

# Weddings Bolster Sagging Economy

The girl in the elaborate white gown floating down the aisle on her father's arm may not look like the symbol of an \$8 billion market, but she is. There will be an estimated 2,307,000 weddings in 1974, and more than 75% of them will be first marriages.

These brides are not anguishing over inflation, rising unemployment figures, or frightening talk about a serious recession. Nothing keeps them from following through with their plans for a formal wedding and reception, and beginning married life in a beautifully furnished home.

While married couples may be angry about increased costs of food, utilities and gasoline, the bride-to-be and her groom, with money saved in the bank, are accepting inflationary prices. They have no choice, for they must make the major purchases for their first home. Many of the luxuries, in the form of shower and wedding gifts, will be supplied by family and friends. In all, the total cost of weddings and receptions this year

will be \$2 billion, according to one trade source.

The tip of this economic iceberg is the very visible wedding gown and the attendants' dresses. For the bride, who is as traditional today as her parents could wish, the average amount spent on the gown is \$243, up more than 100 percent from a decade ago. The total cost of all bridesmaids' dresses in the wedding party totals up to \$195.

Receptions, which vary in style from one part of the country to another, from formal sit-down dinners in the northeast to champagne punch and wedding cake in some parts of the south, average out to \$721. Yet, parents of 21% of the brides who have receptions spend from \$1,000 to \$2,000 and over.

It is even more significant that \$6 billion will be spent on furnishing first homes. At a time when a great many established families are delaying a new major purchase because of economic uncertainty, the bride and groom of the 70s are moving ahead just as one

might expect of children raised in an affluent society. They are not frightened by crop failures and the increased cost of meat. They pay no attention to Dow-Jones averages. All they know is that they must furnish their first home and they either have the money in the bank or a credit rating that will enable them to do it.

The days when newlyweds made do with hand-me-downs and happily turned orange crates into coffee tables have long since been dead.

Understandably, their buying spree is out of proportion to their numbers. While nearly-weds account for 24% of all bedroom furniture and 14.6% of all living room furniture, they will represent only 2.6% of all households in the country. Today, for manufacturers and retailers alike, the bride is providing an economic booster shot that cannot be ignored.

### "Family" not outmoded

This concern for a formal wedding and a sparkling home is not a new phenomenon. It is true that during the 1960s many parents feared that their offspring were ready to chuck the family unit as a way of life and, with it, all the familiar trappings. However the facts diminish the feverish talk of young women going it alone, communal living, and more singular one-to-one arrangements.

All indications, according to one authority, point to more new household formations during the 1970s than in any other decade in the country's history.

The major difference is that the average bride and groom will both be independent wage earners and

somewhat older by the time they exchange wedding vows. Today's couple can wait until they can afford to begin their future as man and wife in the lifestyle they choose.

Two economically-independent individuals can save towards a house, more vacations that are as exciting as honeymoons, and the latest electronic devices for their households. When they decide to have a child, they will also have saved towards that event. Today, the belief is that young marrieds will keep their families down to zero population. However, they will become a family, and their

children will be wanted when they arrive.

### Double incomes

The flower children have come and gone. Successive generations now seem to appear with alarming frequency, each somewhat altered from the preceding one.

At the moment, it appears that young men and women planning marriage are as materialistic as their parents were supposed to be. They want to "get ahead," and they will both work towards success. More and more brides are continuing to work after marriage. The double income insures economic safety.

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