



# project menu

Want your reception to be unforgettable? Here's a little secret: It's all about the food.

BY CHRISTA VAGNOZZI

If you're like the rest of us, you have more food blogs on your Google reader than anything else, and your DVR is set to record at least one cooking show (our faves: *Top Chef* and *Ace of Cakes*). Thanks to celebrity chefs and the Food Network, today's couples are more tapped into the food and wine industry than ever before—which means, when it comes to planning a wedding menu, the standard chicken or beef just doesn't cut it. That's why we put together this list of 10 hot catering trends. From eco-friendly meals to tasting menus, these ideas are guaranteed to satisfy your appetite for good food and drink. >>



When it comes to wedding food and drink, it can be a work of art as well as a showstopping experience for everyone invited.



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: ANNE RUTHMANN PHOTOGRAPHY; LAURA NOVAK PHOTOGRAPHY; ANTONIS AGHILLEOS; SARAH BASTILLE PHOTOGRAPHY



**color cues** Hot hues have jumped from the wedding invitations and bridesmaid dresses to hors d'oeuvres and signature cocktails.

#### 1 Play With Color

It's one thing to think in terms of color when it comes to linens and flowers, but for food? That's what's so exciting about modern-day wedding catering: If you want it, chances are a caterer can do it. Many chefs are coming up with unique ways to infuse color into their food to match the couple's signature hues, and we're not talking green mashed potatoes! If you're having a black-and-white wedding, consider serving Oreo cookies and mini ice cream sandwiches for dessert, or (even better) root beer floats. Like red and green? We know one caterer who put together hors d'oeuvres that included shot glasses filled with layers of edamame (green) and lobster trifle (red), and also tuna tartare (red) served in wasabi (green) sesame-seeded wontons for a cocktail hour.

#### 2 Break Out the Bubbly

One trend we love: letting your guests play bartender. How do you do it? First, pick your drink. Since it's a wedding, champagne is a natural choice. Next, ask your caterer to set up a display at the cocktail hour with the requisite glassware, spirits and all the fixin's. For a bubble bar, have champagne, prosecco and sparkling California wine (see our sidebar on page XX for recommendations) for variety. Hint: The prettier the bottles, the prettier your display will be. You also need liqueurs, like Chambord, Midori, >>

Schnapps and St-Germain (a tasty new liqueur that's made from elderflowers) and juices like pineapple, cranberry and orange juice. Then set out pretty bowls filled with fresh peach, white grape and pear purees (think Bellinis) as well as raspberries and blackberries for garnishes. Your guests can pick whatever they like and enjoy their very own custom-made cocktail.



**top chefs** Eating at a wedding now comes with its own form of entertainment, as couples are hiring local and celebrity chefs to wow their guests.

#### 3 Spring Into Action

Cocktails aren't the only things that can be custom-made at weddings these days. Caterers are now creating what some call "interactive culinary kiosks" around the cocktail hour and reception that allow for more guest interaction and better flow from room to room. Taking the traditional buffet one step further, each of these stations is attended to by a chef who can plate your meal and give you tips on what to pair things with. Right now, the hot station is the ceviche bar, which offers a variety of fish in savory cones. If you're not into seafood, you can do a chips station with several varieties of chips made from nontraditional roots and tubers, like beets and sweet potatoes paired with a variety of house-made dips. This type of food service is perfect for a cocktail reception where guests can mill around and eat, dance or just hang out in a lounge area all night long. >>



**healthy hors d'oeuvres** Pigs in a blanket? Yes, they're tasty, but we'll take fresh-made veggie spring rolls and chicken satay too.

#### 4 Trim the Fat

Just because it's your wedding and you're hosting a large crowd doesn't mean that your options are limited when it comes to a healthy meal. Gone are the days of heavy cream sauces, fatty double pork chops and deep-fried apps. For the cocktail hour, think small—as in little antipasto skewers with a grape tomato, a ball of mozzarella and an olive drizzled with fresh basil oil, or mini lettuce wraps with chicken in a savory Thai peanut sauce. You could also do pecan, raisin and apple crostini drizzled with honey and sprinkled with blue cheese (is your mouth watering yet?). Even though these apps are healthy, it doesn't make them any more expensive. You're actually spending less since you're adding a lot more fresh vegetables to your menu. Looking for healthy dessert options? Well, this is one course where we're going to stick to tradition. The more sugar, the better!

#### 5 Go Green

This trend is here to stay. As organic and sustainable ingredients become more and more available, brides and grooms want to have at least one green course on their wedding menus, and caterers are responding. These days, you can serve something as simple as a fresh salad made with organic greens, or do a free-range chicken with organic string beans as the main meal. And going green doesn't stop >>

with the food. Many winemakers and spirits producers are venturing into organic beverage options, so you should ask your caterer about adding organic tequilas and vodkas or even biodynamic wines to your bar menu.

#### tip minimize it

Nothing is more awkward than when you're at a wedding and you have champagne in one hand and your clutch in the other, and a waiter comes up and offers you a tasty-looking hors d'oeuvre that has to be eaten with a fork. You've only got so many hands, but that duck ravioli looks so good! Save your guests all that trouble by asking your caterer to serve only one-bite hors d'oeuvres during cocktail hour.

#### 6 Opt for Family-Style

Now you don't have to be Italian to have a family-style meal at your wedding. In fact, more brides and grooms are requesting that their reception meals be served family-style to take the stuffiness out of a sit-down meal. There's more interaction between guests at the table because they have to pass all of the dishes between each other, which means more mingling and a better chance that everyone will have an unforgettable night. One thing to think about if you're opting for a family-style meal is to nix the massive centerpiece. You'll definitely need more room for all of those big serving plates. Let the food star as your décor. You can do large plates of bright-red steamed lobster, flank steak rolled up with portobello mushrooms and Emmentaler cheese nestled in magenta-and-white Swiss chard, along with a colorful dish of vegetable risotto.

#### 7 Get Global Goods

Like a lot of things in life, it's the details that count. When it comes to food, those details lie in the exotic ingredients caterers are using to give their dishes extra-special flair. Black lava sea salt or wasabi salt, Middle Eastern herbs and tahini sauces are being used in dishes to add a zing or richness to the flavor. Most >>

of the time, you may not be able to quite put your finger on the difference these ingredients make, but you do know that it tastes good, and that's what will get people talking about your wedding. The next day or even a few weeks later, most people won't be able to remember what type of flowers you had in your bouquet, but they'll definitely remember the food.

#### 8 Try a Taste

Tasting menus are becoming a huge trend, and now they're creeping into weddings. So what's a tasting menu? Sit down and get ready to *mangia!* You'll be served anywhere from five to seven mini courses—even though they're "mini," trust us, no one will go hungry—and depending on your budget, you can also choose to pair a different wine with each course. For example, you could start with a caramelized onion tart with Roquefort cheese, followed by herb-crusted filet mignon alongside pork loin with pear chutney, followed by shaved summer squash salad, then maybe a lobster tail, then cake and some bite-size desserts. So you may start to wonder: When do we dance? Well, unfortunately, that's the thing about tasting menus—most of your time will be spent eating. If you're the type who wants to live it up on the dance floor, then a tasting menu might not be for you. But if you're self-proclaimed foodies and you want a sophisticated, black-tie wedding, by all means, go for it!

#### 9 Kick Up the Kids' Menu

As children's palates are becoming more sophisticated, so too are the children's menus at weddings. Long gone are the plates of chicken fingers and French fries or the spaghetti with butter. Kids are having more fun eating sushi—yes, sushi!—like California rolls with soy sauce dips, chicken potpie or ravioli in a nice brown butter sauce. For the first course, caterers are also serving bowls of fresh fruit, and to drink, don't forget the milk, of course! What parents love about this is that they can relax and enjoy themselves at the wedding, knowing that their kids are getting served a healthy meal instead of loading up on hot dogs and soda. >>



**special delivery** Even if you serve a four-course meal, there's always room for comfort food. Make plans to bring in your faves for a late-night snack.

#### 10 Late-Night Snacks

Think the food-related portion of the evening is over the very minute the cake is cut? Think again. Around 10 p.m., brides and grooms are opting to serve a late-night snack. Now's the time you can really get creative. If you love the sliders from White Castle, then call up your local joint (a few weeks ahead, please) and see if they'll deliver. You could also arrange for servers to bring out trays of the quintessential before-bed treat: mini cartons of milk and an array of cookies. Or consider your families' ethnic backgrounds to get some inspiration for what kind of food you'd like to serve. We know one bride from Mexico who hired her favorite churros guy to come to her beach reception and serve authentic churros from a Boardwalk-style food stand. Your caterer can help you with this part of the evening by setting up a table of pizza or popcorn toppings, a gyros station or an espresso bar. Make sure there's room to put the station close to the dance floor so guests can hop off, refuel and get back out there and show off their moves.

*Special thanks to Connie Bolle of Levy Events in Chicago; Shai Tertner of Shiraz NYC; Andy and Rick Bott of Merri-Makers Caterers in Edison, New Jersey; and Christian O'Dowd of The Canterer Caterer in Connecticut*



Looking for more catering ideas? Find them at [TheKnot.com/reception](http://TheKnot.com/reception)

## all that sparkles

Bubbly picks for every budget.

ON A BUDGET (under \$35 per bottle)

Iron Horse, Wedding Cuvée, Green Valley 2004 \$20

sidebar  
TBD

Special thanks to William Rhodes, wine director at Country in New York

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q&a

### catering costs

**Does a cocktail reception cost less than a sit-down meal?**

You may think that since hors d'oeuvres tend to be on the small side, they'll cost less, but think again. If your cocktail reception includes butlered hors d'oeuvres and stations, you could end up spending 15 percent more. Why? Because you have no control over how much your guests will eat, so your caterer needs to have more of everything—plates, napkins, food. If you're only having a few passed hors d'oeuvres and no stations, then your cost per head will be less; just make sure your guests know not to arrive with empty bellies.

## wine for weddings

What you need to know about vino

Maybe you and your fiancé are wine lovers; maybe you're not. Either way, you'll want some type of wine at your wedding, whether it's red, white or champagne. Leaving the specifics up to your caterer is fine, but it's always good to do your research. Read on for a quick lesson.

### LESSON 1 Pick a Wine

When choosing wine for your wedding, you want to pick something with versatility that goes with many types of food. That wine would be California Sauvignon Blanc. It's truly the chameleon of wines; it can be light and crisp in spring and summer, or full and round in fall and winter. Other versatile picks: pinot noir from California or New Zealand, a Loire Valley red, such as cabernet franc, or Cotes du Rhone.

### LESSON 2 Add It Up

Now that you know what kind of wine you want, it's time to figure out how much you need. Figure you can get four glasses out of every bottle. So for a 150-person guest list, if you plan for two glasses of wine each, that's 75 bottles. It's best to try and overshoot the amount so you don't run out, but remember that catering staffs tend to overpour.

### LESSON 3 Know Your Options

When it comes to setting up your bar, you have three options: the open bar, where there's no limit on the type of alcohol or how much of it your guests can consume (read: the most expensive choice); the limited bar, which offers a selection of drinks such as beer, wine and a signature cocktail; or a dry house, which means sparkling water, soda and other nonalcoholic mixed drinks. And what about a cash bar? Since it's a wedding, it's best to just say no.

Special thanks to William Rhodes, wine director at Country in New York

q&a

### black-tie buffet

**Can we have a buffet at our black-tie wedding?**

The word "buffet" may conjure up less-than-appealing images of a cafeteria line; these days, they're anything but. Caterers have given them a makeover and even changed the name to stations or a "marketplace." You get the mobility of a buffet teamed with sophisticated food that's artfully presented. Your guests can start off with an artisanal cheese station, move on to the charcuterie, vegetable and meat stations and end at the raw bar. Each station is attended by a chef or educated member of the catering staff.