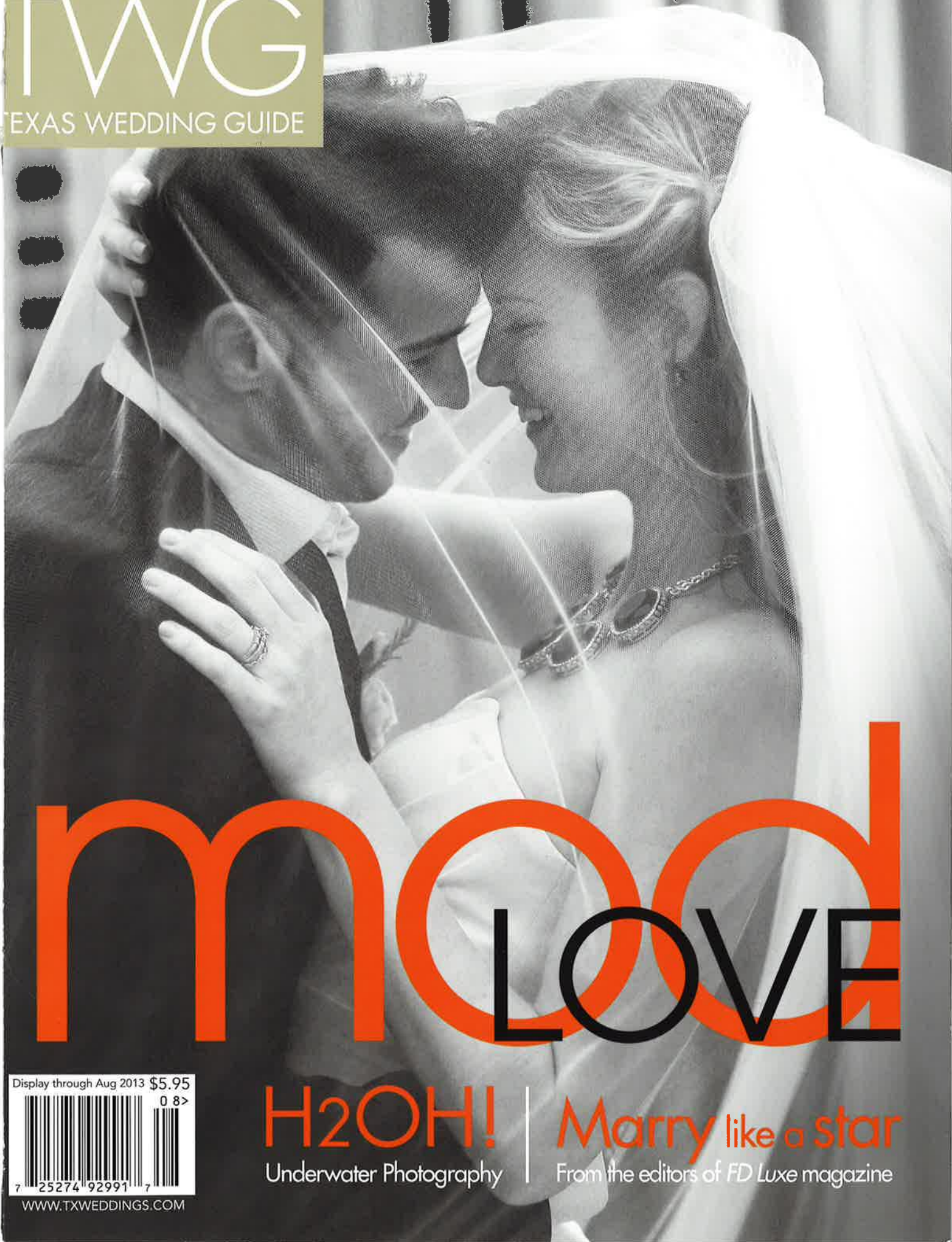


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# Defining *the New* Maid of Honor

CONFIDANTE, COUNSELOR, DIPLOMAT,  
DRILL SERGEANT. DO YOU HAVE THE METTLE  
TO BE A MAID OF HONOR?

by Melissa Gatchel-North

**K**risten Wiig's funny turn as Annie in *Bridesmaids* is an insightful tutorial about what not to do if you are asked to be your best friend's maid of honor. But it also illuminates the complex emotions and gauntlet of tasks that come with the job, er, honor.

Grappling with "I'm so happy for you!" along with the bittersweet realization that marriage will forever change the relationship between you and your BFF can complicate things. And while the film hypes Annie's failings for laughs, every maid of honor feels some stress. In a media-frenzied day and age where there is so much pressure to be Facebook fabulous, here is some advice about how to gracefully navigate the role and responsibilities of the modern-day maid of honor.

**Remember, weddings are about celebrating love.**

Sure, there is a certain amount of pomp and circumstance with any wedding, and there is a lot to do to prepare for your friend's important day. As maid of honor, you will spearhead certain aspects of the celebration – organizing and hosting the bridal shower and bachelorette party or bridal luncheon are usually at the top of the list. "The maid of honor may be more stressed out than the bride," says Shannon Walsh, a former wedding planner and a maid of honor in the throes of helping plan her friend's East Coast nuptials. "But you're there because she wants to share this milestone with you."

**Have a heart-to-heart early on.**

"Maid of honor duties originally involved coordinating the cake cutting, dances, the bouquet and garter toss," says Jenna Heilman, the events and membership director at The Reserve at Lake Travis. "Now with professional wedding planners, her duties have been re-focused on the bride's personal needs." Of course, every bride and maid of honor relationship is unique, so have a conversation with your friend up front to discuss her needs and your availability.

"As my sister's maid of honor, I am very involved with the wedding planning because we are so close," says Maranda Harrison, a Dallas-based actress now in the supporting role of a lifetime. "I'm happy to do whatever she needs, whether that's helping select bridesmaid dresses, going to look at a venue or talking with the florist."

"I'm in Texas and my best friend lives in New York City and is getting married in Central Park," Walsh says. "I can't physically go with her to dress fittings or to look at possible reception venues, but we've been coordinating things using the phone, email, Pinterest and Skype."

**Rally the bridesmaids and delegate.**

"In the beginning I talked with the bridesmaids and said we can all plan everything together, or I can come up with ideas that give us a good starting point, and then we can divide up the tasks," Harrison says. "Planning and dividing the work among everyone has been a huge lifesaver because it prevents drama."

**Be an advocate for the bride.**

Throughout the process, remember this is the bride's day. Don't make it about you. "I've seen 'Maid of Honor-zillas', and they end up ruining the process for the bride," Heilman says.

"Try to make it a fun, happy experience, but be willing to stand up for the bride and be the bad guy, if necessary," Harrison says. "Put out fires so she doesn't have to."

Most importantly, savor your time together. "We've been best friends since 2004. I'm so happy for her, but there is a little sadness, too," Walsh says. "I know our relationship is bound to change."

"It's exciting, but bittersweet," Harrison admits. "We're not just sisters, we're best friends. We've always been so close, and marriage changes your family dynamics. Soon, we won't be living together anymore, so I just want to enjoy this time, be each other's cheerleader and support system through it all."

