

The honeymoon goes on and on for the Bridal Gallery

The Anna McDonald Bridal Gallery in Thame has been open a year now. Charlotte Collins talks to Anna about the successes of the past 12 months.

Aнна is pointing to the cabinets that house some gorgeous bridal gowns. The lighting caresses as much as illuminates the gossamer soft, sensuous fabrics. “It’s a new lighting system we have introduced,” she explains. “It really shows off the collections in their full glory.” The gowns are bathed in a luxuriant glow so rich and embracing that it can be hard to tell where glow ends and gown begins.

Anna is hoping that the new cabinet displays will help her win next year where she so narrowly lost this. “We were short-listed for the Best Bridal Retail Display at the British Bridal Awards back in March,” Anna says. The Bridal Gallery was up against hundreds of other bridal shops but won through to the last six. “I thought we had a chance of claiming an award, but now we’re concentrating on the next National Bridal Show and hoping to do even better.”

That the Bridal Gallery reached the final of the major awards ceremony for bridal retailers at the first attempt is a sign of the success that Anna has made of the enterprise in the 12 months that it has been open. So good has business been that the shop has had to be

extended in order to create enough room for the bridesmaids’ accessories and the evening prom wear – in some really funky colours – which will be arriving soon.

But it is the fabulous designer collections that have really helped to fashion the Bridal Gallery’s name. A recent addition to the collections has been a stunning range of gowns and accessories from Paloma Blanca. “Paloma Blanca offers a classic wedding dress,” says Anna. “Elegantly styled, beautifully made and imaginatively designed.”

Reaching the finals of the British Bridal Awards may have been quite a coup for Anna, but it hasn’t been quite the highlight of the year. “We have been chosen as the first wedding shop in the whole of the UK to showcase the new autumn range of dresses from Justin Alexander,” says Anna with evident pride. “To be selected as the shop to launch the new collection from such a world-renowned designer as Justin Alexander is a real honour and privilege.”

The showcase event takes place on the weekend of 21 and 22 November. “This will be the first time that anyone has seen the new dresses, and, even more excitingly, the design team from

The newly installed lighting system



Justin Alexander will be coming along to the Bridal Gallery to help customers with the fitting process,” adds Anna. “These are going to be dream wedding dresses, so if you want the chance to see and to buy them before anyone else in the entire country, now is the time to book your appointment for that very special weekend in November.”

That the Bridal Gallery should be chosen as the venue for the launch of



Just some of the stunning range of gowns from Paloma Blanca

such a major collection should come as no surprise. The shop's reputation has been growing and growing, not simply across Oxfordshire but across the whole of the UK. "The content on our website gets updated daily," she explains, "and we have been attracting customers from as far away as London, Manchester and Aberdeen." More impressively still, Anna

has even won clients from overseas – one from Canada, the other from South Africa – who made appointments for relatives living in the UK.

Innovation has clearly paid a part in the astonishing progress that the Bridal gallery has enjoyed. In October, the Bridal Gallery is all set to launch its very own iPhone application. It will be the

very first application of its kind and will set a benchmark for the entire bridal industry in terms of both innovation and customer service. "People will be able to download information about the latest designer wedding dresses, key wedding fair dates, and useful wedding preparation tips straight to their phones," says Anna.

Not that Anna is abandoning her more traditional activities. She has already exhibited at 15 wedding fairs throughout Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire, and she has plans to attend even more in the coming months, some as far afield as London. She has also hosted three fashion shows, the latest of which took place at the Spread Eagle in Thame.

If the next year is as busy and as involving as the last, then success and the Anna McDonald Bridal Gallery look all set for a long and happy relationship.

**The Anna McDonald Bridal Gallery:
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