

Whittington Bridal: every bride's dream come true!

BY SUSAN MCFARLAND

Tribune Correspondent

Sisters-in-law Kari and Jenna Whittington were both Humble ISD teachers before deciding to open Kingwood's Whittington Bridal Salon five years ago. Kari taught English at Kingwood High School for six years and Jenna taught English at Kingwood Middle School for three years.

The pair have been friends for almost 10 years. Kari had always wanted to open a bridal salon and kept talking to Jenna about it until they decided to take action.

"There was a need for a bridal salon like this in north Houston and we both thought our personal experiences shopping for a wedding dress (in Houston) could have been better. Instead of just feeling like every other person, we wanted to make the brides feel special and have a memorable experience," said Jenna.

The shop has been going strong and will celebrate its five-year anniversary in January. The Knot website has honored the salon with the "Best of Weddings" award every year they have been open. "The award is based on reviews from brides. The salons that are exceptional get the award. I think last year only three bridal salons in Houston received the award, and we were one of them. We are now part of The Knot Hall of Fame and we are very proud of that," said Kari.

The store has hundreds of wedding and bridesmaid dresses in many different sizes and styles. Jenna said, "We only offer beautiful dresses. We do the work

of weeding out the bad and offering the good so it leaves just fun for the bride. We only carry dresses that have an exceptional fit with great fabric, construction and detailing."

The pair travel to Chicago to Fashion Mart twice a year and this past year went to Barcelona Fashion Week to shop for dresses to carry at the store.

As far as trends in wedding gowns, Kari said, "In addition to strapless, we are starting to see more low backs and straps or cap sleeves. More brides go fitted instead of princess gowns. It's most flattering across body types. Lace is still reigning supreme, but we are seeing Mikado and crepe trickle in."

The shop currently carries wedding gowns by seven different designers: Eddy K, Calla Blanche, Lis Simon, Essence of Australia, Stella York, Justin Alexander and Justin Alexander Signature. Dresses need to be ordered at least six months, and preferably 12 months, in advance. Sample sizes at the shop start at size 10 and will soon run up to size 30. "We clip the dress for those who don't fit in the larger sizes," said

Jenna. Prices range from \$1,200 to \$5,000. Twice a year, the shop sells their samples at discounted prices. "We offer a lot of bang for your buck," added Kari.

The shop sells hundreds of dresses each year. Typically, a bride schedules an appointment and brings along mothers, grandmothers and bridesmaids. "We suggest bringing four to five people at most, just because it can be overwhelming with too many opinions. Sometimes a dad will come along, but that's more the exception than the rule. Usually if the dad is there, they have a very special relationship," said Jenna.

Saturday is the biggest day to visit the shop. Kari said, "We book appointments two to three weeks out to make sure every bride has a stage and a stylist." The shop can accommodate five brides at a time. In their appointment confirmation email, the bride receives a request for her Pinterest board. The Whittington stylist reviews the board and uses it to help select dresses for the bride. "In the past, people would bring torn out pages from bridal magazines with them, and we still get some people bringing them in. It's still a rite of passage to get engaged and go buy a bridal magazine," said Jenna.

Employees have seen their fair share of special moments in the shop. "We do have a lot of beautiful moments in the shop, and tears have been shed, mostly out of joy. One time, a bride's father had passed away and her best friend's father called ahead of the appointment and, as a surprise, paid for the dress. There was not a dry eye in the house when she found out at the register," said Jenna.

The shop has seven employees, including the two owners. "We make sure all of our employees are welcoming, friendly and warm. Our main thing is for people to feel loved and cherished when they walk in the door. A place like this can be intimidating to walk into because you don't visit a place like this every day," said Kari. "We offer a mimosa at the beginning of the appointment and then there is a champagne celebratory toast when the bride says yes to her dress," added Jenna.

The women say they can't watch the popular television show, "Say Yes to the Dress," because it doesn't represent their reality and seems overly dramatic. "You shouldn't have to feel that you have to try on a thousand dresses. Watching that show can make brides stressed out," said Kari.

Whittington Bridal invites you to have your moment and find your dream dress! They are located at 2665 Royal Forest Drive, Suite 30, in Kingwood. For more information, call 832-644-5655 or visit whittingtonbridal.com.



OWNERS:
Jenna and Kari Whittington

Whittington
B R I D A L

OPENED DOORS:
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FAVORITE QUOTE:

"To glorify God in our work and to make an impact on the community and on brides."