

# A New Orleans vision for the royal wedding

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By Susan Langenhennig, *The Times-Picayune*

It's been decades since a wedding dress has captured the public's imagination with such intensity.

Kate Middleton's *very big fashion decision* will be revealed on Friday when she enters Westminster Abbey's "Great West Door" and proceeds to the altar to marry Prince William.

The eyes of the world will be watching, and for once, that's not just a cliché. Friday has been declared a national holiday in Britain. In the wee hours of the morning on this side of the pond, a simulcast of the ceremony will be broadcast live in New York's Times Square at 4 a.m. Television sets will also flicker on in pubs, bars and bedrooms, with pretty much every network going live from London that morning.

As for the dress, it's still shrouded in secrecy, an amazing feat given the machinations of the British tabloids, staking out the showrooms of nearly every designer in England. The only elements easy to predict are that the designer will be British and the cut will be modest, with covered shoulders and a demure neckline, in keeping with royal wedding tradition. We expect the dress, like Princess Diana's, will have a very long train -- the better for TV cameras, zooming in like a slow-moving car chase, to track the bride's progress up the aisle.

Other than that, it's pure speculation. Will it have a full skirt or A-line? Will the bodice be decked with embellishment or a simple swath of silk? Will she wear a veil or go with a crown, or both?

It's fun to speculate on the fantasy of it all. And no one does fantasy better than New Orleans. Down here, we know a thing or two about dressing royalty, even if it's just for make-believe. So we asked four local designers who work with Carnival queens and high-profile brides to share their visions of how Middleton should dress to say "I do."

## **Raoul Blanco**

*The designer's background:*

Known for his non-traditional style, Blanco has been designing for brides and private clients for decades. A native of Puerto Rico, he moved to New Orleans in 2002, first opening a studio on St. Charles Avenue. After Hurricane Katrina, he moved to the north shore. Though he's no relation to the former governor, Blanco was tapped to create the gown and suit worn by former Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco for her inaugural celebrations. He also designed the queen's dress for the Mystic Krewe of Olympia.

*His sketch:*

"When I design a wedding gown, I'm a little controversial. I'm a believer in less is more. I've been looking at Kate Middleton, and I think she's stunning and beautiful. Everything she's worn (since the engagement was announced) has been simple, sharp, tailored and clean-cut. In my opinion, that's her look. So I see her in a fit and flair column dress, in silk faille with silk and cotton French lace, called Solstiss lace, and embroidery with pink silk satin thread over the lace, to give it a little color.

"The lines (on the sketch) are the texture of the silk faille fabric. I would cut it on the bias, and those lines would intersect in a beautiful way. It would be all one piece, with no shoulder seams. That's the couture detail. She's splendid, and she should illuminate the room."

*Advice for the bride:*

"Just remember, the lady is the show, not the dress or the designer."

