

# NORTHWEST BUSINESS

## Hitched offers one-stop bridal shopping

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There is a certain theatricality to weddings — ornate costumes, precise choreography, a familiar script, music and dance.

So there is symmetry to the fact that Julia Lichtman Kepniss and Carin Rosenberg Levine, who shared a passion for the theater as students at Georgetown Day School, have now teamed up to create Georgetown's new wedding salon, Hitched.

Best friends since they were 12, Kepniss and Levine always dreamed of working together. But after attending different colleges, they pursued different careers. Kepniss worked as an actress before attending law school, and Levine got a master's degree in business.

First one — then the other — fell in love and got married. And that's when it hit them. As they shopped for wedding dresses, caterers and photographers, they observed that, compared to other cities, D.C.'s bridal scene was lacking.

"We noticed that other cities were offering full-service bridal shops," outfitting the entire bridal party as well as creating invitations, Levine said.

Meanwhile, they noticed that the wedding industry had changed a great deal over the past decade. More than in the past, Kepniss said, brides now take center stage when it comes to planning their weddings.

"Brides are a bit older than they used to be," Kepniss observed. "They're doing a lot of the planning. They're doing the research."

"The Internet plays a role," Levine added. "Brides come in pretty knowledgeable. They're more brand-conscious."

Kepniss and Levine "saw an opening" in the wedding industry and decided to seize it. Armed with copious research and guided by their own experiences,

they set out to create "a special place" at 1523 Wisconsin Ave. where today's savvy brides could exercise maximum choice and control.

In many stores, Levine explained, a salesperson sizes up the bride-to-be, ducks into a back room and returns with an armful of satin and lace to meet her measurements. At Hitched, Levine said, "all of our dresses are there for the bride to see."

And it's true. One wall is all ruffles and tulle, displaying white gowns of various shapes, sizes and styles by six designers: Ulla Maija, Judd Waddell, Suzanne Ermann, Richard Glasgow, Elizabeth Fillmore and Modern Trousseau. The opposite wall boasts a rainbow coalition of bridesmaid dresses. Once a bride has chosen a dress, Kepniss and Levine help her customize it to her taste.

In addition to dresses — for bridesmaids and flower girls as well as brides — Hitched sells jewelry, invitations, lingerie and assorted wedding gifts. There is an outdoor patio for bridal showers and cake tastings, and a "salon" where Kepniss and Levine advise the brides and grooms on a full array of wedding details.

"We're calling it 'The Salon at Hitched,'" Kepniss said. At the "salon," for no extra charge, Kepniss and Levine brief brides, grooms and their families about area photographers, caterers and wedding planners.

"The one-stop shopping process speaks to the modern bride," Levine said.

Hitched opened in December, and, so far, "we're having a ball with it," Levine said. Foot traffic has been steady, and already, the old friends have made new ones. "We're becoming friends with our brides," Levine said.

Meanwhile, working together 24/7 has not stopped the longtime girlfriends from gabbing.

"My father would joke: 'What would it take to run out of things to say to each other?' Levine said with a laugh. "The business has made it worse."