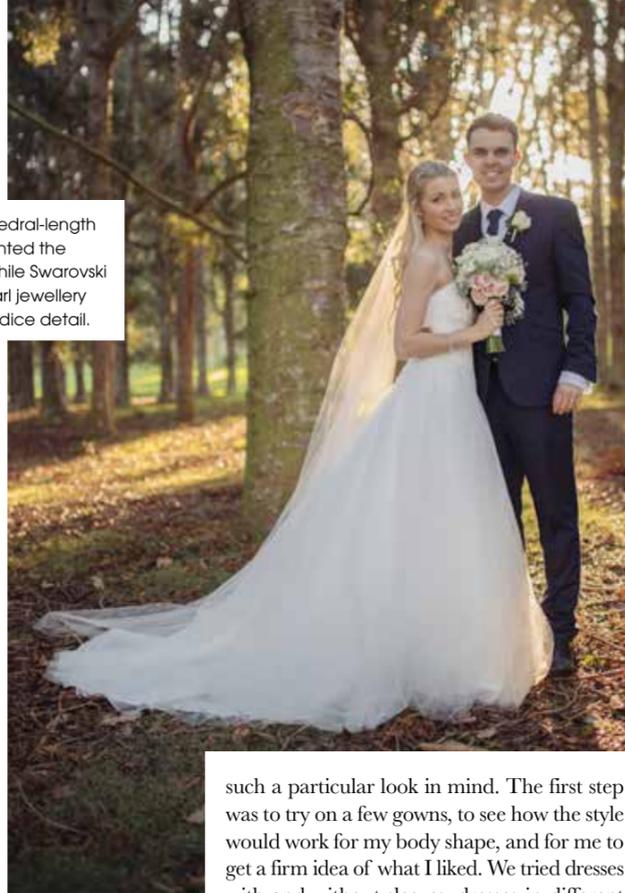




TIED IN A cathedral-length veil complemented the gown's train, while Swarovski crystal and pearl jewellery echoed the bodice detail.



such a particular look in mind. The first step was to try on a few gowns, to see how the style would work for my body shape, and for me to get a firm idea of what I liked. We tried dresses with and without sleeves, dresses in different shades of white and with bodices of various lengths – details I wouldn't have thought of if I hadn't been guided through this process.

Creating the gown took around three months from the first fitting to the last and I was able to make adjustments all the way through to the final result. My favourite milestone was when I got to try on the semi-completed gown with the skirt attached to the bodice – it was so exciting to see the shape for the first time. I wore a petticoat underneath the skirt to make it even fuller and we also added a pearl button to the bottom of my train, so I could hook it up when I got to the reception, which proved invaluable.

I'm planning to keep my gown; I don't want to part with it. Fraser says he couldn't have imagined a dress more perfect for me, and that's so true – because it was made to fit my body, I didn't need to adjust it all day.

When visiting a bridal designer, you shouldn't be afraid to try on styles you wouldn't have envisioned for yourself. It helps to narrow down your options, and inspires your ideas for details such as fabrics, shapes and shades.

ANITA SAYS... Chantelle knew just what she was after, which was helpful as it focused the vision and made it easy to fine-tune the details. This design is usually best suited to petite body shapes. In this case, the delicate beaded Chantilly lace we chose was perfect for the fitted bodice, and the full organza and tulle skirt really enhanced Chantelle's tiny waist.

The design FILES

WHAT DOES THE EXPERIENCE OF BUYING A DESIGNER GOWN REALLY ENTAIL? WE MET FOUR BRIDES FOR WHOM ANITA TURNER-WILLIAMS OF VINKA DESIGN CREATED DISTINCT LOOKS, AND DISCOVERED THE SECRETS OF THEIR DRESS SUCCESS

THE BRIDE Chantelle Perrow married Fraser Bowden at Saint George's Presbyterian church, with a reception at McHugh's of Cheltenham in Auckland, on Saturday, September 12, 2015.

THE GOWN Classic, cinched waist, strapless sweetheart neckline, full tulle skirt.



Inspired by the idea of a classic romantic wedding, I've always known what type of gown I wanted to wear. Mine was a princess-style design with a fitted bodice embellished with lace and pearl buttons, with lots of tulle and a long train.

The theme of our wedding and the inspiration behind my gown were one and the same. We chose Saint George's church for its beautiful glass roof – and because its wide aisle could accommodate my full skirt!

I'd looked in various bridal stores, but none of the gowns came close to my vision. When I booked my appointment with Anita, I was hoping she'd be able to bring it to life, as I had



PERFECT MATCH Pared-back grey suiting for the groom ensured the bride's lavish lace gown was the star of the show.

but I had several appointments over a four-month period to make sure it fitted my shape exactly and was the right length for my shoes, and to confirm I was completely happy with every element. I think that level of attention to detail is necessary to ensure your gown is 100 per cent what you want and that you not only look good but feel comfortable.

My gown was an ivory colour, which made it easy to find pale flowers and bridesmaid and groomsmen attire to match. As the lace was such a feature, I made sure the suits and dresses were simple so they didn't clash.

Even though buying off the rack was a relatively simple process, one of the things I loved about going to a professional was that she didn't treat it that way at all. I was sent the most beautiful sketch of my dress along with a fabric sample, which I'll cherish forever. Having an expert design your gown puts your mind at ease. I liked knowing it was all going to go to plan. Planning a wedding is stressful enough, so the fewer things you have to worry about, the better.

ANITA SAYS... This guipure lace gown is a very simple design with the main feature being the stunning sheer lace back. Natalie's blessed with a gorgeous figure and the gown really showed it off – when she put it on, there was no question it was the one.



THE BRIDE Natalie King married Michael Hall at Rahopara Reserve in Castor Bay, with a reception at Mantells On The Water in Auckland, on Friday, March 21, 2014.

THE GOWN Vintage-style lace, fitted, capped sleeves, high back.



Simplicity was key for me. I'm not a dress girl and have never been one to style my hair or wear much makeup, so it took a lot for me to get dolled up for my wedding day. I actually dreaded going gown shopping, but my mother had always wanted to look at Vinka Design's dresses, so she dragged me into the store – and I fell in love with the only gown I've ever tried on!

I'd considered getting a gown custom-made, as my body shape is quite straight up and down and I find it hard to find garments to suit. But the gown I chose was so perfect, it was as if it had been made for me. I noticed it hanging on the end of a rack, having just been worn in the *New Zealand Weddings* 2013 Fashion Week show, and knew I had to have it. The lovely thick lace was extraordinary – I've never seen or felt anything like it.

Apart from the bust area, the gown fitted beautifully, so there wasn't much I wanted to change,



SIMPLY CHIC The bride's minimalist styling included only a flower in her hair and a diamond bracelet borrowed from her aunt.



PHOTOGRAPHY BEN JUNG, TRIMAGE PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTOGRAPHY LUCINDA HYDE, LUCINDAPHOTOGRAPHY.CO.NZ



THE BRIDE Kirsty Swan married Mark Taylor at Waiorau Homestead in Wanaka on Friday, April 11, 2014.

THE GOWN Floaty, beaded, capped sleeves, low back, layered skirt.



Our wedding theme was 'sophisticated festival' with a big marquee, ribbons and string lights. We decided on the theme and my gown was designed to suit it: not too formal or traditional but sophisticated and fun.

Anita and I worked together, collaborating over a period of four months to make my gown even better than I'd imagined. I told her what I didn't want and what I was looking for: a timeless, feminine dress with a small train – something I could twirl around in on the dancefloor. I showed her some ideas I'd collected from magazines and Pinterest, and tried on gowns that were similar to what I wanted. She gave me great advice and honest feedback, then drew a sketch and showed me lots of fabric samples.

Initially I was keen on lace, but I chose a beaded fabric because it seemed so special – something you'd only wear on your wedding day. I've never suited sleeveless clothing and I wanted a bit more coverage on my shoulders



and arms, so I went with capped sleeves. Another feature we incorporated was layers of floaty chiffon in the skirt, which helped to keep me warm. To match my dress, Mark wore an ivory shirt, a matching pocket square and a tie with a slight sheen.

I had five fittings in total. The second to last stands out as the beaded fabric had been added to the dress and I was so thrilled to try it on. Anita made me a veil as well and I also bought my earrings from her. She has an amazing jewellery collection and it worked well to try on the earrings with the dress, plus she was able to perfectly match the colour of the veil to the gown.

Working with a knowledgeable and creative designer was an excellent choice. On the day I felt amazing and confident that I was wearing an incredibly well made dress that fitted like a glove – I didn't have to worry and could just enjoy my day.

My advice for brides to be is to check out a few designers and choose one you feel really comfortable with. Talk to people who have used the designer you're considering to find

BACK & BEYOND The beaded fabric of the capped sleeves extended down the bodice and into the elegant low back.

out if they were happy with the end result and that it was finished on time and not stressful towards the end.

ANITA SAYS... A V-neck sheath such as Kirsty's suits most body types. The divine beaded lace is the main element of this gown; we broke it up with tulle and chiffon to give it dimension and movement. Designing is a collaboration, so having a bride's input is hugely important – even knowing what she doesn't like is helpful. In this case, Kirsty loved a similar gown I'd designed, but wanted to change the neckline to include sheer lace over her shoulders, which was a lovely touch.



HAND-DRAWN Anita's pencil sketches depict the cascading floral detail that embellished the gown's bodice.



the extra flowers in the train that hid hooks that allowed me to raise up the skirt, and my veil was embellished with Swarovski crystals that sparkled in the sun. For me, the effort put into making the gown fit perfectly was a feature in itself.

I'd imagined I'd choose a fuller skirt, but in the end I opted for a mermaid skirt as it looked divine with the floral detail down the back. I'd always thought fit-and-flare styles seemed a little awkward, but that was definitely not the case when I tried them on, which is why experimenting is good.

I allowed plenty of time to design my gown – seven months – and had five fittings in total. At the first I tried on a variety of styles and we came up with a timeline and costings. At the second we worked on the lining of the bodice, and the gown took shape from there. I had a good idea of what the finished product would look like, but there was nothing like seeing the final result.

THE BRIDE Elizabeth de Lautour married Jeffrey Birse at Cassels in Auckland on Friday, May 1, 2015.

THE GOWN Embroidered, platinum-hued, embellished, strapless, mermaid skirt.



I'd spent hours researching on the internet and thought I had a fair idea of what I wanted, but that changed when I started trying on different gowns. Anita picked out the key aspects of the dresses I liked and encouraged me to try styles I hadn't considered. I'd thought there was no way I'd look good in a strapless gown as I'm not big-busted, but the embellishment made me less self-conscious and in the end I absolutely loved it.

The bodice of my gown featured lace embroidery with platinum flowers and pearls, which complemented my hair and allowed us to bring some apricots and cooler colours into our colour palette. Other special touches were



HUE BEAUTY A crystal-encrusted veil and pearl headpiece helped to keep the bride's strawberry-blond locks in place.



My bridesmaids attended the fitting, and their reaction said it all.

Walking down the aisle, I felt incredible. I'm quite shy and the gown gave me the confidence I needed. The plan is to keep it for any daughters we might have – even if they don't like the design, they can use the wonderful lace and fabric.

My advice for brides to be considering having their gown professionally designed is to find someone who's not afraid to say what they think works – it's their job to know what looks good, and if they don't speak up, you'll never know what could have been.

ANITA SAYS... With Libby it was 'seeing is believing' – when she put on the gown and saw what it did for her, she knew it was the right choice. This sort of gown takes close to 40 hours to create; all the lace is appliquéed and stitched by hand. Here, the fitted bodice was enhanced by the lace, and along with the crisp layers of tulle and organza in the skirt, it really accentuated Libby's curves. This look is usually most flattering to an hourglass body shape, but curves can be created by the angle, length and shape of the bodice, too. **W**

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