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PAGES OF
fantastic
SCOTTISH VENUES
START HERE

Planning a wedding is a massive task. How do you know if you're doing it right? *Rosie Patrick* grills the experts, who reveal it's all in the timing

Time of YOUR LIFE



As you might imagine, we get asked a lot of questions here at TTKS. Do you have to throw an engagement party? (Not if you don't want to.) How do I know if I've picked the right photographer? (You'll feel a connection.) Are sample sales really the best way to save money on the gown? (Are you kidding me? Landing a designer dress for half the price is the holy grail of shopping.) But the top query, the one that's asked most often, is this: What happens when?

Weddings have changed almost beyond recognition from when the previous generation married, and couples are certainly far more creative now - but does that mean anything goes? I would say no: everyone needs a framework. You have to understand the rules before you can break them. A rough schedule for the months ahead, and for the day itself, is very helpful (especially from the venue's point of view). Besides, there are certain milestones with no manoeuvrability, like paying deposits or updating the co-ordinator on final guest numbers. Got your diary at the ready?

[Below] If alfresco nuptials aren't your bag, Cambo has a wide variety of spots to tie the knot, including a grand country house, a courtyard and the unique 'Tattie Barn'

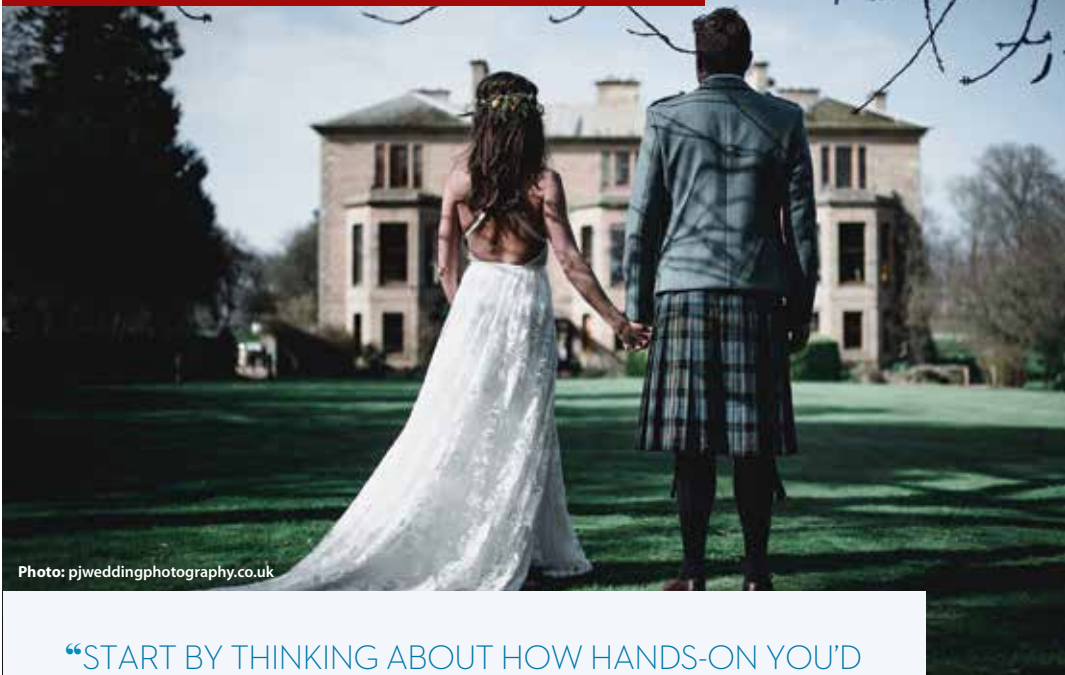


Photo: pjweddingphotography.co.uk

“START BY THINKING ABOUT HOW HANDS-ON YOU'D LIKE TO BE. DO YOU FANCY DECORATING AND BOOKING ALL THE SUPPLIERS YOURSELF? WOULD YOU RATHER GO FOR A READY-STYLED VENUE WITH IN-HOUSE CATERERS? OR SOME COMBINATION OF BOTH?”



[Left] The styling potential at **Cambo Estate** is vast, thanks to its lush 'party woodland'. Here, the couple have elected to host a festival-inspired celebration with tipis and quirky record bunting

Photo: thecurries.co



[Right] Inside **Cambo's** country house, the interior design is lavish and opulent, in complete contrast to its rustic woodland setting

Photo: brucemackenziephotography.squarespace.com



[Above] Provided the weather stays dry (and even better if it's as sun-drenched as above), you can tie the knot on **The Lodge on Loch Lomond's** patio, metres from the water's edge



you see yourself celebrating in a rustic barn amid enchanting woodlands, or in a sophisticated mansion house, or in something completely different?"

[Left] "Quiz the co-ordinator on maximum and minimum numbers, what's included in the package as standard, which registry office you need to contact and whether you can organise your own suppliers," says **Sandra Cunningham at Lodge on Loch Lomond**

If you're sweating at the thought of wading through a sea of venue websites and brochures, Emma has an ingenious hack: "Look to photographers whose style you admire and see if there are any venue spaces that strike a chord with you in their galleries."

Find out where the photographs were taken!"

For Rachel Gow at Stirling's Hotel Colessio, it's a case of location, location, location: "It must be the main focus to ensure it will work for the wedding party."

Sandra Cunningham, over at Lodge on Loch Lomond, echoes that sentiment: "Location and size are perhaps the first things to weigh up when it comes to the venue. I'd recommend searching online →

STEP ONE

As the backbone of your big day, venues are the first and last word in weddings, so finding a setting is where your journey begins. "Although it's fantastic that no two days, or indeed venues, are the same, the sheer volume of options can be overwhelming," says Emma Aspinall-Bailey of **Cambo Estate** near St Andrews. "Start by thinking about how hands-on you'd like to

be. Do you fancy decorating and booking all the suppliers yourself? Would you rather go for a ready-styled venue with in-house caterers? Or some combination of both?"

"Secondly, decide if you need accommodation for you and your guests and whether you'd prefer this to be on an exclusive-use basis, so you aren't bumping into strangers the morning after. Another consideration is the style of venue. Do



[Above] Stirling's **Hotel Colessio** perches on a hill, which shows off its dramatic architecture beautifully. It really does make a good first impression
[Left] Nab a portrait in front of the columns – with bonus points for throwing in a classic car and a sprinkling of confetti

might be marrying, to give you the most accurate representation of how the venue could fit into your vision. "Daylight is also best in terms of time of day to visit," adds Sandra. "And keep an eye out for open days to see a venue set up as it would be for a big day. It can be difficult to picture how a banquetting suite might work for you if it isn't suitably dressed."

As you tour the space and meet the venue's staff, tune into your feelings. "Ask yourselves: can we see our wedding here?" challenges Hannah. "Will this co-ordinator look after us? What is important to us for our day? Is this place within our budget?"

Like what you see? Then it's a case of signing on the dotted line. "You can secure a date as quickly as you like, but we do offer a one-week provisional hold on a date to ensure it remains available," Hannah says. "To secure the booking, we require a signed agreement and a deposit. You can return the contract in person, by post or by email, and the deposit can be paid at the hotel, over the phone or by BACS transfer." It's a date!

ON YOUR WAY

Once you've got your venue in the bag, you can breathe a brief sigh of relief. Your most monumental wedding task is over – for now. Edging closer to w-day, it'll be up to your co-ordinator to keep you on the straight and narrow. "There is no pattern to the communication," notes Hannah. "But we're always here if you need us – just pick up the phone or book an appointment for a chat. We want to build a good rapport with you."

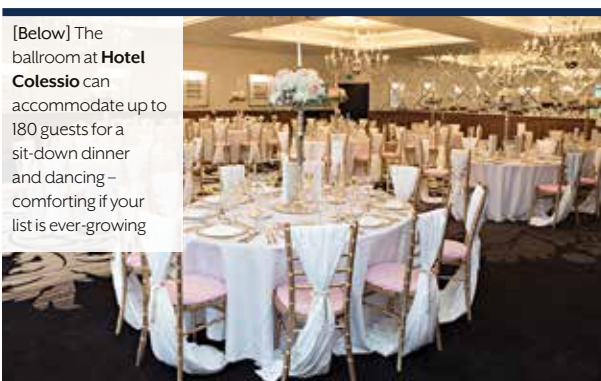
by area, once you have a vague idea of numbers. This is crucial from the very early stages."

Hannah Wood, of Edinburgh's Norton House Hotel, agrees: "A general concept of your guest list allows the staff to show you the correct spaces. However, it's reassuring to know if the venue has flexibility, should your numbers increase."

Say you have a grasp of how many of your nearest and dearest might attend, a pin on the map and a few places that float your boat – what do you do next? "Make a shortlist of two to four venues," Rachel advises. "If you have a longer list, it can become confusing. Narrowing it down to a specific style of venue will lead to a more concrete decision down the line."

At this point, typically a year before, it's time to pay your chosen spots a visit. "Venues book up quickly, so before you schedule a visit, ask about their availability for the year and season you'd like to get married," Emma advises. "You don't want to fall in love with a place, only to be told it's fully booked! If you have a lot of flexibility with dates, this is not an issue. But if you find out there are only limited slots left, ask if you can provisionally book a date before you visit."

It's sensible to pop along around the same time of year you



[Below] The ballroom at **Hotel Colessio** can accommodate up to 180 guests for a sit-down dinner and dancing – comforting if your list is ever-growing

At Hotel Colessio, co-ordinators reach out regularly. "Couples should hear from us every three months, just to check in, to arrange the menu tasting and finalise the details," Rachel says.

Did someone mention food? Grub is king to your guests and working out what's going to appear on their plates is your next mission. "The tasting is usually held six months before," says Rachel. "If you're hoping to offer a choice menu, this would need to be sorted out before you post your invitations, so you can include the options to allow guests to make their selection. We need to know final numbers for each course a month prior and any special dietary requirements 14 working days beforehand."

At the six-month mark, you might find another hefty payment is due (at Hotel Colessio, 50% of the overall cost is expected then, with the final balance to be settled a fortnight before). Loved ones too will be starting to get antsy about accommodation. When can you put them at ease? "Our procedure is to block off as many rooms as we can on a group reservation as soon as the booking is made," Sandra highlights. "Then we provide a priority list for immediate family and friends, before opening it up to other guests. All rooms should be confirmed individually by paying a deposit - the hotel takes the lead so this onerous job does not fall on the couple." That's another thing ticked off the list.

"WE USUALLY OFFER A COMPLIMENTARY STAY ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY. THINK OF IT AS A WARM WELCOME BACK"

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

While you're busy chasing RSVPs and pinning down the professionals, the time will seem to race away, but you should have your team in place with three months to go. "We've dealt with plenty of suppliers, but if yours have never been here before, we suggest they visit ahead of the day," says Hannah.

The venue will then gear up for the home run. "We arrange a final meeting at the four- to six-week point where we run through arrangements in finer detail," Sandra explains. "It can take an hour, but it's vital to go over suppliers, final guest list and timings."

During the last week, expect a few walk-throughs with the co-ordinator before you're granted access for the main event. "You'll need to drop off all your decor a couple of days before for us to set up," says Sandra. "Then we'll take it down on the night of the wedding and pack it away to be collected the following morning."

And after the I dos and cake-cutting, what then? Is it goodbye? "We usually offer a complimentary stay on the first anniversary," Rachel smiles. "Think of it as a warm welcome back." ♥

[Below] Manicured gardens are just one of Norton House's selling points



CHECK your SCHEDULE

At a glance: a timeline for the months leading up to the wedding, and the day itself

UP TO THE WEDDING

According to Sandra Cunningham at **The Lodge on Loch Lomond**

ONE YEAR

"Typically you are bound by the hotel's terms and conditions and cancellation policies come into play at this point. Ensure you have wedding insurance well before this stage so you're covered for all eventualities."

SIX MONTHS

"Have your menu tasting and sample your drinks. These will then be confirmed."

THREE MONTHS

"50% of your balance should be paid, based on anticipated final guest numbers."

ONE MONTH

"Final meeting is held, running through everything for the day. Balance to be paid in full."

TWO WEEKS

"Complete your table plan."

ONE WEEK

"Drop off your bits and pieces for the day and liaise with the venue on any last-minute changes."

DAY BEFORE

"You'll give us a final update and we'll check any outstanding issues."

THE WEDDING DAY

According to Rachel Gow at **Hotel Colessio**

12.15pm Groom arrives

12.30pm Guests arrive

1pm Ceremony begins

1.40pm Signing of the register

2pm Fizz is served, with a tray to be kept aside for the bridal party

3pm Photography is wrapped up and the newlyweds mingle with their guests

3.30pm Receiving line

4pm Guests seated for the wedding breakfast

4.10pm Bride and groom are announced by the operations manager

4.20pm Speeches begin

4.45pm Dinner is served

6.45pm Evening turnaround begins

7.30pm Evening guests arrive

7.45pm Cake cut on dancefloor

8pm First dance

10pm Evening buffet is served

12.45am Last orders

1am Finish

[Below]

"We are fortunate at **Norton House Hotel** to have two events spaces," says the Edinburgh venue's Hannah Wood. "The ballroom (below) has a traditional feel, while the Garden Suite is more contemporary. Which room suits your style better?"

