

The Wedding Is Not the Competition

The most expensive choice is not always the most beautiful; sometimes it is simply the most legible signal of status.

Slide 1 - The Wedding Is Not the Competition

A Veblen-inspired guide to spending beautifully without letting comparison design the celebration.

Slide 2 - Why Budgets Creep

- Few families begin by saying, "We want extravagance."
- Instead, each choice is quietly compared with peers, Instagram, family expectations, and the fear of looking cheap.
- The result is a moving standard: what once felt exceptional becomes merely respectable.

Slide 3 - The Mechanism: Pecuniary Emulation

Veblen's central insight is simple:

- Wealth is often accumulated not only for comfort, but for the honor and distinction it communicates.
- Each social group treats the next higher group as a model of respectable living.
- Comparison therefore creates wants that comfort alone could never satisfy.

A wedding can become a public ranking exercise before anyone consciously chooses to compete.

Slide 4 - When Preference Becomes Signal

Ask of every major expense:

1. Would we still want this if no guest knew what it cost?
2. Does it improve the experience, or mainly certify our position?
3. Are we choosing it because it feels like us-or because omitting it feels socially dangerous?

This is not an argument against luxury. It is a way to separate luxury from anxiety.

Slide 5 - Beauty Can Borrow the Authority of Price

Veblen argues that costliness can masquerade as beauty.

That matters because an expensive object may begin to feel more beautiful simply because its price signals refinement, rarity, or belonging.

The useful test is not "Is this expensive?"

It is: "What quality are we actually paying for-and would we recognize that quality without the price tag?"

Slide 6 - The Difference Between Use and Display

Conspicuous consumption is valuable goods used as visible evidence of wealth and reputability.

Conspicuous waste is spending that may satisfy the individual while adding little to collective usefulness.

For a wedding, the distinction is practical:

- Some spending creates comfort, hospitality, beauty, or connection.
- Some spending mainly makes the family's capacity to spend unmistakable.
- The same choice can contain both motives.

The goal is not to eliminate display. It is to know when display has taken over.

Slide 7 - Why "Just Cut It" Rarely Works

A standard of living is habitual-and easier to raise than to lower.

Once a level of expense becomes associated with self-respect or social decency, reducing it can feel like personal or familial decline rather than a design decision.

So begin earlier:

- Name the family's non-negotiable experiences.
- Identify the comparison-triggered upgrades.
- Protect the former before the latter becomes customary.

Slide 8 - A Better Definition of Luxury

Luxury is strongest when it serves a genuine purpose:

- generosity that guests can feel,
- beauty the couple actually loves,
- ease that allows people to be present,
- craftsmanship valued for what it contributes,
- rituals that express belonging rather than prove it.

Status signaling is not shameful. It is simply a less reliable design brief.

Slide 9 - Use the Instinct of Workmanship

Veblen distinguishes useful, purposeful activity from competitive demonstrations of force or wealth.

Apply that distinction to planning:

- What problem does this expense solve?
- What human experience does it improve?
- What would become worse if we removed it?
- Is its value visible only as rank, or also felt as care?

A well-made celebration should be effective before it is impressive.

Slide 10 - The Planner's Role

The planner is not there to moralize about money.

The planner can help families:

- recognize the social pressure inside an apparently personal preference,
- distinguish experience from reputation management,
- preserve generosity without entering an endless comparison cycle,
- create an event that communicates taste through judgment-not simply expenditure.

The finest wedding is not the one that proves the family could spend more.

It is the one in which spending remains subordinate to meaning.