

Synopsis

Astutely observed and deftly witty, *One Perfect Day* masterfully mixes investigative journalism and social commentary to explore the workings of the wedding industry?an industry that claims to be worth \$160 billion to the U.S. economy and which has every interest in ensuring that the American wedding becomes ever more lavish and complex. Taking us inside the workings of the wedding industry?including the swelling ranks of professional event planners, department stores with their online registries, the retailers and manufacturers of bridal gowns, and the Walt Disney Company and its Fairy Tale Weddings program?New Yorker writer Rebecca Mead skillfully holds the mirror up to the bride?s deepest hopes and fears about her wedding day, revealing that for better or worse, the way we marry is who we are.

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Customer Reviews

I'm not married but I've been to 5-6 weddings a year the past few years and am in 2 this June. I have been totally flabbergasted that so many of my friends -- very thoughtful and unconventional in every other aspect -- swallow the most meaningless consumerist drivel when it comes to their weddings. I'm a professional designer and out of all those weddings, I can't remember a single bridesmaid's hairstyle, a single centerpiece, or what any of the cakes looked or tasted like. I'll never eat a wedding dinner that's as well-prepared as any of the San Francisco restaurants that I frequent, and some of the best wedding food I've had was mostly purchased from the Whole Foods deli -- around \$1,000 instead of \$10,000. What I remember and enjoy is the ceremony and the symbolism of two people getting married, and the fun of celebrating afterwards with friends and family. The fact

that my girlfriends spend months and tens of thousands of dollars agonizing over useless stuff completely astounds me. I don't understand why everyone gets so neurotic about it! What I liked about Mead's book is that she does not seem to be writing from within the dominant paradigm: she doesn't take it for granted that a meaningful wedding requires matching bridesmaid hairstyles or that it's a daring, hand-wringing proposition to (gasp!) let members of the wedding party choose their own shoes. I suppose that I find so much of what brides worry about to be utter nonsense, and I wish there were more voices (besides from the fabulously stodgy Miss Manners) that did not assume that the only way to properly symbolize a marriage is with \$10,000 of floral arrangements. This book is not comforting. The author's tone is dry and you can tell from the language she uses that much of the industry seems over the top to her.

As we stagger into the third millennium, nothing is what it once was. That goes double for weddings. Once, weddings were a celebration of the transition of young people from parental control to their own control under the watchful eye of a beneficent Deity. Now, with the loosening of parental control, with the rise of cohabitation, the decline in church attendance, with the separation of sex and baby-making, and with the rise of a self-oriented consumer culture, the stage has been set for massive change in the way couples view marriage and the ceremony that kicks it off. Actually, the stage is far past set: we are well into Act II. Author Rebecca Mead could have taken a number of approaches to this new culture. She could have been censorious about its narcissism, or applauded its liberation from its ancient anchors. Instead, she adopts a somewhat bemused, slightly aghast tone that allows her subjects to speak for themselves. And speak they do! Mead's main focus is the wedding industry, which is at an enormously-profitable dream machine. She obtained her information from a close reading of bridal journals, interviews with the industry's visionaries, attending trade shows and visiting sites from Wisconsin to Las Vegas to Aruba to China. What she sees is either refreshingly or depressingly the same all over. Brides (and an increasing number of men) are being sold on the idea that they must stage a dream wedding with all the "traditional" touches that expresses their personal sense of style. And the more money spent the better. Mead makes it clear however, that many of the features considered traditional are not all that old. Only since the 1920s, for instance, have the majority of American brides been married in white silk gowns.

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