

# Royal Weddings Then and Now Set Fashions for Every Bride

When the heir to the throne of England married Lady Diana Spencer last July, the wedding was "attended" by almost everyone in the western world who owned a television set.

The much heralded wedding gown by Elizabeth and David Emanuel had been wrapped in secrecy before the nuptials.

Within 24 hours of the ceremony, bridal gown manufacturers were boasting of being able to offer copies or adaptations of the gown. Are brides-to-be buying these copies?

According to bridal gown buyers they are. "Most manufacturers have a version of the Lady Di gown," one said.

It's not the first time that a royal wedding gown has affected the styling of gowns for the masses. The gown worn by Grace Kelly when she married Prince Rainier of Monaco had a similar effect.

Harold Koda, associate curator of the Edward C. Blum Design Laboratories at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, thinks that current wedding gown styling had its roots in court dress, once the exclusive province of the aristocracy.

"Take the use of white in wedding gowns, for instance. Until the middle of the 19th century, wedding dresses weren't always white. Girls were married in the best occasion dresses they could

afford and often wore them for best until they could afford to replace them."

But we know that Mary, Queen of Scots, was married in white and silver in the 17th century. Following that, the aristocracy used white and silver and finally just white.

From about 1850, white became consolidated as the only color for bridal gowns, since it implied virginity which the Victorian age demanded.

"Or take the use of lace, which is very often lavished on wedding gowns," Koda continued.

"At one time, lace was more expensive than fine jewelry. It was all handmade. The Industrial Revolution broke the hold of the aristocracy on sole use of lace.

The so-called 'Robber Barons' could certainly afford lace for their daughter's wedding gown. Later, machine-made lace made it possible for good approximations of Brussels, Honiton and later Alencon and Valencian-type laces to be used freely."

Another aspect of bridal gowns which Koda felt was an adaptation of court attire was in the use of trains.

"Originally, this came under the heading of conspicuous consumption that was not only impractical for the masses, but sometimes was even forbidden them by laws confining such modes of

dress to aristocracy or even royalty."

High waistline gowns stem from the reign of the Empress Eugenie in the Second Empire or from what is perceived as the Juliette, or Venetian silhouette.

Dropped waistlines in front or often in the back are almost Elizabethan.

The Edwardian styles that are prevalent in bridal gowns today stem from the turn of the century and the movement toward the liberation of the woman from the rigid construction of fashions of the Victorian era.

"Actually," Koda pointed out, "the transition happened visually before it happened structurally."

"All of these Edwardian pigeon-bosomed gowns are quite deceptive. They look soft enough on the surface. But the underpinnings were still so boned and structured that the liberation from bondage was only in the eye of the beholder."

Another point is that the decided emphasis on detailing at the back of the gown was due to the nature of the bridal ceremony itself which usually has the bride with her back to the congregation.

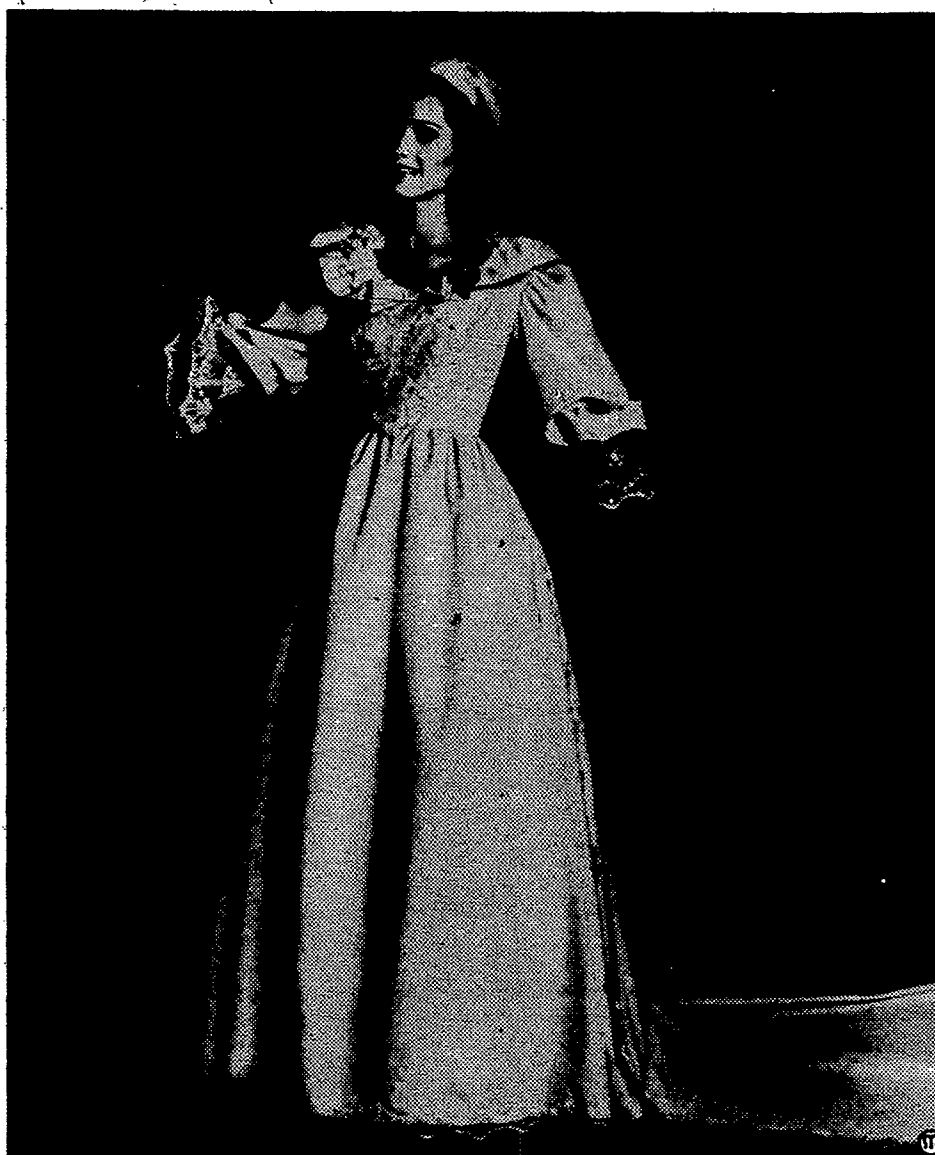
Trains, whether of the Watteau type starting from just below the shoulder, or the chapel or longer cathedral styles, are very often little short of breathtaking.

Of course, Lady Diana's train was designed to be

impressive in St. Paul's Cathedral. It is highly doubtful future cathedral

trains will go to such lengths. But it is also highly probably that the Lady Di

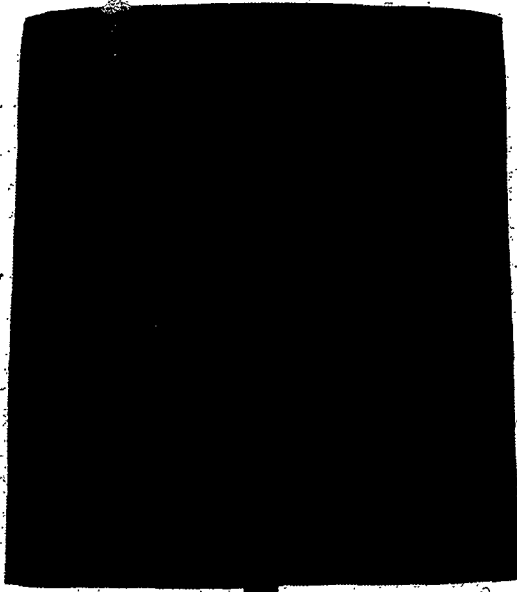
gown will remain as a lasting influence on the bridal industry.



**Gown Fit for a Princess**

This is an adaptation of that much-heralded royal wedding gown, available in white or ivory polyester taffeta with Schiffli embroidered bodice and cuffs trimmed in sequins and simulated pearls. The softly gathered A-line skirt has a detachable cathedral-length train. The hemline and train are also trimmed in Schiffli lace.

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