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Pay up, you lucky wedding guests

DOMINIC RUSH IN NEW YORK AND TOM PATTINSON

AMERICAN couples are meeting the spiralling costs of weddings by asking their friends and guests for money. Crystal, toasters and other gifts are being shunned in favour of a bare-faced appeal for cash.

"We are happy to invite you to our wedding. PS: Please bring your cheque book," said one invitation from a couple who explained that they already had all the bedlinen and household goods that they needed.

No matter how startled they may be, friends are paying. Georgia Lawther-Richmond, 27, from New York went to a wedding in Oregon recently. Instead of sending out a traditional gift list, the bride and groom posted an internet appeal for contributions towards wedding and honeymoon items.

Lawther-Richmond offered to split the cost of the honeymoon rental car. "We sent the money straight to the travel agent," she said.

With an average New York wedding costing \$40,000 (£21,600), the big day is often beyond the means of parents and couples. Wesley Puryear and Valerie Hernandez are able to spend \$51,000 on their August nuptials, complete with a string quartet, by tapping guests for \$150 a head to recover half the cost.

Wells Fargo bank has set up a "Wishing Well" service. "Instead of registering for dishes and wall hangings, have your guests help out with the burdens of the cost of the wedding itself," it advises.

Peggy Post, an American expert on etiquette, says that asking guests to pay is "inexcusably rude".

Fadi Kheir, a New York photographer, said people wanted celebrity-style weddings but could not afford them. "Asking friends to help out is one way," he said. "I suppose it's not that different from taking back their gifts and getting the cash."

Americans take a dim view of one of our customs, however. Kate Edmonds, one of New York's top wedding planners, said: "In Britain you often have a cash bar at a wedding. That would be really bad form here."

