



Museum Textile Services

How to Archive Your Wedding Gown

Brides are always asking us what they should do to insure their wedding gown will look the same in 30 years as it did the day they wore it. By following the tips below, you can avoid costly gown preservation scams and archive your dress yourself. Older or fragile gowns may be best treated by a textile conservator, who can not just clean but also repair and pack your veil and gown before and after the wedding.

- One-price-fits-all offers are a red flag—each gown must be evaluated to determine how to safely clean it. Likewise, warnings to not open your “hermitically sealed” box are almost always a scam. What are they afraid of you seeing?
- All wedding gowns should be cleaned before long-term storage. The sooner you get your dress cleaned, the more likely the sweat, champagne and dirt that accumulate during the special day can be removed. The oily and sweaty soils on your dress are soluble in drycleaning solvent but sugar-based stains, such as alcohol, are soluble with water and detergents. A good commercial cleaner will use both methods combined with low-agitation machines. If a commercial cleaner does not explain this to you, get a second opinion.
- Things to avoid in modern archival wedding gown storage include plastic forms, colored tissue paper, shiny boxes, and clear windows. These materials often break down, releasing volatile organic compounds into your sealed box, only to be absorbed by the gown. Colored paper also can lead to dye transfer from water damage or storage in a high-humidity environment. Poor storage materials are another easy way for gown preservation firms to scam you.
- Once you get your dress back cleaned and wrinkle free, you can archive it yourself for under \$100. You will need an archival box, some undyed fabric, and unbuffered acid-free tissue (avoid buffered tissue.) Archival boxes are made of several types of acid-free board, but we prefer polypropylene boxes. These strong, inert, plastic boxes are water resistant, durable, and remain pH neutral. Cardboard boxes are prone to moisture and pest damage, are easily banged up, and acidify over time. Our favorite 30 x 18 x 6 inch box is available here: <http://bit.ly/1qII54N>.
- Line the box with about 1.25 yards of unbleached muslin or other undyed fabric. Wash, dry and press the fabric before use. You may get away with one or two packs of acid-free tissue sheets, but if your dress is large or you have a veil also, spring for a 40” x 250’ roll, which can be purchased here: <http://bit.ly/1x6iFNH>.
- Find a clean area large enough to accommodate your gown when it is laid flat, such as a bed. Place the gown face down so that when you are finished packing it you will be looking at the front. First place “snakes,” or rolled up pieces of acid-free tissue, inside each sleeve and stretching from one shoulder to the next.
- Next, hold the box top next to the gown to determine how many folds are necessary to fit the dress into the width of the box. Place tissue snake along these vertical folds, working one side and then the next. Once the gown is folded to the width of the box, gauge how many folds are necessary to fit the gown and train into the length of the box. Start folding from the bottom up, placing a tissue snake in each fold. If your gown is an odd length—such as 2.5 box lengths—start with the half-box length first. Finish by folding the front of the dress up so that it makes a solid top layer. Add additional tissue for support where needed. Repeat with the veil.
- Carefully lift the dress into the box. Store the veil on top of the dress or in its own box. Fold the muslin closed and place the lid on. Store your box on the main floor of your home, never in an attic or basement. Ideal locations are a closet shelf or under a bed. Check around and inside your box once a year in spring or summer for signs of pest or water damage. Contact a conservator if you see any changes. For more tips on textile storage and other concerns, visit the resources section of the MTS website at <http://www.museumtextiles.com/resources.html>.

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