



As Seen In...

Bridal Gown Preservation

By Chuck Horst, Margaret's Cleaners

Your bridal gown may be preserved and worn by brides of future generations. In order to assure the long-term integrity of your wedding gown and prevent yellowing of the fabric, a preservation process is recommended. There are several techniques in use by the large variety of gown preservation services that desire your business.

The commonly used "sealed box method" uses a vacuum-sealed box with a plastic viewing window. Vacuum-sealing attempts to stabilize the acid-free cardboard box against moisture and oxidation and prevent acid buildup. Other methods involving sealed boxes include inert gas purges and/or desiccant salt absorbers. One of the disadvantages associated with all of the sealed box methods is the inability to periodically inspect the gown during storage without voiding the warranty. The lack of air exchange promotes deterioration and mold development due to out-gassing from the fabric and trims.

Nancy Kerr, Prof. of Textile Science, University of Alberta: "*Vacuum sealing is not a good idea, because any moisture trapped inside leads to mildew.*"

Katherine Dirks, Museum of Natural History: "*Don't let plastic touch fabrics. Plastic can decompose, and some give off fumes.*"

The preservation method preferred by museum conservators is the Museum Box Storage Method. All materials used in this preservation process are not only acid-free but also of true archival-quality. This means the chest and tissue are also lignin-free, which prevents them from turning acidic and yellowing the gown. For additional protection, an unbleached muslin fabric liner is used as well. An outer muslin bag adds extra protection



and keeps the box dust-free during storage. With white gloves and care, the box can be periodically opened, the gown inspected and refolded without voiding the warranty.

Textile Conservator, Bern, Switzerland: "*... Textiles need to breathe.*"

Justin Leene: "*The muslin liner serves as a fabric filter which can remove 99.99% of the incoming suspended dirt.*"

In selecting a reputable preservation specialist to preserve your gown, look for one with a great deal of experience. Your gown specialist should have been performing preservation as a major emphasis for a number of years. Also, the entire process should be performed directly by them, and not by a third party that you will never meet. Their in-house processing capabilities should include hand cleaning as well as immersion techniques. Never trust your gown to a cleaner who sends it out to a wholesaler for preservation. Another important thing to ask is if finished gowns are rinsed in a *virgin solution* to flush any cleaning agents that remain after hand cleaning. Also be sure to ask if they provide an anti-sugar treatment. An international/lifetime warranty should be offered at no extra cost.

When should you have your gown cleaned and preserved? It is best to bring it in (or have it picked up) within a week or two after your wedding, before any stains have set! Many stains, invisible at the time, cause problems later. If you have a gown that was not preserved (or incorrectly preserved) and has yellowed, restoration is often possible. Many experienced preservationists are also certified in restoration techniques.