



# BRENDA POWER

## The excess is back... but the meaning isn't

**I** THOUGHT I knew how shopping worked. Even shopping for a dress for a special occasion, indeed for *the* special occasion, I reckoned would go something like this: you go to a shop that sells the kind of dress you want.

You try on some dresses. You pick one you like. You hand over some money. They put the dress in a bag. You bring it home, job done. Even when shopping for my own wedding dress, in the last century, I have dim, distant memories of being able to walk into a shop and just browse the rails.

I didn't expect it to be that simple in 2024, but wasn't Covid meant to have put an end to the madness of the massive wedding blow-out, where young couples shelled out the equivalent of a house deposit on a three-day festival with an ever-increasing inventory of (engraved, monogrammed, dated, personalised, colour-coordinated) bells and whistles?

Didn't we all hear those heartwarming stories of small, intimate family weddings, with just the closest friends and relatives gathered in a bijou venue, toasting the newlyweds with supermarket fizz, feasting on homemade cake and takeaway pizza, and having a sing-song rather than a live band? Surely we would never go back to the pre-Covid competitive wedding stakes when the option of a scaled-down celebration was so much more meaningful, profound, personal and sensible, not to mention cheaper?

### Urgency

Well, think again. If my first outing as a prospective mother of the bride (why does that sound so much more ageing than 'granny'?) is any indication, not only have we abandoned the modest simplicity of pandemic-era ceremonies, we're making up for lost time: when it comes to weddings, nothing exceeds like excess. It's like that brief, obligatory bout of common sense never happened.

The process of buying a wedding dress, from my initial experience, is much like attending a busy A&E department on a Saturday night. You travel miles to a large, glass-fronted warehouse, on the outskirts of the city. You stand in a queue to be triaged by a pleasant assistant who takes all your details and assesses the urgency of

### Cillian will get hands-on experience with Oscar

**AHEAD** of the Oscars next month, it seems there's a rush of A-list nominees getting 'hand rejuvenation' to remove age spots, saggy skin and bulging veins. Their lifted-and-tucked faces look fine for their close-ups, as the nominations are announced, but if they get called to the stage to accept their award, their aged hands give the game away. Still, at least the Best Actor nominees can probably save themselves the bother. Given the unstoppable swathe that Cillian Murphy is cutting through the awards season, with his latest triumph at the weekend's Screen Actors Guild ceremony making him unbackable for the Academy Awards, none of them needs to worry about getting their hands on an Oscar this year.

*Stars: Cillian Murphy, left, with Emily Blunt and Robert Downey Jr*



your situation. And then you wait at least two hours to see a 'consultant', who will assign you a cubicle behind a curtain in a large, long room that has all the tense, sweaty vibe of a hospital ward.

You are prescribed a selection of gowns on the basis of your consultation, from the rails of hundreds of white frocks on several floors, and you try them on, while outside in the main ward, your loved ones huddle on low benches, waiting anxiously to see what will

emerge from behind the curtain. You will all repeat this exercise several times.

And since the purchase of the dress is just one element of wedding planning, and that alone has all the hallmarks of a major, money-spinning industry, it seems that the restraint of the pandemic era was a fleeting illusion and young couples are, once again, happily lavishing tens of thousands of euros on increasingly extravagant events. Maybe it's a

touch of 'avocado toast' syndrome, where young people who know they'll never be able to afford a house reckon they might as well splash their cash on treating themselves to designer lunches, nice holidays and memorable weddings. Except it's not just weddings that have returned to their pre-Covid excesses.

We will shortly enter the First Communion and Confirmation season, and already the department stores and children's clothes

shops are full of dresses, suits, tiaras, veils and every other accessory imaginable. Even some bridal shops have their own First Communion section with mini-gowns, often costing as much as an adult's dress and at least as elaborate, on display. At First Communion Masses in April and May, churches that are normally almost empty will be thronged with the so-called 'Bouncy Castle Catholics', basically using the service as an excuse for a massive party.

### Plea

Most of the brides queuing to be fitted for wedding dresses will probably be solemnising their weddings in churches filled with elaborate flower arrangements, monogrammed candles and expensively dressed guests as a prelude to the real celebrations. And yet it is most unlikely that very many young adults or engaged couples were at Mass last Sunday to hear the Catholic bishops' plea for a No-No vote in the referendums on the basis that the 'family' amendment effectively reduces marriage to the status of a dating relationship.

Since the courts have refused to put a minimum time span on 'durable relationships' in the past, and the term will not be defined in the Constitution, it seems the bishops are correct to fear that even the shortest of intimate relationships could in future be considered 'de facto' marriages.

Opinion polls suggest the 'family' referendum will be carried, with young people more likely to support the amendment being pushed by the Government. If it succeeds, though, the weddings on which they'll be spending so much money will, in effect, be far less of a commitment, far less of a unique declaration, than they currently represent. A wedding will still be a 'day out', a chance to buy a hat and have a hooley, but nothing more profound or significant than that. It seems as if the less a church ceremony actually means to us, the more extravagant, performative and secular the celebrations around it become.

## Why tough love doesn't work

**MODERN** parenting is blamed for turning out a generation of 'snowflake' young adults who can't handle the slightest setback in the real world. Last month, businessman Cathal Friel said he'd never hire Dublin southsiders because they've been too pampered with their private schools, SUVs and red-brick homes. But does 'tough love' give you a better start? Not according to Michael Lynn, right, the former solicitor now facing a lengthy jail

sentence for theft and embezzlement on a massive scale. Pleading for leniency in court, his psychiatrist reported that Lynn was 'deprived of birthday presents' because his parents deemed them a waste of money and was exposed to a 'frugal way of life'. What a parenting dilemma – cosset them too much and they'll be unemployable, do it too little and they'll turn up in court in 20 years' time saying: 'I didn't get a ski trip for my 21st so I had to steal €18million.'



## For a rude awakening, try Paris

**BEST** of luck to Karen's Diner, the Aussie chain that prides itself on being the world's rudest restaurant, with its new outlet on Dublin's O'Connell Street. I can't think of a better place to locate if you want your customers to have a fully immersive experience, since this busy street is hardly the most genteel of environments – let's just say that if you want to hear the F-word flung about in that part of town, you really don't need to pay at least €20 a skull for what sounds like fairly mediocre

fast-food fare. The waiting staff are all actors, and apparently if you accept that it's essentially interactive theatre with some food thrown in, you'll get what you paid for. You'll be personally insulted for your age, appearance and dress, which is all great fun I'm sure. However, it seems to me they're confusing the concepts of 'abuse' and 'rudeness'. It's easy to be abusive, but if you want proper, five-star rudeness that makes you shrivel like a salted snail, try going to a posh restaurant in Paris and picking up the wrong fork.