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*Photo courtesy of B&B Catering*

# Changing Wedding Trends

Today's brides and grooms value tradition—but they also want something new

Thousands of brides still wear white and walk down the aisle to the sound of "The Wedding March." Receptions are often sit-down meals with a protein in the center of the plate, a starch and a vegetable beside it. Or buffets with a carving station and an array of salads and sides. There's something wonderful about tradition, after all.

But even in what might seem like the most traditional communities, ideas about what a wedding reception should be are changing. Brides and grooms may watch the Food Network and get ideas about menus. They may travel quite a bit, they may work and socialize with a diverse group of people, they may be increasingly concerned about the health of both themselves and their environment.

The demographic, social and economic trends that impact all parts of our lives are also changing at least some couples' ideas about what they want for their wedding reception. ❖



by Linda Picone

## TREND: Multiculturalism

*Bringing together different traditions*

Technology and modern transportation bring people from many cultures together in a variety of ways. They work together, live in the same communities, go to school together—and sometimes, they fall in love and get married.

“Every family is bringing together diverse histories and backgrounds,” says Jon Wool of Finesse Cuisine in Chicago. “You’re trying to do a tribute to each person’s history and family, yet make it contemporary and unique for a more American audience.”

Wool catered a wedding for a woman from Chicago who was marrying a man from India

that had to meet that challenge. So the menu included items like a mango ginger mojito with lime and

lamb tikka braised in mint, with a roasted chicken korma on the buffet. “Then we threw in a couple of very classic American items, like a house-cured salmon,” he says. “Just to make the locals feel comfortable.”

One wedding for a couple who travel and have worked in several different countries merged multiple cuisine traditions, from a sushi table for the cocktail hour to a Mediterranean station

to a tribute to London—with Indian cuisine like Chicken Masala and Coconut and Shrimp Samosas. “Then we went really mid-American desserts to complement the wedding cake.”

Wool stresses that even couples who aren’t from different ethnicities or traditions may want something unusual for their reception—but they are likely to have relatives who aren’t particularly adventurous.

“Brides and grooms are very well traveled, especially if they live in a cosmopolitan area, very daring,” he says. “The parents may be a little more classic and a little more conservative and, ultimately, they still have to appeal to the uncle who travels some distance and wants some red meat and potatoes. A good caterer has to walk that fine line between being inventive and creating a level of comfort.”

### *Working with couples who want a multicultural reception*

Wool says that whether a couple is multi- or mono-cultural, he goes through the same kind of conversations: “I try to learn their

history and their background. I ask about some particular interest, or what brought them together. They share something in common; I try to pull that experience into the menu.”

## TREND: Economy

*Saving money with hors d'oeuvre only*

It’s no news that everyone is trying to save money. Having a cocktail wedding reception instead of a full meal isn’t a new idea, but it’s come into focus a little more recently because of the economy.

In the past year, Bakers’ Best Catering in Boston has done several cocktail receptions “where people are looking to save money,” says Kristy Hartling, catering sales and event planning manager. “For the same price point of a seated meal, you can have some amazing food.”

In other words, the wedding couple can actually deliver more, in terms of flavor and excitement, for the same price or less than they would have paid for a buffet or a seated dinner.

Bakers’ Best can make that work for the company, too, Hartling says. “We’re able to take on more events in a single day because less staff is required. We only need one or two chefs for a 100-person wedding,

where a sit-down dinner might require four chefs.”

For many guests, the cocktail reception will be dinner, whether or not they’re sitting down. So you need to make sure they feel satisfied, ❁



Hartling says. "Probably they need a choice of at least eight passed hors d'oeuvre, which is more than you would do before a dinner. And you might do some heartier things than you would have before a dinner, like lamb chops, a couple of beef things."

Bakers' Best will do at least one hearty station, like a tapas station.

"We want to have more than enough food for people to make this their dinner."

The quality is important, of course. "Our grilled shrimp is really fantastic, as simple as that seems, and a lot of that has to do with the shrimp we can get here. When you bite into it, you can tell the difference."

#### *Working with couples who want an economical reception*

Hartling says that guests sometimes aren't aware that a cocktail reception is not the beginning of a sit-down dinner reception. "They'll be asking, 'Where's dinner, where will we be

sitting?'" They hold off on eating because they think that dinner is coming." She advises couples to make sure the nature of the reception is clear on the invitation—and to create an hors d'oeuvre menu that will not leave guests wishing they had more.

#### **TREND: Do-it-yourself**

##### *Making a reception a drop-off event*

The ultimate in an economical reception is one in which the food is catered—but not served. The drop-off wedding reception is an important solution for a few couples. Not every caterer is going to want to do them—and most caterers aren't going to encourage them, but requests for a drop-off reception are popping up occasionally.

Kathy Craig of Castle Catering in Richland, WA did her first drop-off receptions last year and has two or three happening this year. "We've just kind of seen it with the economy," she says. "Our market is pretty conservative to begin with, and then we've seen everybody beginning to pull back."

For brides who can't manage the wedding of their dreams, the drop-off reception is "a way to do what they want to do, to stick to the things that are most important to them," Craig says.

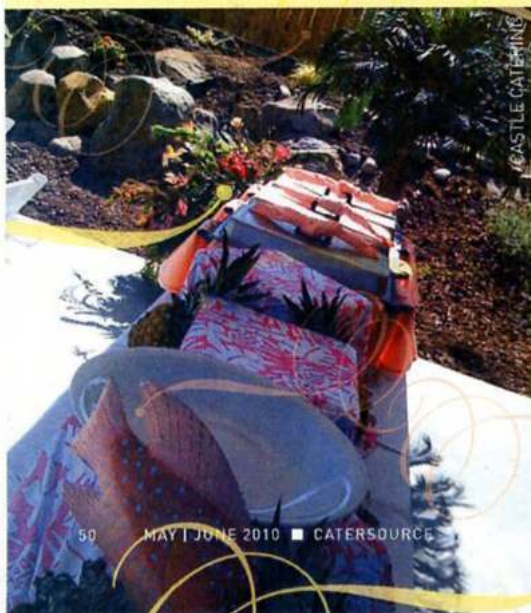
One bride she worked with had wanted to go to Maui for her wedding, but that destination wedding was just out of bounds financially. Instead, the young couple created a wedding with a tropical feeling—at home. Castle Catering provided a simple luau luncheon for the reception.



Craig says the way she handles a drop-off reception is not quite pure drop-off, "because we really just couldn't do that; we can't just drop it off and leave it alone." Although the food is ready to serve—"at most, we would toss a salad on-site"—a server will go with the delivery person to make sure the food is set up attractively and her staff will come back after the event to clean up and take away the serving dishes. The quality of the food, including presentation, is going to reflect on the catering company, whether it's drop-off or full service, Craig says, and she's not willing to take a chance that it won't be perfect.

Craig says none of the drop-off receptions she's done started with a request from the couple; the idea came about as they talked through what the couple wanted and how that could be accomplished. All that she's done were at private homes, "because they're saving money all over the place."

Craig is happy to have the drop-off option available but, "to be honest, I hope we don't do a heck of a lot of them. We all love the big weddings." ❁



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*Working with couples who want a do-it-yourself reception*

Craig charges her usual menu pricing for a drop-off reception, plus the 18 percent service charge for delivery and pickup that she would include for any event. The savings for the client is in staffing, not in the food costs.

**TREND: Environmentalism**  
*Greening the menu and more*

Something borrowed, something green? More and more wedding couples want to feel that their reception is sensitive to the environment in a variety of ways.

"Food is the biggest concern when it comes to environmental impact," says Wesley Adams, director of marketing for One Atlantic in Atlantic City, NJ. "About 25 percent of clients ask about where their food comes from and another 30-40 percent express interest when queried."

One Atlantic has created a 100-Mile Menu that is popular with clients. All of the ingredients for items on the menu come from within 100 miles of Atlantic City. "We've developed relationships with farmers and growers in the region to secure the finest and freshest products available," Adams says. "We can even organize trips for clients to go to the farms themselves to 'harvest' the items."

Adams says the cost of local ingredients is nearly the same as transported items—and can be less in some circumstances. "If a local grower has a huge crop of spinach they need to sell off, we can acquire it for a low price and substitute that for another vegetable on the menu." ❄️



Beyond the 100-Mile Menu, One Atlantic also has created other ways for wedding couples to feel like they're doing their part for the environment:

- A partnership with carbonfund.org, so the couple can buy carbon offsets for their wedding. One Atlantic works with carbonfund.org to calculate the carbon emissions for the event, then the client can buy carbon offsets that are used to support projects that reduce carbon emissions.
- A community partnership with a foundation to which it donates all floral arrangements after events. "Those arrangements, which usually are thrown away, go to cheer up sick patients."
- Use of environmentally friendly products, including cardboard furniture, greenery and flowers in wood boxes and recycled paper.

#### *Working with couples who want environmentally sensitive receptions*

Adams says that only a handful of clients ask unprompted questions about the environmental impact of their reception, but "when we tell them about the many options they have here, such as local foods and carbon offsets, many are interested. I believe that as more people realize they have more environmentally friendly options, they will start taking the initiative and insist on them."

#### **TREND: Healthier eating** *Updating the vegetarian option*

Every caterer has a vegetarian option or two, to serve the odd guest at the reception who won't eat meat. But there's an increasing interest in having non-meat options for all guests. "What we're finding is that more people want



more and more vegetarian components for the wedding," says Chris Opper of Food for Thought in Chicago.

"They're being more sensitive to their guests' needs. If they have six hors d'oeuvre, for example, two or three of them will be vegetarian and at least one will be vegan."

Opper says it's important to give vegetarian options that are comparable to the meat options on the menu. For a menu with, say, grilled tuna loin with a red wine sauce, Yukon gold mashed potatoes, baby vegetables and some micro-greens, the vegetarian option could be a vegetable Napoleon with a little marinara sauce and some spring peas. In other words, a delightful menu item on its own, not just a plate of vegetables without the tuna loin.

Trying to find vegetarian options is a nice challenge to the chef, Opper says. "It forces you to think outside the box. You need to think of vegetables or starches or grains in different ways. Do you layer them, do you stack them, do you cook them differently? Do you make them in cakes or bars." The chef also may learn to work with less familiar proteins like seitan or tofu.

#### *Working with couples who want vegetarian-friendly receptions*

There's just one key thing to remember when talking with the couple and creating the menu, Opper says: "Will that vegetarian guest walk away feeling as full as someone who is not a vegetarian? We never want anyone to walk away hungry." **CS**

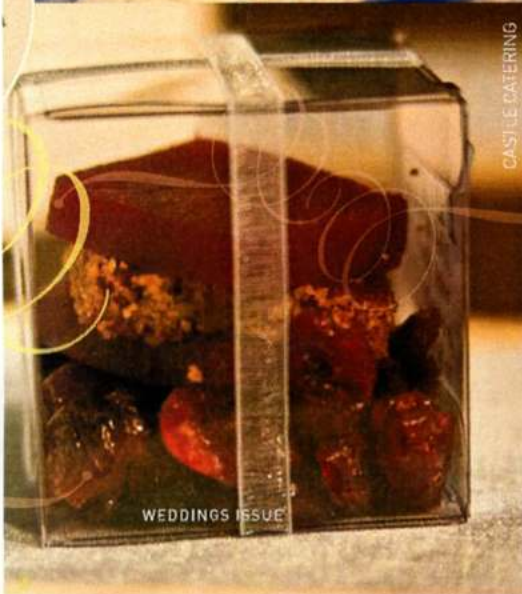
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