

Something Old, Something New

LOCAL SEAMSTRESS WEAVES MAGIC INTO UNIQUE, AFFORDABLE WEDDING GOWNS by Caitlin McKimmy

Eugene resident Bethany Coleman married her husband, Luke, in spring of 2010. The couple didn't have a lot of money to spend on the wedding, but they wanted something authentic, pretty and vintage. In preparing for the ceremony, Coleman steeped her custom-fitted dress in a bathtub full of black tea.

Coleman envisioned a 1950s aesthetic and, given her budget, she perused the internet for affordable vintage gowns. "The one that I finally ordered was covered in this weird netting and sequins," Coleman says. "I had to cut a lot of stuff off of it."

In order to transform a vintage internet find into her dream dress, Coleman contacted Deborah Demirzah, a seamstress working for local fashion boutique Deluxe. It was Demirzah who recommended that Coleman soak her dress in tea. "She was brilliant," Coleman says of Demirzah. "She turned my vision into something real — even the color." Demirzah gave Coleman's dress a modern fit and suggested she use tea to achieve the desired off-white tone.

Coleman was married in a park, and the dress she created with Demirzah perfectly matched the spring sunlight shining on wildflowers in mason jars. "I feel fortunate and blessed that I could pull that dress off for under \$200, and I'm really grateful to Deborah," Coleman says.

Demirzah has been sewing since she was eight. Over the years, she says, she's created about 10 wedding dresses. "They're fun to make," she says. "I just love that people have these amazing ideas, and that I get to be a part of their creative process."

Demirzah both alters dresses and creates gowns from scratch. "Someone will bring in a classic dress and want to change it, or they'll have a picture and ask me to recreate what they see," she says, adding that it takes at least a month for a dress to be altered or made, with such work priced anywhere between \$30 and \$400.

Thanks to seamstresses like Demirzah, brides seeking something classy and artistic don't need to shop off the rack for expensive designer dresses. A reasonably priced dress can be made from a photograph, and unique gowns can be found online and tailored to personal specifications. Outdated family heirlooms can even be modernized.

Demirzah says she loves making dresses with personal, creative flair. "I actually made my own wedding dress based on a design from an Erté paper doll book, and it turned out beautifully," she says. "It was cut on the bias (at a 45-degree angle to the threads), and it had a little shawl piece with tassels. It was so rewarding to make."

Demirzah's workspace is in the second-floor loft of Deluxe, where she keeps a wedding dress she made for a fashion show. It is a short, lacy number cut from velour curtain fabric. "I made this one by just draping the fabric on the model in different ways," she says. "Sometimes you discover the best designs by getting a little messy and making mistakes."

For creative brides like Bethany Coleman, custom-made and altered dresses can be a perfect fit. "It's so great to see people's reactions to what they've helped create," Demirzah says. "There are so many ways to make a dress, or to transform something old into something new." **EW**



A DEBORAH DEMIRZAH DRESS MADE OF RECYCLED MATERIALS

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