 48%: the couple

Slightly more than 50% of couples have all/the majority of their wedding paid for by their parents

Top Vendors Hired

US WEDDING VENDOR SPEND BY CATEGORY

	% Hired	Average Spend	Spend Range		
			Low	Medium	High
Wedding Dress	91%	\$2,100	\$1,200	\$2,000	\$3,200
Venue	89%	\$12,900	\$3,500	\$10,400	\$24,800
Photographer	88%	\$3,000	\$1,500	\$2,800	\$4,700
Caterer (Per Head)	85%	\$80	\$60	\$70	\$130
Groom's Attire	84%	\$330	\$260	\$310	\$410
Cake	76%	\$530	\$300	\$500	\$800
Hair & Makeup	72%	\$300	\$200	\$300	\$400
DJ	71%	\$1,800	\$800	\$1,600	\$2,700
Event Rentals	68%	\$2,000	\$1,100	\$1,700	\$3,200
Florist	59%	\$2,800	\$900	\$1,900	\$4,800

* The Spend Range shows the range of typical couple spend on wedding vendors. Many factors impact couple spend, including geography, time of year, and guest count. The low quartile represents the bottom 25% of spend, while the high quartile represents the top 25% of spend. The medium quartile represents the spend of the couples in the mid 50%.

Vendors

Building the perfect wedding team is about more than just checking boxes; it's about finding vendors who align with a couple's vision and values. On average, couples assemble a team of roughly 13 vendors to help celebrate their day, prioritizing professionals for the logistical heavy lifting while seeking genuine personality connections for the experiential elements.

★ Assembling the Team:

- Professional hiring remains the standard for the complex "big ticket" categories, with 2 in 3 couples saying hiring wedding professionals is essential to bringing their wedding vision to life. 89% of couples book a venue, 88% hire a professional photographer, and 85% secure a professional caterer.
- Couples prioritize the visual elements of their day, with 84% securing professional groom's attire and 72% hiring beauty professionals for hair and makeup. Setting the scene is also key, as 59% book a professional florist to handle their florals.
- Couples tend to focus on venue selection first, with 83% saying the venue selection was most important to them. To find the right venue, 73% of couples are using wedding planning websites/apps.
- Couples are willing to shop around to find the right price, with 37% of those impacted by the economy reaching out to more vendors than initially planned to find options that fit within their specific budget constraints.

★ Making the Connection:

- Chemistry is key for vendors who may interact directly with guests. Personality was a top deciding factor for 53% of couples hiring a DJ and 50% of those selecting a wedding planner.
- When selecting a photographer, 81% of couples cited "photos/examples of work" as their most important decision factor, beating out price (73%).
- Communication with vendors builds trust before the contract is even signed. 52% of couples cited responsiveness as a top deciding factor when hiring a wedding planner, ranking it higher than reviews or years of experience.

VENDORS AT A GLANCE

40%

Paid extra to have a second-shooter photographer

37%

Found the process of finding wedding vendors challenging

21%

Met with vendors in person before hiring

26%

Prioritize a caterer that can accommodate special requests

17%

Paid travel fees for their photographer of choice

“

The technique is what differentiates a regular makeup artist from a bridal professional. The amount of layers we have to do, while making sure the client feels like themselves while also making it last all day! It's not a technique most artists have to use.”

- PROFESSIONAL WEDDING MAKEUP ARTIST



Most Popular Moments

The definition of a traditional wedding continues to undergo a major rewrite. Couples are favoring a semi-formal atmosphere that prioritizes connection and comfort over protocol. From the vows to the color palette, the focus has shifted to authenticity and nature-inspired elegance.

★ Defining the Atmosphere

- 60% of couples categorize their wedding style as "Semi-Formal," creating a relaxed elegance that outpaces the 19% who chose "Formal/Black Tie."
- This relaxed vibe extends to the dinner service. 60% of receptions feature a buffet or self-serve stations, encouraging guests to mingle, compared to just 30% who opt for a formal plated sit-down meal.
- The look and feel includes soft hues and neutral palettes with 36% of couples incorporating light green, 29% light blue, and 26% dark green.

★ The Ceremony

- One in two couples choose to have a "first look" before the ceremony, carving out a private moment to connect (and calm nerves) before the festivities begin.
- Private connections extend to the altar where 61% of couples chose to write their own vows rather than relying on traditional scripts.

★ The Reception

- The first dance remains the most enduring reception tradition, with 87% of couples kicking off the reception with this moment.
- Despite the rise of alternative desserts, the classic cake cutting is still a major moment, included by 72% of couples.
- How couples leave is just as important as how they arrive. 30% of couples staged a "grand exit" with sparklers, fireworks, or a carriage ride to end the night on a high note.

MOMENTS AT A GLANCE

22%

Included a wedding logo/monogram

24%

Had a bouquet toss

33%

Incorporated a specific wedding theme.

Top themes include:

11%

Nature & Garden

10%

Seasonal

9%

Rustic & Country

SWEETENING THE DAY: OF THE 53% WHO ADDED A DESSERT BAR



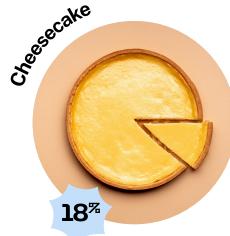
Cookies

45%



Cupcakes

39%



Cheesecake

18%



Ice Cream Bar

11%



Donuts

10%

Distribution of Wedding Costs

No two weddings are alike, and this goes for the price of the celebration as well. While the national average cost of a wedding is a helpful benchmark, the final bill is ultimately determined by the couple's priorities, plus a unique mix of location, guest count, and time of year.

2025 WEDDING SPEND DISTRIBUTION



- The average wedding cost in 2025 was \$34,000 with a median wedding cost of \$24,000. The wedding spend ranges seen include:
 - Low: 25% of couples spent approximately \$12,000 or less
 - Medium: 50% of couples spent between \$12,000 and \$41,000
 - High: 25% of couples spent over \$41,000
- The 2025 landscape is defined by a "K-shaped" split in spending, where couples are diverging into two paths to navigate the economic climate.
 - Couples spending over \$41,000 are prioritizing guest experience (77%), hosting larger celebrations averaging 141 guests at full-service venues like historical buildings and country clubs, often supported by family contributions (covering 62% of the bill).
 - Couples spending under \$12,000 are driven by cost (77%), opting for smaller gatherings averaging 92 guests in non-traditional venues like parks or a family home, and relying heavily on DIY decor (44%) and friend officiants (67%) to keep their self-funded celebration affordable.

SNAPSHOTS OF WEDDINGS PLANNED ON THE KNOT

\$10,000 Wedding

- Location: West
- Family/friend home venue & reception
- 75 guests
- No alcohol
- January 2025
- 6 paid/hired vendors (did not hire planner, florist, DJ/musician)

\$34,000 Wedding

- Location: Midwest
- Church venue & event center reception
- 125 guests
- Full open bar
- March 2025
- 18 paid/hired vendors (did not hire caterer)

\$75,000 Wedding

- Location: Southeast
- Historical venue & reception
- 102 guests
- Full open bar
- November 2025
- 13 paid/hired vendors

The factors that have the biggest impact on wedding costs include guest count (venue size, catering, favors), location (high vs. low cost of living areas, vendors available), timing (weekend vs. weekday, time of year), and number of vendors (professionally hired, friends/family, DIY).

The 2026 Wedding Forecast

The era of the "cookie-cutter" traditional wedding is fading, replaced by a generation that values authenticity, intimacy, and content creation over etiquette and tradition. Couples planning for 2026 are either going big or going very small, and are craving more personalization, quality over quantity, and leaning into creating weddings that feel like a true reflection of them.

2026 LOOK AHEAD

Most Popular Wedding Dates

OCT.	SEPT.	JUNE	JUNE	SEPT.
10	26	20	06	19

* October will be the most popular wedding month

Unforgettable Dates

Couples are drawn to dates with repeating sequences or mathematical harmony, ensuring an anniversary date that is impossible to forget

★ What couples are saying

- Trending up: TikTok/Instagram influenced trends like Pearlcore, candid flash photography, and multiple outfit changes.
- Trending down: Traditional bouquets and garter tosses.
- Impact of high-profile celebrity weddings and engagements: 4 in 10 couples predict more celebrity-influenced 2026 wedding trends based on the popularity and high-visibility of celebrity weddings and engagements throughout 2025 like Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce and Selena Gomez and Benny Blanco.

★ What vendors are saying

- Couples are opting for more intimate ceremonies, with more luxury experiences for a smaller crowd than generic experiences for a larger group of guests.
- Gen Z and modern couples are rejecting traditions they find outdated or awkward and creating a wedding that is more influenced by tech and unique experience than tradition.

“

Couples are moving toward candid, documentary-style photos instead of traditional posed portraits. They want the real, unscripted moments. Blurry, overexposed photos.”

- PROFESSIONAL WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER

★ What The Knot editors are saying

- New twists on traditions: Posed photography is giving way to more editorial and documentary-style candid shots, while the deconstructed wedding swaps typical day-of timelines for looser event schedules.
- Creating content moments: making an event of the courthouse moment and opting for dramatic serpentine aisles ensures the couple's day is one to remember.
- Floral trends are showing elongated stem bouquets and meadowcore moments with organic, effortlessly chic designs.

