



My best friend's WEDDING...

Two style-savvy brides, two very different celebrations! Y&YW drops in to bridal designer Kate Halfpenny's quirky-cool studio and eavesdrops as she talks big-day fashion and fabulous food with celeb chef (and BF) Gizzi Erskine

Photography | Chiara Romagnoli

The sign above the dress rail at Halfpenny London reads *passementier* – in French, ‘one who embroiders and embellishes dresses’ – but that’s only part of the story. Here, in a converted mews packed with girly treasures, antique pieces and cool taxidermy, designer Kate Halfpenny works her unique brand of bridal magic, from dreaming up couture dresses, veils and accessories to curating a killer collection of vintage gowns. “Lots of people think I only do vintage, but I’m really diverse,” she explains. “I do bespoke red carpet looks for celebrities like Rihanna and Kate Moss – and every client gets the same A-list service.”

Along with high-profile styling commissions from companies like M&S, Kate’s also been tasked with an extra-special job this year: designing the dress for friend, food writer and TV cook Gizzi Erskine’s intimate Christmas wedding to graphic designer Dean Martin. “As soon as she got engaged, Gizzi asked if I’d make her dress,” Kate says, “and I was like, ‘Absolutely, no question’. It will be very Gizzi, with a serious nudge to the Sixties.”

And, as if 2012 wasn’t busy enough, Kate herself is tying the knot with fiancé James-lee Duffy over the August Bank Holiday, in a weekend-long countryside festival for more than 200 friends and family (expect Tim Walker-inspired touches, a riot of colourful hydrangeas and a karaoke machine at midnight). “Gizzi’s probably having 20 guests, and I’ve got 20 bridesmaids,” Kate laughs. “We’ve got such totally different visions for our weddings, but I’m helping her with the dress and she’s working really closely with James on our food. They’re foodie obsessed together, it’s ridiculous!”

“James and I have very similar tastes,” Gizzi agrees. “We both come from the same school of using really great ingredients and having a grazing mentality, which is an affordable way to cater for large numbers. >

WORDS BY JULIA SCIRROTTO HAIR BY SAMI KNIGHT USING TIGI BEDHEAD (SAMIKNIGHT.COM). MAKE-UP BY LILLY KEYS USING DERMALOGICA SKINCARE (LYNDSAYLILLYKEYS.COM)

“I’ve got files and files of mood reference but not one spreadsheet,” Kate admits



Veil,
Halfpenny
London

KATE'S STYLE COMMANDMENTS

1 STAY TRUE TO YOU

“Don’t suddenly feel you’ve got to change your style, or choose a strapless dress if you’d never, ever wear one normally. So many brides call me after they’ve bought the wrong dress. It was in the sale, or they felt they should, and then end up having a whole couture gown made anyway.”

2 CAST A WIDE NET...

“Try on lots of things, because you can often be surprised – look at lots of different shapes and sizes so you feel you’ve really saturated your options.”

3 ... ESPECIALLY WITH VINTAGE

“It’s frustrating when brides only want a vintage dress but they haven’t tried anything else on first. One major rule is, definitely don’t go shopping for vintage until you’ve tried on lots of other styles.”



4 EMAIL YOUR SAVE THE DATES

“We did! My fiancé designed ours and drew the swans (weareshadows.com), and our friend’s little boy drew the hearts. Postage is expensive these days, and it’s so much easier to chase up an email.”

5 ALL HAIL THE VEIL!

“I definitely encourage brides to wear a veil, because I just think, you’re never going to have another chance to do that, so why not? Mine is going to be huge! Remember, it doesn’t have to cover your face – try a beautiful silk one with a lace trim that you attach at the back of the head.”

6 CHOOSE SHOES YOU ADORE

“People put so much pressure on the shoes matching the dress perfectly, but it’s a really kooky idea to find a super-special pair that you completely love and can potentially wear again. Try a colour (I’m *obsessed* with these by Nicholas Kirkwood!) or a beautiful beige leather pair that you can dress up with clip-on flowers or bows.”



Kate took
inspiration from
Tim Walker's book
I Love Pictures!



And if Kate needs me to run around on the day to keep an eye on the chefs, I’m more than happy to take that role – I’m such a nosey-parker!”

The meals at their respective dos are shaping up to be as varied as their guest lists – with Kate opting for a rainbow-like assortment of fresh salads and to-die-for canapés by The Detox Kitchen* to complement a locally sourced hog roast, and Gizzi planning a pub takeover with expertly executed oysters, roast beef and Bloody Marys. And although the final dress designs are top secret until their ceremony unveilings, exquisite fashion is most definitely on the menu. (Preview: a comeback for the much-maligned peach bridesmaid dress on Kate’s day.) “Everyone slags off peach so I thought I’d just confront the peach issue head on,” says Kate of the soft silk tulle skirts and cap-sleeved t-shirts she is making for her star-studded bridal party, which includes actress Emilia Fox and supermodel Erin O’Connor.

“Collaborating on my dress has been amazing, because it’s just like us having girl time – we can sit down, have a natter, do some scribbles and try tons of stuff on to see what suits,” Gizzi says of the design process. “I love seeing Kate work, when she’s at her most creative and wonderful. She’s a very clever girl!” >





"We've got such totally different visions for our weddings," says Kate



COUNTRY COOL THE KATE WAY

I'm quite renowned for my parties, so this is going to be another one of those," Kate says of her Derbyshire do, which will begin with a ceremony in the village church (wild and wonderful blooms by East London florist Rebel Rebel) and wrap up sometime the next morning, when the mob of fabulous partygoers finally clears the dancefloor and retreats to bell tents for a spot of glamping (double beds and duvets included). "For James and me, it's all about everyone being together and just having a big celebration of love – that's why there are so many guests!"

Both bride and groom have pulled out all the creative stops in their 14 months of planning, from using James' expertise as an art director and illustrator on the stationery to Kate's own labour of love – the dress. "It's the hardest thing I've ever done," she admits. "I'm obsessed with fabrics, so committing to one look was tough. I'm also petrified of wearing cream because I live in black."

With an entourage of gifted friends queuing up to help, James and Kate's supplier list reads like a Who's Who of British talent. Rings will be forged out of a single

piece of gold by Duffy Jewellery, while celeb stylist Duffy Hair will engineer Kate's signature quiff (both Duffys are James' brothers and best men). Reception-wise, vintage crockery specialist Darby & Joan, cool photobooth company Booth Nation and photographer Elegant & Wild have all pledged their services as wedding gifts. Cakes and a sweetie table will be provided by Villa Dolce, and White Door Events is handling the planning. Several live music acts will take to the stage as the party progresses, with "a dodgy Derby DJ" likely to spin late-night tunes. Only the coolest gifts will do, of course, so the couple have chosen the unique wares at The Mint List.

For Kate, the process has been a journey into the minds of the brides she's served for the past seven years. "I'm not a bridezilla, but I understand the pressure they're under and appreciate why everyone tends to go a bit mad towards the end," she says. "But I've really enjoyed it. I could sit for days and do research – I kind of don't want it to end!" *For more on Kate's designs and styling, visit halfpennylondon.com.* >





GIZZI'S CULINARY COMMANDMENTS

1 FEED GUESTS EARLY

"Absolutely make sure people get to eat as soon as possible! You have to have some kind of food at the drinks reception."

2 THINK BEYOND CANAPÉS

"I'm not into canapés, but I love the idea of small plates, or having massive cheese and charcuterie boards with loads of cornichons and sourdough breads, plus pints of peely prawns with homemade mayonnaise."

3 SERVE IT STYLISHLY

"I love these boards by Jamie Oliver (top), which you can pop around the venue and let people serve themselves. You can also use old vintage tin cans to prop them up on the table, which is quirky and fun."

4 TRUST YOUR GUT

"The worst events I've been to are where people try to preempt what their guests are going to want, and end up serving chicken because it's safe – but chicken on a massive scale is one of the hardest things you can do!"

Go with something you love, even if it's a curry, pie or sausages and mash – it'll be better value and more personal."



5 KEEP IT SIMPLE

"There's so much emphasis on pushing the boundaries and doing the most extravagant, opulent thing, but simple, great ingredients, like really good smoked salmon, are more satisfying and not too pricey. Later on, go for a massive beef or venison Wellington (it's so easy to make in volume and carve into) with a lovely jus and mashed potatoes."

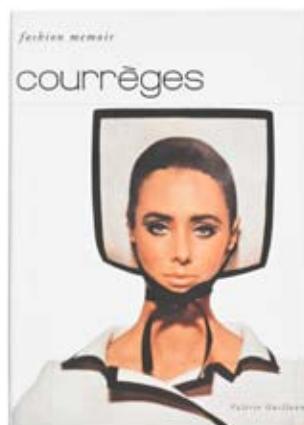
6 BRING ON THE BUFFET!

"My favourite way to eat is family-style, and there's a lot to be said for going old-school with weddings. You can even bring back the classic buffet. Take inspiration from the royals and have really amazing coronation chicken and lots of cold dishes that look exceptional on platters. Or do Scotch eggs, but not just the ones you get in the supermarket: take it to the next level, served hot with a nice gooey middle."

Ballet flats, Christian Louboutin, £455



Gizzi's aisle style is influenced by 1960s designer Courrèges (below)



TIE THE KNOT GIZZI-STYLE

"I'd elope tomorrow if I could," jokes Gizzi, a self-proclaimed anti-bride who confesses she'd never really pictured her walk down the aisle before fiancé Dean popped the question. "He and I are both really shy, believe it or not, and don't really want to have an extrovert wedding. I get dressed up all the time for work so doing that for my wedding wasn't something I'd thought about – but when Kate Halfpenny is one of your best friends it's not even an option not to use her!"

The dress has gone through multiple incarnations as plans for the celebration have evolved. "First it was going to be 50 people, then 10 at one of my friend's restaurants, and now we're planning a pub takeover catered by a food collective called the Young Turks," Gizzi says. "With every different type of wedding, Kate and I have talked about every different kind of dress. We're still refining the design, but it will have a nod to boxy Courrèges dresses from the Sixties."

And clearly, Gizzi's style signatures will figure into her big day look, with her

trademark beehive hairstyle already on the list of must-haves. "I'd love to do a Barbra Streisand in *Funny Girl* kind of thing, with loads of roses around the beehive and a veil dropping down the back," she says. "I'll always have flicky eyeliner and red lips" – Artliner by Lancôme and Costa Chic by MAC, FYI – "and I'm hopeless in heels so I'll be wearing flats for sure." A spritz of her fave fragrance, Bella Bellissima Perfect Day, and "bright, brash, Sixties sunflowers" will likely complete the retro-glam effect. And stationery, designed by Dean, will take inspiration from old B-movies.

After a register office ceremony, the intimate group of guests will sit down to a proper roast, with fabulous crumble for dessert. "To me, the best weddings are the ones that have tons of personality and really ooze the couple," Gizzi explains. "I'm obsessed with having Sunday lunch, and I want a bloody great Sunday lunch, because that's what I get thrills from."

Gizzi will appear as the host of Sky1 show Cooks to Market. For more info, visit gizzierskine.com. ♡