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After 10 years in business, the mother-daughter team behind **La Belle Mariée Bridal** delivers an unforgettable experience for brides searching for their dream wedding dress.

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A Decade of Making Dreams Come True

by Matt Cosentino | photos by Alison Dunlap

After 10 years in business, the mother-daughter team behind **La Belle Mariée Bridal** delivers an unforgettable experience for brides searching for their dream wedding dress.

Stepping away from an established career to start a dream business is certainly a bold decision. When Gabrielle Devine made the leap of faith around a decade ago, she found comfort in the fact that her mother, Michele Frederico, would be by her side every step of the way. After all, it was Frederico's idea for the two of them to open their own bridal salon.

The pair had always been close, but what they could not have predicted was that their bond would grow even stronger while running La Belle Mariée together. In the 10 years since the bridal salon's founding, they have supported each other through highs and lows, and even seen Devine begin her own family; her two daughters can now be found following them around during busy days in the shop.

Looking back, they are surprised at how quickly the time has passed on their way to a significant milestone, and grateful for the venture's success.

"I was optimistic and I had hoped we would still be in business in 10 years, but it was definitely a challenge," says Devine, who was previously a teacher. "There was a lot of trial and error, there were a lot of mistakes early on, and there were heartbreaks—but each one, I looked at as a learning experience. Even now, when one of us makes a mistake, we look at it as a positive.

"We've built a family within the store with our employees and with all of the brides who come in, and they all mean so much to us," she continues. "We set out to make something special and it really does

feel like it came true."

Featuring premier designers such as Martina Liana, Kelly Faetanini, and Arava Polak, La Belle Mariée works with brides of all types—some who come in with an exact idea of what they want, and others who need some guidance. The salon's staying power has been built on the down-to-earth nature of its owners.

"We try to keep up with the changing times, the changing styles, and how brides shop," Devine says. "Honestly, we just approach each client with love and compassion. Planning a wedding can be stressful, and we want this to be the fun experience it should be. When you think of wedding dress shopping, you think of a movie montage moment, and we try to make that real life."

They also encourage brides and their guests to engage in the process, unlike other salons where the dresses are kept in a back room and only employees actually have access to them.

"Our dresses are on the showroom floor, they're not in plastic, and the girls and their loved ones can look at them, touch them, and help pick them," Frederico says. "It's a very personalized experience, and when they say yes to a dress, we make it a big deal: We serve champagne, we have a photo booth, we take pictures. When the bride and her mother start crying, it always brings a tear to my eyes."

The appreciative brides reward La Belle Mariée with five-star reviews and by sending

their friends and family members to the salon. Philadelphia wedding entrepreneur Joe Volpe and his daughter, Sophia, were so happy with their experience that they recently hosted a fashion show in the salon's honor at The Bellevue Hotel.

Through all of those satisfied customers, Devine and Frederico have remained loyal to their longtime employees—and vice versa—and enjoyed the ride together.

"We've traveled the world going to bridal markets and have had so many amazing moments together like photo shoots, style shoots, and weddings," Devine says. "When things aren't so great, it's wonderful to have somebody as close as your mother to lean on. We help each other through those moments and lift each other up."

Frederico is clearly proud of her daughter, whether she is designing a dress for a bride or making the shopping experience easier by creating online tools. She also envisions La Belle Mariée becoming a third-generation business someday.

"We always said if she had little girls, maybe one day they would want to work in the salon with us," Frederico says. "Who knows, if we stay in business long enough, maybe her girls will come and work with us or take over. It's the best thing we've ever done." ■



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