

Meet the Brides

Arti Patel

CM: How much in advance did you start planning your wedding?

AP: I am one of those girls who thought about their wedding since they were 4-5 years old. I knew what kind of a wedding I wanted even before I met Ricky. Of course, things change during the planning process. Since I am the only daughter, my dad wanted the biggest and the best wedding for me. I was still in school so most of the planning was done by my mom, dad and brother.

I had attended a wedding and was blown away by the decoration there. Later I found out that Pinky of *Nikun Events* was the person behind the magic. Pinky is a very close family friend too. I didn't know about the hall, the caterer or Pinky, but I knew exactly what I wanted for my wedding.

CM: Tell us why you chose the vendors you used.

AP: For catering, we chose *Rajbhog* from NJ. They have to be the

most professional caterer in the industry. Sachin Modi and Suzy were amazing and innovative. Mine was a five day wedding and they never repeated any dish. They took care of breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. The food was out of this world. The best was the surprise where instead of

the 4-5 desserts Sachin had offered, we found two huge tables full of a variety of desserts! The guests liked the food and they were happy.

Arvind Patel and Ashok Pancholi took care of the photography part.

Pinky was the amazing wedding planner and decorator. Rita (Fusion Bridal) had also come down from Atlanta to help. They helped facilitate everything. A bride doesn't need to get a wedding coordinator; she can get a family member to fill that role. I was so worked up during the wedding process! I must have driven up to Orlando at least 4-5 times just to choose the linen.

My wedding was absolutely how I wanted it to be. There were a few instances when I was upset. Also, the biggest concern throughout the wedding process was I like this but will



everyone like it? I finally accepted that you can't please everyone.

I saw other people, looked through their books, mandaps, linens, etc and then I decided on Pinky. I wanted a mandap that was all floral and Pinky custom made that for me. We kept going back and forth and she showed me some pictures and it was all flowers and crystals.

I saw a bit at a bridal show in Orlando. I still have people telling me it was gorgeous. They all worked very hard. The wedding planner goes to all vendors. Pinky referred a lot of people to us and she coordinated everyone and their efforts.

My parents definitely wanted to pick things on their own. You work and plan, plan, plan – and then you let the wedding coordinator take over.

InterContinental hotel was not quite the first choice as wedding venue. My dad wanted to have a wedding in our backyard which is

about 5 acres and he was going to get it bulldozed. Instead we opted for the nearest biggest hotel that met our needs and it turned out to be wonderful. Monica is the sales manager and we were on the phone

with her almost everyday about lighting, *mehendi*, party by the pool, wedding in the ballroom, different ceremonies and more. They were willing to let us do what we needed, like letting 10 people take over the kitchen! Also they made sure we had the privacy and security that was needed and met our



every need.

CM: What would tell future brides to help them with planning their wedding?

AP: Every bride needs to go with somebody who knows how to represent you, your style and who you are, and fits your needs.



* It is extremely important to get references. We relied on references when it came to photographers, caterers, etc and asked everyone what they liked or did not like about them.

* Attend bridal shows. I also went to some bridal expos and fairs. I found them to be amazingly helpful. The amount of vendors you will meet and the information you will collect will be very helpful.

* Right before the wedding, just relax and let go, this is your wedding, enjoy it!

(Continued on page 18)

Meet the Brides

Deepika Aneja

CM: How did you start planning your wedding?

DA: For me, the wedding planning was different because I had just started interning! I was very much against the traditional wedding, it requires too much planning and work and I am not one of those girls who always dreamt of how her wedding will be. To me, it seemed like the wedding is more for the town and expensive. My dad, however, did not think that way. He wanted me to have a nice big wedding since I am the first born daughter and it was very important to him.

CM: Tell us why you chose the vendors you used.

DA: We had about 400-450 people at the wedding. The venue turned out to be the Hilton in Daytona Beach since that was probably the only place in our area that could accommodate the

wedding.

I had heard of Seema of *Zamana Photo* and I got to know her. I liked her work, we set a price and she was the first person I booked for the wedding. The toughest part was deciding on the decorator. First of all, I did not have time to go back and forth and I found the prices to be outrageous. I met with Remmal of *Occasions by Shangri-La*, he turned out to be one of the easiest vendors to work with.

Finding a DJ was a problem because they are usually booked a whole year in advance! Finally, I brought *DJ Jatin* from Washington, DC, as it is he was my first choice in DJs.

Philip, from *Memories of India*, was in charge of catering. I did not get to eat because I did not have time to, but the feedback was that the food was amazing. We also had fresh *dosa* catered by *Woodlands* on Friday.

I went all over Florida looking for someone to do my hair and makeup. I finally found the perfect person in *Aisha Sattar*, I took all my chunris during the trial. She did a great job. My mom, sister and bridesmaids also got her to do their hair and makeup. I am definitely going to

continue going to her in future.

For clothes, I was going to get *Priya and Chintan's*, but somehow that did not work out and I ended up ordering an outfit from Season's website. (www.seasonsindia.com) and my *mehendi* outfit from



Photograph Courtesy of *Zamana Photo*

Khazana's in New Jersey, I love their clothes!

CM: Please share your wedding experience.

DA: Punjabi weddings are all about good food, music and alcohol! We managed to get all of that together quite well.

For someone who did not even want a traditional wedding, we actually set up a 14 page schedule. If it was to be an event, it had to be really nice. My cousin Sumeet was my enforcer. He is great at event planning. I am sure Sumeet stopped sleeping 72 hours before the wedding!!

The mehndi, *sangeet*, wedding, reception, everything went per plan. At the reception we did something untraditional, we had a live multi media presentation for about 30 minutes and the guests were kept entertained. The dance floor stayed open until 2.30 am!

CM: What would you like to share with future brides?

DA: Most important—Book ahead!

- * Always set a price. Set a budget. Have your contracts and quotes in writing, and take a family member or friend with you and have them double check. Keep your guard up. Ask if they will throw in something because sometimes they will. Control costs on alcohol by getting a tally every hour.

- * One important thing that future brides should keep in mind is that there are often surcharges at hotels. We ended up paying 22% gratuity and service fee for what we spent there. I don't know if this is the case at all hotels, but it helpful to ask about it so that you can budget better.

- * Keep an extra outfit handy! My *lehenga* was 35-40 pounds, not the easiest thing to dance in! Also, having a pair of comfortable shoes is an absolute must.

- * Get rid of your cell phone the day. Have fun, enjoy your day because this day will go by fast.



Photograph Courtesy of *Zamana Photo*

(Continued on page 20)

Meet the Brides

(Continued from page 18)

Nima Patel

CM: How much in advance did you start planning your wedding?

NP: My wedding was going to take place in Jacksonville while I was living in New York! To top it all, my parents had a HUGE wedding in mind for me since I am the first daughter and first everything in my family! My parents paid for the entire wedding but they let me plan everything the way I wanted it. Ever since I was a little girl I knew exactly what I wanted for my wedding, like coming in on a doli and how I wanted it to look. My mom and dad, maasa and masi, mama and mami took care of everything.

CM: How did you chose the different vendors?

NP: The first place we started looking was halls, our guest list was 750 people, not many places can accommodate so many guests and my selection was narrowed down automatically since very few hotels let you have Indian food catered from outside. Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront was able to accommodate our request and the guest list.

My parents were concerned about breakfast and *chai-naashta*. We got an extra room for people to change and we were able to negotiate prices for the wedding guests to stay at the hotel. We got all the rooms and halls we wanted and we also made sure there wouldn't be a convention or another party at the same time.



Photograph Courtesy of Zamana Photo



Photograph Courtesy of Zamana Photo



Photograph Courtesy of Zamana Photo

We chose *Occasions by Shangri-La* as the decorator. A friend of mine had recommended them and they have a warehouse where they show different set ups. I had also seen pictures of the weddings he has done. It was easy working with Remmal, especially since he had already done a wedding at the Hyatt. I started booking vendors one year in advance. I also had time to go to India to pick out my outfits for the wedding. We got a band to play at my wedding, *Hemang*

Thakker from Texas. My mom had seen him at another wedding and they are an amazing band, expensive but well worth it! I also had DJ Prem from Clearwater for American songs during the cutting of the cake, Prem brought out another DJ who was with him.

We are Surti Patels, and my parents wanted a Surti cook. My dad was adamant about having Sudha Patel, who can be pricey, cater and there was no negotiating with my dad. She came for about 6 days and brought her crew and a kitchen caravan. The dinner for the reception was catered by *Memories of India*.

I saw an ad for Zamana Photos and checked out Seema's website, we couldn't meet up but she sent me some albums and I really liked her contemporary style. We needed her for 3 days and she did all the photography and videography. They are probably twice as pricey as other traditional photographers and I had a hard time convincing my dad, my mom liked the pictures and our package was good and

they also did a slide show of previous events and had a projection screen for people in the back to be able to watch the wedding. It all worked out great!

Prerna and her sister did the hair and makeup for the wedding party. *Sushila* aunty from Jacksonville, and her daughter in law did an amazing job for *mehendi*.

CM: Please share your wedding experience.

NP: The ceremonies lasted 4 and a ½ days. I got my *Mehendi* done a little bit earlier so that I could enjoy the actual *Mehendi* ceremony. The ceremonies began the first day with *Ganesh Pooja &*

Peethi in the morning, *Mehendi* and *Sangeet* in the evening, The next day we had *Grah Shaanti* in the morning and *Garba* in the evening. On the third was it was the Wedding in the morning and Reception in the evening and concluded with a farewell lunch the following day.

CM: What would tell future brides to do or not do?

NP: I feel that everybody goes through the issue of how many people are invited – parents always seem to want more! That is where you need to make a compromise. You can't book any vendor until you know how many people will be there.

Book ahead of time, I have friends who went through a difficult time trying to find the right vendors because it was too late.

RSVP – with Indian people, it is the most difficult thing to accomplish. They don't respond and still show up, or better still, people who are not invited may show up! You have to follow up.

Schedule – make sure they know that you are not following Indian Standard Time.