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Gold less popular in wedding rings

CHRISTOPHER GILLETT

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Gold has seen less use in wedding rings recently, Sherry Hofstetter, of J.R. Hofstetter, said.

She said gold has become more expensive.

"When feel people feel insecure about what's happening, the price [of gold] tends to rise," she said.

Many people are turning to platinum or tungsten-carbide for rings, she said.

"With the high gold price, that makes platinum very reasonable," Hofstetter said.

Platinum is also heavier than gold, Hofstetter said.

She said there is constant interest in the solitaire ring.

"A fellow comes in, and he doesn't know what his fiancé is going to like, and the solitaire is always the safest, because he can always reset that into something that she might prefer," she said.

Hofstetter said the solitaire is more versatile for individual tastes.

"You can put it with a plain band," she said.

"You can put it with an insert or a wrap or a diamond band. The look right now is a band on each side of the engagement ring."

There has also been increasing demand for lab-grown diamonds, Hofstetter said.

"We sell mostly natural diamonds," she said. "We don't stock lab-grown diamonds, but we can offer them. We can get them."

Hofstetter said lab-grown

diamonds are more popular for other reasons too.

"When people want a larger stone, it's a fraction of the price of a natural diamond," she said.

Hofstetter said the store does a lot of work with colored stones.

"One of the biggest trends now is a wedding band on each side," she said. "It used to be a wedding band, and now we're seeing a pair of band, one on each side."

Hofstetter said customers want all kinds of items in their rings, including birth stones, sapphires or rubies.

"We can put any stones in the rings," she said.

Hofstetter said some materials do not work as well for wedding rings.

"Opals are very brittle," she said. "Pearls are delicate, because of the nacre."

J.R. Hofstetter said the store deals with various groups of customers.

"If somebody's got an odd-sized stone, we make a piece to fit that stone," he said. "We finish them. We polish them."

The business has produced a lot of unique pieces, Hofstetter said.

"We've done stuff with elk teeth, bear claws," he said. "We've set just about everything."

Hofstetter said making rings is not rocket science.

"You've got to know what you're doing," he said. "You have to understand the metals and the mixture metals."

SEE POPULAR, 10



CHRISTOPHER GILLETT | STAR BEACON

Wedding bands and rings have seen less gold, according to Sherry Hofstetter of J.R. Hofstetter's.





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Almost 80-year-old barn hosts weddings

CHRISTOPHER GILLETT

cgillett@starbeacon.com

HARPERSFIELD — Running Horse Farm has been a major venue for years in Ashtabula County.

The farm, located on Stoltz Road, has a deep history, according to one of its owners and operators, Megan Acord.

It was the home of the Stoltz family in the 19th century, after they immigrated from Germany, Acord said.

“The original barn burned down in a fire in the 1940s, and the current barn was built in 1946 to replace the original,” she said.

That almost 80-year-old barn, which holds up to 150 people, is now the site of weddings and many other events.

“We mostly hold weddings, but also host graduation

parties, reunions and smaller gatherings like baby and bridal showers,” Acord said.

The barn’s most popular times are typically Saturdays in the summer and fall, Acord said.

“Generally couples set up a tour and then pay a deposit to hold their date,” she said.

Acord has noticed smaller-attended weddings have become more popular, she said.

Acord said she thinks many people are interested in weddings surrounded by people they are very close, too.

Catering decisions at the farm are generally left up to the incoming couple, Acord said.

“We have many vendors that come to the barn on a regular basis, and we have great working relationships,” she said.

Decoration decisions are also left up to couples, Acord said.

“We have a huge assortment of decor that couples can use at no additional cost,” she said. “We also give the couple extra time to go through all of the decor and decide how they want to use it, and then we do all the decorating for them.”

Acord said she considers that practice to be more environmentally friendly, cheaper and less stressful for people.

Alongside weddings and other gatherings, Acord said the farm still profits from agriculture.

“While the barn has been transformed into an upscale wedding venue, the rest of the 70 acres remains farmland for soy, hay, corn and grapes,” she said. “All of our grapes go to Welch’s, and some vines are over 60 years old.”

Acord said people enjoy seeing and getting photos at the farm’s crop fields, sunset views and ponds.

“Couples also love the upstairs wood ceilings, which looks a bit like an upside down ship,” she said. “Our large sunflower and wild-flower fields have also been very popular.”

Many people host graduation parties, reunions and baby and bridal showers at the barn, and Acord said they’re LGBTQ-friendly.

The venue’s pricing can be found on its website.

Acord said people should book a wedding or other event at least a year in advance.



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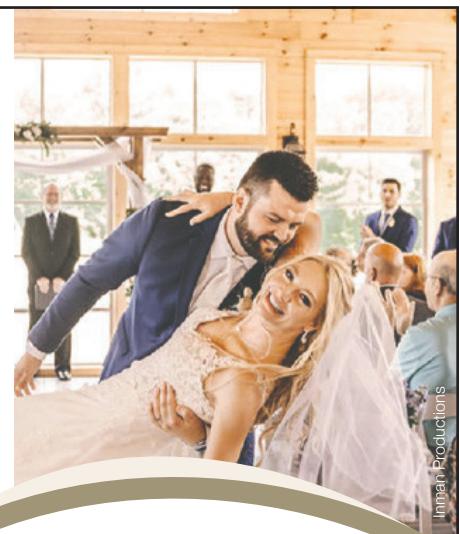
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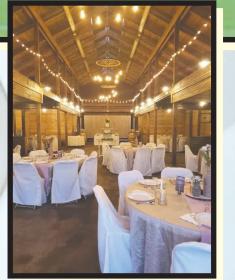
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Consider wedding flowers carefully

Although many decorative elements help to create ambiance for a wedding celebration, perhaps none is more awe-inspiring than beautiful floral arrangements. Flowers offer visual appeal, captivating aromas and texture that can make a space more welcoming.

Engaged couples typically go to great lengths when planning their weddings, but flowers may not be as micromanaged as other elements. Some are content to let florists design their arrangements, but the average cost of wedding flowers in 2023 was \$2,800, according to The Knot Real Weddings Study.

That price tag merits some input on the part of couples. Floral experts say couples should budget for floral arrangements coming in at 10 percent of the overall wedding budget, which is the industry standard.

Therefore, for a \$60,000 wedding, a couple should assume their florals will cost \$6,000.

It's important to note that the cost of wedding flowers has been steadily increasing over the last few years due to inflation and climate change, says

The Knot. So couples may need to be even more involved in floral decisions to maximize their dollars spent.

Here are some variables to consider when selecting wedding flowers.

- **Greenery:** Adding greenery to fill in spaces in floral arrangements can save some money. Centerpieces and bouquets that are floral-heavy will certainly cost more.

- **Symbolism:** Consider the meaning behind flowers to make choices even more personal. You also may want to select flowers that will complement the theme of the wedding. For example, traditional spring blooms like tulips and daffodils will coordinate with spring weddings.

- **Flower varieties:** Hardier varieties of flowers, such as daisies, mums, carnations, and protea, are less likely to wilt quickly in bouquets or centerpieces than some other blooms, even when they are cut. Such blooms can hold up in any weather and last the entire day so that arrangements will be picture-perfect no matter the hour.

- **Venue:** Couples may

find that some venues already have faux flowers or other decor. That may mean couples do not need to have as many flowers or any elaborate arrangements.

- **Size:** A particularly large floral centerpiece can overwhelm a table, and a bouquet that is overly cumbersome may detract from the bride or her bridesmaids. Choose the correct scale for comfort in bouquets. For table arrangements, select a size that will not discourage conversation or block guests' view, nor take up too much real estate on the table.

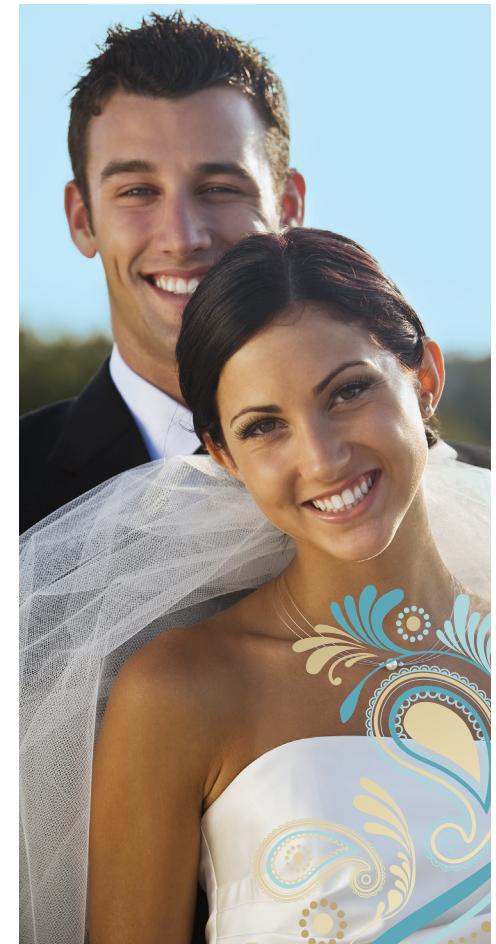
- **Allergies:** Although they are cut, flowers in arrangements can trigger allergic responses in some people. Others may be bothered by overly aromatic flowers. Work with the florist to find blooms that will be best.

- **Color scheme:** Although white flowers always coordinate, many couples like some color in their arrangements. Be sure the flowers pick up the hues used in bridesmaid dresses or even the season of the year.

Couples should take an active role in deciding what to include in floral pieces for their weddings.

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POPULAR: Gold used less frequently in wedding rings

FROM PAGE 3

Hofstetter said making wedding rings can be time-consuming, especially when you are starting out.

"Once you've done it long enough, it's really not difficult," he said.

Hofstetter said there are a lot of steps to making jewelry.

"Whatever the product is, we create it in wax, and then we cast it into gold," he said. "Then, [we] set stones. We make pieces to specifically fit rings."

Hofstetter said busy times of the year are unpredictable.

"Right now, it's catch up with Christmas," he said. "Our first show is in February, and that's when we buy a lot of our loose stones, and we start manufacturing from

there."

Hofstetter said he remembers his first days in business.

"I could not buy a raw casting from a castor," he said. "I had to buy it through a host seller."

"I decided that there was no need for that step

in my life, so we started casting ourselves."

Sherry Hofstetter said it takes about three weeks to make a ring.

The store does a lot of

the work to create the rings, she said.

"If you bring in a picture, we can duplicate that exactly," she said.

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Photography focuses on weddings

BY WARREN DILLAWAY

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ASHTABULA — More than 25 years of photographing weddings puts Heather Martello in a special place when working with couples seeking to find striking images of their big day.

Martello said she has been photographing weddings for more than 25 years in Ohio and Florida. She also operates a studio on Bridge Street in Ashtabula.

"I enjoy getting to know different people," Martello said of the byproduct of being a wedding photographer. She likes to put herself in the unknown of the wedding experience, which

means injecting herself into the environment.

Developing a relationship with the client starts during an initial interview and continues through the wedding, and often well beyond.

"Afterwards, they are coming in for baby pictures," she said.

The possibility of becoming friends with clients is another enjoyable part of the experience, Martello said.

She operates throughout northeast Ohio, with Niles, Cleveland and Erie as her general areas of work.

Wedding photography can provide unique experiences, but most of her clients are generally relaxed.

"I do 15 to 20 [weddings]

a year," Martello said. She also works with other photographers, especially if it is a big wedding.

Martello said she has a business relationship with five other photographers in the Cleveland area, and they are all willing to act as a second photographer when needed.

There are some interesting things that become a part of the experience. "I had a wedding in a hot air balloon in Florida," she said.

Martello said she enjoys beach weddings, formally in Florida, and now in Ohio.

Information about Martello Photography can be found on her website, Facebook or Instagram.

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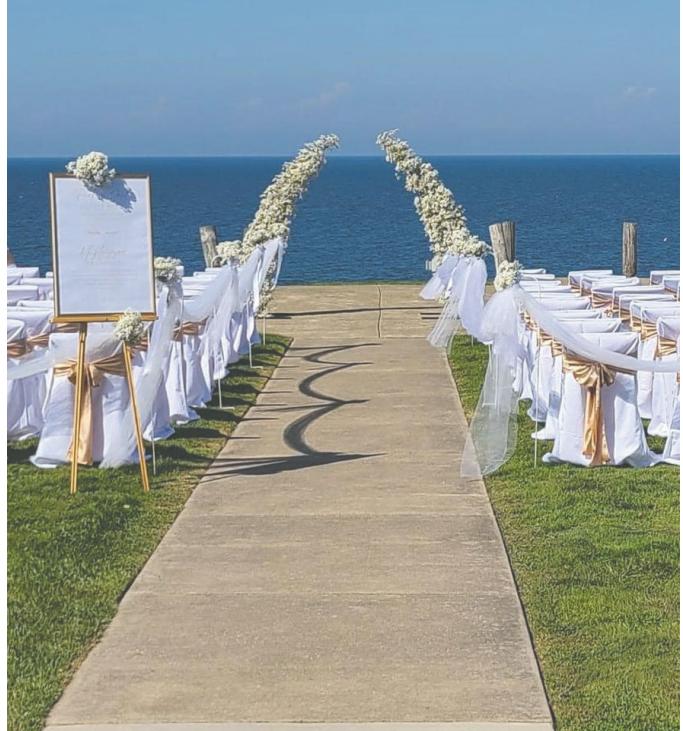


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