



Turn That Gown Upside Down

UPCYCLING BRIDESMAIDS DRESSES

A good friend calls late at night, breathless with exciting news: “He proposed!” she exclaims. And whether you whoop with joy or nervously gulp chardonnay like Kristen Wiig’s character in the wildly funny movie *Bridesmaids*, one thing’s for certain: You’ll soon be making room in the closet for a dress you most likely have no control over picking out. In addition to letting it gather dust or letting it gather dust at Goodwill, there’s another option: the upcycle.

In Roman times, 10 witnesses were required in order to outsmart evil spirits that might be attending the festivities. The five females and five males were to be dressed identical to the bride and groom so the spirits couldn’t decipher who was getting married.

How we’ve gone from finding friends to outwit evil spirits to dressing friends in, more often than not, comically bad dresses isn’t known for sure. Nevertheless, if you’re a woman, there’s a good chance there’s a taffeta or satin gown lurking in the depths of a forgotten closet, just waiting to be drug out for a Halloween costume.

Maybe you spent a pretty penny on that dress, and would rather not slather it with fake blood to be a *Night of the Living Dead* bridesmaid. Is there hope?

According to Claudia Cooper, seamstress extraordinaire at the Redoux Parlor, yes. “You could always wear it to a prom party, or throw a prom party,” Cooper jokes.

But in all seriousness, there are ways to upcycle that billowing number. Just be sure to keep in mind the fabric of that oh-so-special dress before deconstructing.

“You’re not going to find one that’s going to be an everyday dress because a lot of times bridesmaids’ dresses are made out of that taffeta or a satin, and it’s just not a practical or breathable fabric. It doesn’t wash well. It’s not fun to work with and it’s not fun to sew on,” Cooper says.

Still interested in turning that gown upside down? Cooper has a few tips.

“I’ve seen some that are nice but really formal because they’re long,” Cooper says.

“Someone could cut it short and have a really cute cocktail dress.”

If the dress in question is short, there’s always the option of dyeing the color to something more “you.”

“You can dye a dress, but more often than not those dresses are made out of synthetic fabrics, so you have to use a dye specifically for synthetic fabrics. The thread might not dye, so that’s something to keep in mind,” says Cooper.

Cooper cautions that with dyeing fabric, any lace or different fabrics will take dye differently, and can create a mottled look.

“If you’re open to having an experiment and if you’re not attached to the outcome, dyeing is something to play with,” says Cooper.

Perhaps the dress in question has a beautiful bodice. For that, Cooper suggests separating the top from the bottom.

“You could keep the bodice and turn it into a shirt or wear it with a different skirt,” says Cooper.

While she hasn’t had anyone come to Redoux with a total bridesmaid dress re-do, Cooper says she’s worked with a few brides to re-imagine existing dresses from their grandmothers. In the same vein, as long as there’s ample fabric, a dress could be completely re-imagined into a different pattern using the same fabric.

Whatever your bridesmaid dress might look like, consider thanking your bride for veering shy of the road Oregonian bride Barbara Orr Ehrhart went down in 1948.

According to *Life* magazine, Ehrhart hand sewed and dyed each of her bridesmaid’s dresses out of a very unusual fabric — turkey feathers. Pink, yellow, blue and green, the floor-length gowns were a sight to see, and more than likely harder to imagine wearing than your average taffeta disaster. — Jackie Varriano

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