

EXCLUSIVE: It's Pop Girl Summer (p. 68)
19th Annual DMC Spotlight (p. 10)

SPECIAL EVENTS

SUMMER 2024

*Great
Inspiration*

FIND YOUR
EVENT'S TRUE
COLORS

P. 26

SETTING THE
TABLE(SCAPE)

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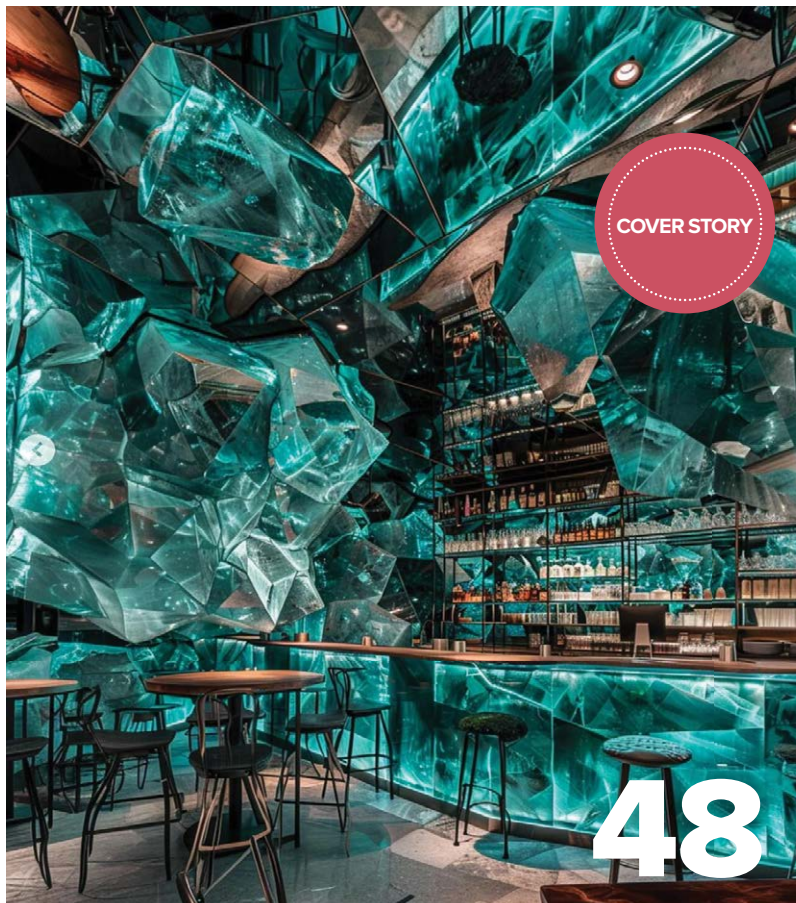
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This issue dives into both table designs (p. 36) and color theory (p. 26), seen in this warm-toned, analogous color schemed floral arrangement. Photo courtesy Tracy Autem & Lightly Photography

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EDITOR'S PAGE

Design Inspiration

What designers do you admire or are inspired by, and why? That's a question we ask in our "Great Inspiration" feature beginning on page 48. A dozen industry pros weigh in on that and several other interesting questions, all to get to the crux: we are more than the sum of our parts; we are continuously inspired by the imagination and creations of others, and by the world that surrounds us. What a wonderful universe we exist in to be able to create memorable moments for our clients—and get paid for doing so!

I'd like to add my own admired designer to this mix: our art director Sharon Carlson. As I write this, it is with great regret that we must bid farewell to Sharon, who has guided *Special Events* magazine into its greatest iteration the past four years. Sharon took over the design of this magazine in 2020 (at approximately the same time I took over the editorship) and it has been a joy to collaborate with her. No shade on the designers that came before her, but Sharon elevated our magazine to new heights, with 95% patience and only 5% frustration along the years.

She moves to another division of our company, and I am supremely jealous that they now will have use of her dazzling talent, while we will not. Sharon, on behalf of the entire *Special Events* magazine team, we will miss you dearly.

But—with the departure of Sharon, I can also announce that there are also exciting things afoot with *Special Events* magazine. A new designer will be taking over our fall issue and with that, an innovative format will come into play as well. Instead of the "flipbook" format you have come to know, we will replace it with a cool "digizine" format—allowing greater readability, the capability to embed videos within, heck, I can even stop typing up these editor notes if I want to and speak them (while on camera) instead. (Note: only under extreme duress will I consider that ... I like speaking with my fingers way too much and applying makeup skillfully too little.) We are excited for this improvement in the quality and readability of our publication—watch for it in September 2024!

Make this summer count, my friends! Enjoy this final flipbook-style issue of *Special Events* and keep your eyes peeled for opening day of registration for [Catersource + The Special Event 2025](#)—coming soon!

Cheers!

Kathleen

Kathleen Stoehr
Director of Community & Content Strategy

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Summer 2024 THIS ISSUE

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tech tools for designing
events



PR expert **Meghan
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improve the odds of
getting published



Event pro **Bobby Dutton**
reflects on finding his
“Flow State”

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The Role of Event Design in “Publishability”



If you want to develop an impressive press portfolio, keep press goals in mind as you approach each new event.

By Meghan Ely

Press features remain a prominent promotional strategy for event professionals, driving up competition and inspiring a wave of innovative design concepts. Despite considerable changes in the media landscape, one thing remains true: design plays a significant role in an event’s “publishability.”

If you want to develop an impressive press portfolio, keep press goals in mind as you approach each new event. Where would you like to earn a feature? Which publications can spotlight your work in front of your target audience? Knowing your end goals can help you refine and optimize designs for a particular media outlet.

However, publicity should never be the sole reason for swaying a couple in a different direction. While PR is important for your reputation, your client experience matters more—so don’t risk losing a client’s vision and satisfaction for a chance of future press.

Instead of pushing a couple toward an inauthentic outcome, work with the ideas they bring to the table and offer creative solutions to elevate the design while staying true to their original vision. Here are a few ways to improve your odds of getting published without sacrificing a client’s happiness.

UP THE APPEAL WITH COLOR

Classic all-white weddings will never go out of style, but you can imagine

an editor’s perspective when their inbox is filled with blush tones and traditional details. Conversely, bold colors and unique combinations are quick to make an impression in a sea of neutrals. When you must work within a popular color palette, look for unconventional ways to increase submission chances, like experimenting with lighting design, rentals, or floral installations. (Turn to page 26 for more on color palettes.)

USE DESIGN TO TELL A STORY

Many beautiful trends are featured on Pinterest feeds and wedding blogs, but here’s the reality: When you see something online, it has already been done. New trends quickly oversaturate the media, so carbon copies of popular designs typically lack editorial appeal. To avoid falling into the trend trap, pull inspiration from the couple and focus on telling their love story through personalized details.

Think about how you can incorporate design elements that allude to how they met, how they spend their time, and how their cultural backgrounds play a role in their relationship. Favorite foods, musicians, movies, and travel destinations can all provide endless fodder for design. Your couple is the one thing that sets their wedding apart from every other event on earth, so lean into this as a unique selling point for your submission.

Stay on top of industry trends and consider how to turn popular ideas into something never seen before, remaining mindful of what editors always look for: originality.

GO BIG WITH DETAILS

While newlyweds appreciate seeing photos of loved ones from their wedding, engaged couples don't care to see many "people shots" when looking for design ideas. Instead, they want to gather inspiration from floral arrangements, tablescapes, and signage. As a result, editors place a high value on publishing detail shots.

When designing events for publishability, don't overlook any detail. While flowers and centerpieces often receive credit, pay attention to the subtler elements as well!

Keep these details in mind:

- **Prints and textures:** From floral patterns to elegant silk, prints and textures add an extra dimension to an event's design. Stepping outside of traditional details creates visual interest, boosting editorial appeal. Publications crave well-rounded designs with layers of prints and textures that pop from the page.
- **Paper goods:** Invitation suites, menus, programs, and signage often get overlooked in submissions, but they are an essential part of a wedding's design. Editors love seeing stationery that establishes a cohesive design from beginning to end. It's also an excellent way to infuse more personalization into a submission.
- **Linens:** Specialty linens are a great way to elevate a wedding day design from basic to beyond. Lace, embroidery, jacquard, and sequins can all make a statement when woven into an event's design. Even with a

tight budget, upgrading napkins, table runners, or head tables will help catch an editor's eye.

- **Rentals:** Many venues provide standard chairs and tables, which might appeal to one's budget. However, specialty rentals are an easy way to stand out in a pile of weddings. For example, replacing ordinary Chiavari chairs with velvet or acrylic chairs can take an event's design (and its submission) to the next level.

Regarding publishability, there are no such thing as "small" details. Every little facet adds to the big picture, so long as it comes together as a harmonious design.

SUPPORT PHOTO QUALITY

Even the most unique and beautiful details will miss the mark if presented at the wrong angle or in poor lighting. Photography can make or break a submission, though many non-photographer vendors feel they have little control over the results.

However, planners and designers have more power than they realize. You can strengthen an event for an editorial win by setting up the photographer for success. Here are a few ways to up the odds for top-notch photos:

- Refer trusted photographers to couples that haven't booked one yet.
- Ensure adequate lighting throughout the event space.
- Prepare stationery and other details for shooting beforehand.

- Allow plenty of time in the schedule to avoid rushing newlywed portraits.

And, of course, a thoughtfully designed wedding always photographs best! In addition to personalized details, think about experiences that photograph well. While interactive elements enhance the guest experience, be mindful of how they will be captured in 2D. For example, an elaborate food installation or live portrait artist would likely convey better in photos than a magician or silent disco—even though these ideas may be equally engaging for guests.

Connect with your photo team early to review plans and discuss how you can ensure editors recognize your hard work and creativity in the end product.

Going forward, keep your press goals at the forefront of your mind as you take on new events. What seems like a potential media hit? Stay on top of industry trends and consider how to turn popular ideas into something never seen before, remaining mindful of what editors always look for: originality. ●

Meghan Ely is the owner of wedding PR and wedding marketing firm **OFD Consulting**. Ely is a sought-after speaker, adjunct professor in the field of public relations, and a self-professed royal wedding enthusiast.

19th Annual DMC SPOTLIGHT

Highlighting the top brands in the world of DMCs

Destination events are incredibly rewarding—but they require a lot of know-how. Each year, we turn to the world of Destination Marketing Companies (DMCs), the experts in destinations and a great resource to the event industry, and feature DMCs from across the globe. Here are the 2024 Spotlight DMCs and all they share, including trend predictions.

UNDER \$5 MILLION ANNUAL REVENUE

ACCENT NEW ORLEANS INC., A DMC NETWORK COMPANY

New Orleans, Louisiana
www.accent-dmc.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Diane B. Lyons, CMP, DMCP, President & Owner

**Average Number of Programs/
Events Per Year:** 73

Estimated 2023 Revenue:
\$2.2 million

Capabilities: ACCENT New Orleans, Inc. brings over 33 years of experience in crafting exceptional events that reflect client visions and surpass expectations. As a full-service event planning and destination management company, they specialize in a wide range of events, including incentive and corporate events, galas, receptions, and virtual/hybrid events. Their expertise lies in incorporating unique “Only in New Orleans” moments

and entertainment, such as local talent, interactive entertainers, parades, marching bands, artists, caricaturists, and speakers, tailored to each client’s needs to ensure unforgettable experiences. They proudly serve markets both locally and globally, showcasing the vibrant culture and spirit of New Orleans to the world.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023: In 2023, ACCENT’s agile team of five full-time employees efficiently managed and executed a total of 73 programs, showcasing their capacity for handling diverse projects with finesse. Their adaptability and commitment to client satisfaction were exemplified by a last-minute request in November. A client approached them needing a team-building project within just 30 days. Despite the busy holiday season, they created a project assembling and distributing 300 hygiene kits to shelters, complete with notes of encouragement. They also handled the logistics of transportation, interactive entertainment, and even a second-line parade—all within the

tight deadline. This project’s success, achieved despite the challenges, highlights the team’s ability to thrive under pressure and deliver exceptional results.

Trends to Watch: Tech-savvy generations are redefining destination events. Expect a blend of cutting-edge tech, eco-friendly practices, and experiences tailored to clients. ACCENT is seeing sustainability, virtual elements, personalization, health and safety, immersive experiences, flexible booking, cultural connections, and tech integration as key drivers. These trends are transforming the industry, boosting attendee engagement, and catering to evolving preferences, making events that are not just inclusive, dynamic, and impactful, but also deeply meaningful.

COLOURS OF MALTA

Sliema, Malta
www.coloursofmalta.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Davide Cachia, Owner & Managing Director

**Average Number of Programs/
Events Per Year:** 54

Estimated 2023 Revenue:
\$3.6 million

Capabilities: Colours of Malta, established in 1997, is a full-service event and management firm specializing in conference and incentive markets. They offer a comprehensive range of services

tailored to meet individual client needs, from extravagant gala dinners to high adrenaline activities, supported by a multilingual team. Their experience spans across various industries, including high-profile incentive houses, multinational companies in pharmaceutical, telecommunications, and manufacturing sectors. Colours of Malta was the official DMC appointed by the European Union to manage the EU presidency in Malta in 2017 and also handled the largest incentive group for 3000 delegates.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in

2023: A noteworthy program for Colours of Malta in 2023 was their collaboration with Hosts Global for the 9th annual Hosts Global Forum. This event was significant as it highlighted Malta's rich history and its role as a host to various cultures over millennia, providing an exceptional backdrop for this global forum.

Trends to Watch: For destination events in Malta, as well as globally, several key trends are shaping the landscape in 2024.

- One significant trend is the continued focus on wellness and work-life balance. Organizers are seeking more immersive experiences that go beyond traditional spa offerings, including mindful activities such as yoga and meditation, and immersive sensory journeys. This trend aligns with a growing emphasis on self-care and the desire for travel experiences that promote mental and physical well-being.
- Another trend is immersion in local cultures. Travelers increasingly prioritize authentic experiences that allow them to connect with local communities, cultures, and cuisines. Malta has 7000 years of history and is very rich in culture and traditions.
- Sustainability continues to be a critical concern for travelers,

with a significant percentage looking to minimize their environmental footprint and support environmentally friendly destinations. This interest extends to supporting communities still rebuilding from natural disasters and reducing travel with high carbon emissions.

These trends reflect a broader shift towards more personalized, immersive, and sustainable travel and event experiences, influenced by advancements in technology and changing consumer values.

E2 DESTINATION AND EVENT MANAGEMENT, A HOSTS GLOBAL MEMBER

Orlando, FL

www.e2.events

Top Officer Name & Title: Erin Cook, President & General Manager

Average Number of Programs/

Events Per Year: 75–100

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$4 million

Capabilities: e2 is a full service destination and event management company, serving Orlando, Tampa, St. Pete, St. Pete Beach, Clearwater, St. Augustine, Daytona Beach, Jacksonville, and Amelia Island. They have been in business for 13 years and are proud to be one of the few woman-owned DMCs in the area. Their services include, but are not limited to, off-site events, themed events, entertainment, transportation management, teambuilding, tours, staffing, and branding. e2 is a proud partner of Hosts Global Destination Services.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023:

- e2 was honored to help produce the first large corporate event at the Sound Stage 21 at Universal Studios Florida. They worked closely with their Fortune 500 client to transform the black box space into a breathtaking, elegant awards banquet.

- e2 worked with one of their clients to create a VIP Beachside concert that included classic bands Lynyrd Skynyrd, Boston, and Creed. They brought in beachside-inspired decor and furniture grouping accented with tons of candle centerpieces throughout to set the mood.
- They did a rocket launch party in conjunction with their client and SpaceX to create an event at the Space Coast that was out of this world!

Trends to Watch:

- Clients are being very mindful of their event budgets and putting their dollars toward items that are not only decor but are functional as well; specifically, activation stations such as a backdrop with a logo that is also a photo op.
- Wellness and mindfulness activations are popular right now. Some trends include custom essential oil and hand sanitizer stations, as well as zen and relaxation dens to make your own floral bouquets.
- Activities that allow people to connect, from traditional teambuilding activities to unique opportunities, such as a circus trapeze school.
- It's all about adding bright colors. The whitewash look has been popular the last few years, but we are starting to see bold colors making a comeback, from linens to furniture and beyond.

IMAGINE EVENTS DMC

Scottsdale, AZ

www.imagineeventsdmc.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Heather Husom, Principal

Average Number of Programs/

Events Per Year: 30

Estimated 2023 Revenue:

\$1.4 million

Capabilities: As a full service, creative DMC, Imagine Events has

19TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

become the premier DMC in Arizona and southwest region. Although the company was started in 2019, Imagine Events is a woman-owned business powered by industry veterans with over 90 years of event, entertainment, and hospitality experience. Specializing in bespoke incentive travel, corporate, and special events, they have proven time and time again that a boutique approach to program needs creates a trusted partnership with clients, thus allowing a creative and outstanding experience for program attendees and stakeholders.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023:

- A&H Producers Educational Conference - Enchantment Resort

and Spa - Sedona, Arizona

- Winner's Circle Program - Loews Ventana Canyon Resort - Tucson, Arizona
- National Kickoff Meeting 2023 - Sheraton Grand Resort at Wild Horse Pass - Phoenix, Arizona
- Excellence Roundtable - Phoenician Resort & Spa - Phoenix, Arizona

Trends to Watch:

- More focus on destination-specific events with correlating program themes
- Shift in clients moving to attendee self-transfers/transportation
- Focus on diversity and inclusion creating accessible events and experiences to wider demographics
- Changes in overall needs as planners and C-level executives

shift generationally

- Push for even more sustainable and low carbon footprint events

NOLA DMC, LLC

New Orleans, LA

www.noladmc.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Meg Baird, CMP, DMCP, President & Owner

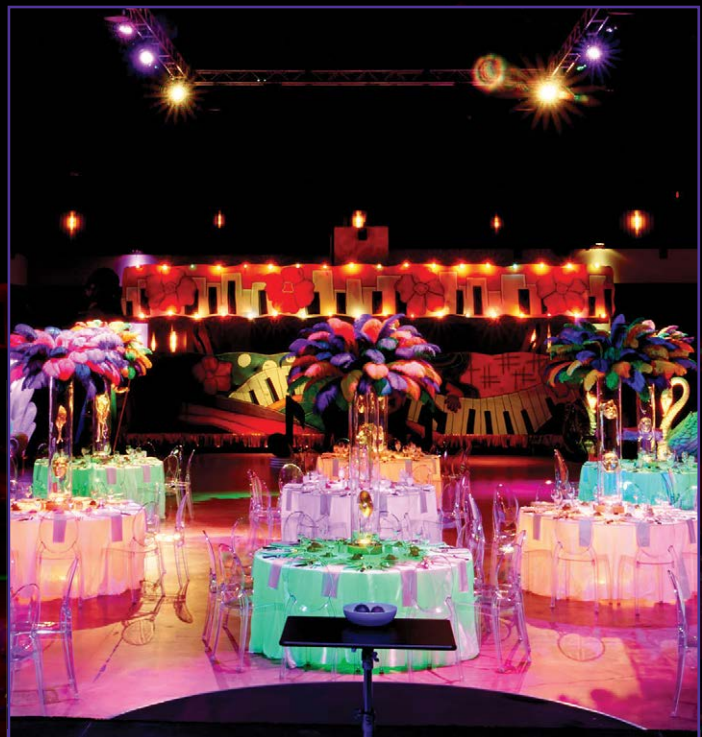
Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 75–100

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$3.1 million

Capabilities: NOLA DMC is a full-service destination management company specializing in the design and implementation of spectacular events, exciting activities, immersive tours, seamless transportation, and

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Our team of professionals inspire trust and confidence with our creative ideas, attention to detail, exceptional execution, and unparalleled hospitality. When working with us, clients can expect our services to exceed their expectations.



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flawless program logistics. The dynamic team of professionals brings creativity, precision, and top-notch execution to every project, ensuring clients receive unparalleled hospitality and service. Behind their dynamic team of professionals is Meg, the visionary founder whose impressive accomplishments have earned her a coveted spot on the Forbes Next 1000 Entrepreneurs list in 2021 and a place on the Inc. 5000 list in 2023.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023: One of NOLA DMC's successful events in 2023 was for a global company, based in Latin America. They invited nearly 200 top producers and customers to New Orleans for their semiannual event. NOLA DMC was charged with ensuring the guests were immersed in the New Orleans culture. A challenge was that everything had to be translated into Spanish and Portuguese. It required an immense amount of pre-planning for the team, creating all communications in three languages and bringing on multilingual guides. NOLA DMC coordinated all logistics for this large group—a variety of dinner events, transportation around the city, tours, and entertainment, including a Second Line parade.

Trends to Watch: The current leading trends in the DMC industry are sustainability, wellness, cultural immersion, personalized experiences, and integration of technology. Forecasting for 2024 events presents a unique challenge, mainly due to it being an election year. The uncertainty surrounding political landscapes often leads to corporations delaying event planning until the eleventh hour. DMCs must remain agile and adaptable to meet the evolving needs of their clients amidst this unpredictability.

ROBERTS EVENT GROUP, A HOSTS GLOBAL MEMBER

Philadelphia, PA

www.robertseventgroup.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Robert Carachilo, President

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 225

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$3.5 million

Capabilities: Roberts Event Group designs, manages, and produces events. They are a multi-generation, award winning team who service meetings, special events, galas, festival production, entertainment, team building, CSR give-back events, transportation, and staffing as an Event & Destination Management company. As their region has grown and expanded, their clients have taken them to new venues and hotels each year, allowing them to service Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware with the same local knowledge and attention to detail that their reputation is built on. As a leader in Events and Destination Management throughout the Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware regions, the Roberts Event Group staff frequently contributes to various publications including *Mid-Atlantic Events Magazine*.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023:

- Event for Prince Albert of Monaco with the Grace Kelly Foundation Program
- Wawa Welcome America July 4 Festival
- University of Scranton Capital Campaign Gala 2023
- Villanova University OPUS Awards
- Congressional Research Services 2023
- Philadelphia Polo Classic

Trends to Watch: Immersive event venues moving away from traditional settings will remain popular and

sought after. Technology integration such as holograms and interactive video walls will be used for branding and guest interaction. Gourmet food stations, plant-based food choices, and craft brews and spirits are popular for a local flair.



TECHNE EVENTS

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

www.techneevents.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Jennifer Dolnik, Owner & President

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 20–25

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$1 million+

Capabilities: With offices located in Vancouver and Las Vegas, Techne Events operates in the US, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and overseas. Services include site selection, event production, event planning, event design, technical production, brand design, activations, corporate incentive groups, awards shows, activities, and digital content. They do extensive research and relationship building in various destinations and give their clients the very best of what's out there. The owners of Techne Events have been in the industry for over 20 years, and the team members have years to decades of experience producing, planning, and executing events.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023:

- A full buyout at a resort in Texas: 100+ on-site crew, eight events, two ballrooms, big production, custom stages, 35 musicians, hall of fame, a rodeo, 1,100 guests, two galas, after

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party, welcome reception, PGA golf demos, goat yoga, line dancing, and a western boot store.

- 450 rooms in Miami at a 5-star resort: 4-day event with big production, 150+ production team members, big entertainment, custom client and event branding, 2 awards galas, pool parties, beach activations, welcome event, afterparty at LIV nightclub, one event on a 220-foot yacht, and a final night at Wynwood Walls.
- In addition, multiple other events that include award shows, brand launches, and galas at top Mexican, US, and Canadian destination cities like Miami, LA, the Mayan Riviera, Brooklyn, Chicago, and many more. Programs range from 300–1500 guests.

Trends to Watch: The biggest trends Techne Events is seeing include more experiential design and implementation in events, as well as use of technology and immersion. Clients want more customization of their events that plays into the destinations they are traveling to. In addition to that, Techne Events is finding that clients and groups are more open to traveling to destinations not necessarily considered before. They want to offer groups unique experiences. Clients want custom event experiences that make their attendees feel different, as well as events that continue to leave an impact long after the event is over!

UNIQUELY PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia, PA

<https://uniquelyphiladelphia.com/>

Top Officer Name & Title: Maria DeBenedetto, President

Average Number of Programs/ Events Per Year: 275–300

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$4 million

Capabilities: Uniquely Philadelphia specializes in live event design in the PA, DE, NJ, DC and Atlantic City areas. Uniquely Philadelphia has been designing custom live event experiences for more than 25 years, inspiring audiences and creating powerful brand narratives through innovative design, strategic solutions, and seamless execution.

At the core of the company lies a commitment to integrity and



Event Planning & Production | Design | Decor | Site Selection
DMC | Entertainment | Digital Content | Being Awesome
techneevents.com

Las Vegas

TECHNE
EVENTS

Vancouver

We produce global events & brand experiences.

Powering live experience with imagination:

Define purpose | Design connection | Inspire action

relationships. These are the foundations on which their business was built and ultimately to what they attribute their success. Respect, trust, and honesty are the principles that guide everything they do at Uniquely Philadelphia.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in

2023: Events for 6ABC Thanksgiving Day Parade, GoPuff, RedBull, Volvo, Capitol One, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown Flower Show Customer Weekend

Trends to Watch: AI and digital technology, diverse accessibility for all, sustainability, event wellness/health conscious to inspire and energize, highly curated F&B, engaging event attendees creatively and uniquely, ensuring events leave lasting impressions, and alignment on client goals integrated in event experience

**\$5 MILLION TO \$10
MILLION ANNUAL
REVENUE**



ADVANTAGE DESTINATION & MEETING SERVICES

Miami Beach, FL
www.advantagedms.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Jim Post, DMCP, President & Partner

Average Number of Programs/

Events Per Year: 300+

Estimated 2023 Revenue:

\$8.4 million

Capabilities: Celebrating their 25th anniversary as a wholly independent, full-service DMC, Advantage DMS is based in Miami, servicing the State of Florida and beyond. Their key destinations are Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, Orlando, and the Gulf Coast cities of Naples, Marco Island, and Tampa. Their full-time staff of 20 includes a full service Creative and Design Team, creating in-house, full-scale decor and event productions.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in

2023: This past season, Advantage DMS successfully planned and executed their single largest program in the company's history. Their European client experienced a 5-day program that included offsite buy outs of Frost Museum and a spectacular Speak Easy at Dupont Bank that required two days of build out to offer customized dance floor staging, customized crystal chandeliers and a cast of professional dancers that wowed the guests. The high-end caterer created a five-course dinner served on antique glassware and guests could "gamble" in the walk-in safe of the bank.

Trends to Watch: Advantage DMS is finally seeing a longer planning window into program development, pacing well ahead of 2023 for their 2024 clients. Trends still include sustainability, re-use of product, and giving back to communities. The optics of a program are also important to clients as they want to be viewed as spending with intent and not frivolously.

CONNECT DMC, A HOSTS GLOBAL MEMBER

Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

www.connecttravelservices.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Benoit Sauvage, CMP, CITP, DMCP, CEO

Average Number of Programs/

Events Per Year: 200+

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$5 million

Capabilities: Connect DMC celebrates 25 years servicing meetings and incentives in Mexico and the Caribbean. Over the last years, they strategically expanded from Punta Cana to Los Cabos, Cancun, Riviera Maya, and Puerto Vallarta, demonstrating measured growth. They have invested in a robust support system that has resulted in quicker turnarounds, enhancing client satisfaction. Connect DMC also became a Biosphere Committed company, emphasizing sustainability as a key differentiator.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023:

- Punta Cana - The largest with 2400 pax: IT Client, attendees from around the world, 190K revenue
- Los Cabos - The biggest revenue for one program: US Healthcare supplier, 1.1 million pax in two waves, all luxury services, off-site dining, high end gifting, decor, entertainment
- A first-time customer with a complex program: Automotive company from North America, 230K in revenue, complex program with upscale requests, off-site dining, decor, activities and luxury transfers

Trends to Watch:

- Season extended! Groups are booking outside of typical high season dates such as June, August, September, and October.
- VIP programs within the program: Some of Connect DMC's clients started to venture into ultra luxe experiences.

19TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

SPAIN TACULAR

Madrid, Spain

www.spaintacular.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Nacho Ferrando, CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 40

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$5 million

Capabilities: Spaintacular has been in the market since 1973 and is the longest established DMC in the country. Covering the whole of Spain including the islands, they deliver services for the meetings and incentive industry with special emphasis on event production and entertainment. This allows them to be the most awarded DMC in Spain with multiple industry awards.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023: Spaintacular services a large number of the major US third parties as preferred supplier. Their most remarkable 2023 program was Cisco Sales Champions Winners Circle, an incentive for 450 guests who won two ADMEI awards and were a finalist for the Site Crystal awards.

Trends to Watch: 2024 will be a great year. Spaintacular is still influenced by the aftermath of the pandemic, handling a mix of programs that were postponed to 2022 but didn't find availability in 2024 and new requests. Planification is going back to the regular time frames, and short term is slowly reducing.



ULTIMATE VENTURES, A DMC NETWORK COMPANY

Dallas, TX

www.uvdmc.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Laurie Sprouse, CITE, CMP, DMCP, President

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 100–120

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$7.5 million

Capabilities: Serving Dallas-Fort Worth area for over 30 years, Ultimate Ventures (UV) is the only certified women-owned and ADMEI-accredited DMC in North Texas. UV has consistent 4.9+ out of 5.0 client satisfaction ratings and the deepest long-term relationships with their vendors. As the most awarded corporate event and destination management company in Texas, UV uses its expertise to give its clients the ultimate peace of mind.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023: Ultimate Ventures worked on two high-profile conventions that showcased Dallas to meetings, events, and convention planners. Partnering with Visit Dallas on the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) convention in August and on the International Association of Exhibitions & Events (IAEE) Expo! Expo! in December, they were honored to help Dallas be seen as the shining star it is!

Trends to Watch: The destination of Dallas is undergoing major growth. The city's Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center has begun its expansion and will be undergoing renovations until 2029. This will allow greater opportunity for non-convention business to find hotel rooms and meet in downtown Dallas.

\$10 MILLION TO \$20 MILLION ANNUAL REVENUE



CORINTHIAN EVENTS

Boston, MA

www.corinthianevents.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Courtney Church, Co-CEO & Partner

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 130

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$11 million

Capabilities: Corinthian Events has been in business for 24 years. They cover all of New England with their headquarters based in Boston and have an office in Newport, RI. They have a registration department in-house, as well as a graphic designer. Corinthian offers venue

selection and contract negotiation, transportation logistics, hospitality staff, airport meet and greet, event design and decor, A/V production and specialty lighting, local and national entertainment, speakers and headliners, creative branding and graphic design, registration build out and technology, food and beverage management, etc.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023: Corinthian worked with a client to help support an 800+ person incentive in London in January 2023. With so many local corporations and organizations in New England, they worked with a lot of clients in their backyard, assisting with non-profit galas, company outings, and meeting planning services. They worked on the Ocean Race event in Newport, which was a huge success.

Trends to Watch: A unique entertainment that really changes things up for the guest experience, drones are on the rise. Sustainability is back, so trying to utilize more sustainable vendors, especially ones that focus on DEI initiatives is important to clients these days.

INNOVATX EVENTS, A GLOBAL DMC PARTNER

Austin, TX

www.innovatxevents.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Emily Kratt, Managing Director

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 100

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$10 million

Capabilities: INNOVATX Events, A Global DMC Partner stands as the premier Destination Management Company (DMC) across Texas, setting the gold standard for event planning and execution

in Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. With unparalleled expertise and a deep understanding of each city's unique charm and offerings, INNOVATX Events crafts unforgettable experiences tailored to clients' visions and goals. From seamless logistics to innovative solutions, they excel in curating exceptional events that leave a lasting impression. Their commitment to excellence, combined with their extensive local networks and insider knowledge, ensures that every detail is meticulously executed.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023:

- A 1500-person two-wave program at Fairmont Austin where they offered 30 different unique excursions and arrival and departure transportation.
- 350-person incentive at the Westin Galleria in Houston where they managed all transportation, VIP excursions and unique offsite events at the Lone Star Flight Museum, George Ranch, and Minute Maid Park.
- A 3000-person San Antonio convention where they completely built out decor and large-scale installations at the convention center. In addition, they provided entertainment and activations for their welcome reception and final evening.

Trends to Watch: Sustainability-focused initiatives are becoming a huge focus. INNOVATX is being asked to find ways to support the local community where the event is hosted by using small local businesses and finding small charitable ways to give back. Custom branding is another big trend for 2024. Finding ways to build in messaging and branding in unique and creative ways is a big

ask. Lastly, there is a larger focus on diversity and inclusion. Finding ways to make sure all feel included and comfortable in the activities or venues is very important.

\$20 TO \$100 MILLION IN REVENUE



DestinationConcepts inc

A GLOBAL DMC PARTNER

DESTINATION CONCEPTS INC (DCI)

San Diego, CA

www.destinationconcepts.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Brynne Frost, CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 175 Programs/1000 Events

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$40 million

Capabilities: For 26 years, DCI's passionate approach to creating groundbreaking events has put them at the top of the list for meeting planners across industries. They are a WBENC certified women-owned and operated business who present inclusive, sustainable, and locally driven ideas to create inspiring events for all. Their much-appreciated team of 95 full-time regional experts and nationwide innovators craft events using the hottest trends to elevate what makes a city shine. To date, they have operated in 43 states and numerous

19TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

countries where clients count on their proactive mindset and creative solutions. DCi stands apart with a must-have blend of consistency, specialty services, an exclusive design studio, and unparalleled logistical depth. They continue to put clients first, supporting them every step of the way from creative ideation to sound operational strategies.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in

2023: 2023 was filled with incredible WOW moments in their coast-to-coast destinations and abroad. The team excelled at designing and producing experiences in a range of sizes, budget, and scope.

- In San Diego, the team successfully operated a four-day program with 9,500 attendees that encompassed

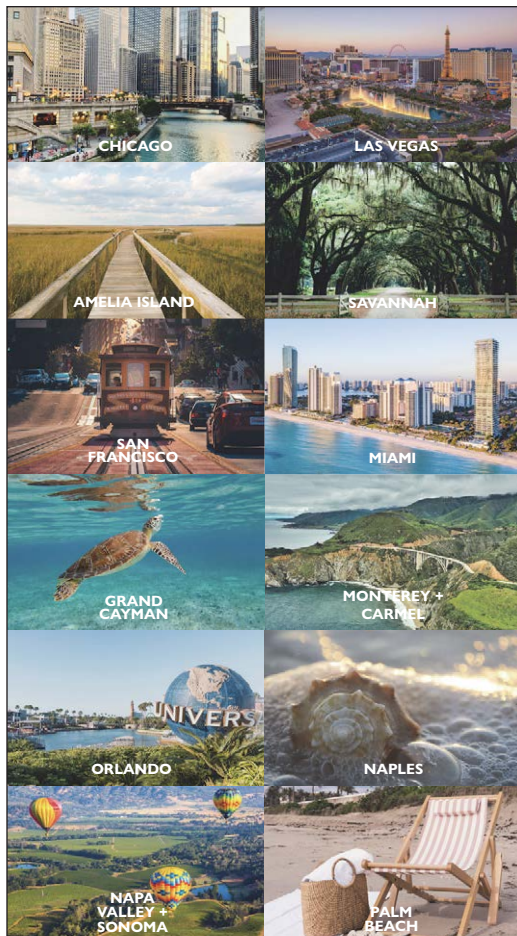
12 hotel properties, a detailed logistical transportation plan in partnership with San Diego International Airport, a buyout of PETCO Park, extensive branding/wayfinding, and more!

- In Nashville, TN, the team operated the FIRST-EVER buyout of the Assembly Food Hall complete with custom branding, eight local musical acts, three name acts, and activations.
- The artistic minds of the In-House design team were instrumental in transforming The Mint in San Francisco into a multi-sensory Wonderland experience for a three-wave incentive program.
- A longtime client leveraged DCi's creative depth and knowledge of their programs, tapping the team

as a consultant to create dynamic moments for their events in Spain—DCi's designers loved seeing the events come to life in Barcelona!

- Feel good moments including supporting clients in fulfilling NetZero goals, reaching the goal for internal spend with Diverse Suppliers, earning a Best Places to Work award, and giving to charitable causes that are near to their teams' hearts.

Trends to Watch: The DCi team is developing event experiences where meaningful meets whimsical, giving attendees memorable moments that also meet their expectation of events being inclusive and positively affecting the community. They put great thought into creating events for all using simple yet effective



OUR MISSION IS SIMPLE

To revolutionize the way events are planned, executed, and experienced. We go beyond the traditional notions of event planning by integrating community, service, and innovation into every aspect of our work.

By embracing these core values, we aim to create events that not only captivate and inspire but also contribute to the greater good.

Our team is ready to discuss your meeting needs, tailor a plan that aligns with your goals, and show you how your events can drive meaningful change.

ETHOS
EVENT COLLECTIVE
PURPOSEFUL PLANNING™
MEANINGFUL RESULTS

solutions like Chill Zones within lively events, stretch breaks between sessions, CSR components that are destination centric, and more. They see clients looking at new and upcoming destinations for their events driven by hotel properties that have come online. Frisco, TX is trending in a big Texas-sized way and the team has seen tremendous interest across Miami, Las Vegas, California, and Arizona thanks to new and renovated properties. Planners are looking for fresh locations for repeat attendees to add another wow factor for their events.



ETHOS EVENT COLLECTIVE

Deerfield Beach, FL

www.ethoseventcollective.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Joe Fijol, DMCP, Principal

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 500

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$32 million

Capabilities: A purpose-driven destination and event management company, ETHOS Event Collective seeks to become a trusted, strategic ally to businesses by creating authentic experiences that align with clients' goals, delight audiences, and generate impactful outcomes. ETHOS provides award winning meeting and event services in Amelia Island, Chicago, Grand Cayman, Las Vegas, Miami, Monterey and Carmel, Napa and Sonoma, Naples, Orlando, Palm Beach, San Francisco, and Savannah. Leveraging technology, research, measurement and destination expertise, programs are designed to spark engagement that generates ROI for the client and opportunity for the destination.

Through a robust service menu that compliments DMC services and successfully generates ROI for both clients and the community, ETHOS hopes to inspire others to join them in their purpose—giving back to the people and places that make the experiences they create possible. Additional services include creative strategy, ROI research and measurement, tailored technology solutions, meeting and educational content, destination and event management services and customized consulting.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023: One of the standout moments by ETHOS Event Collective was the most recent FICP event, a canvas where they could paint with production and show flow and craft an unforgettable experience. The theme proposed—the Florida Everglades—raised some eyebrows, with concerns that it might be too “swampy” for a high-value event. The vision in the creative team’s mind was just out of the box enough to turn some heads, and although there were some doubts, the team was trusted to run with it. Breaking the stigma, the team transformed the concept into a breathtaking reality that captivated the hotel and earned their nod of approval. On the day of the event, attendees entered the room, expressions transitioned from curiosity to awe, and the event culminated in applause as the dessert table descended from the ceiling—that was the magic. Despite initial uncertainties, having a leader who may not fully grasp the vision but supports and trusts in it, and then seeing the final product exceeds expectations and amazes the guests—now that’s a moment etched in time!

Trends to Watch:

- Mobile tech is imperative, so DCi’s in-house technology team created a stand-alone app that

connects planners and participants, with live access to registration numbers, program agendas, billing information and messaging.

- Sustainability as a rule, not a trend: [The COP26 Sustainability Report](#) has conducted extensive research on sustainable events. Key considerations in planning include addressing economic and climate concerns, fostering partnerships, promoting sustainable behavior, encouraging healthy living, utilizing responsible resources, and leaving a lasting sustainable legacy. DCi’s commitment to building communities through responsible planning drove their partnership with Fill It Forward, creating interactive, global giving initiatives that inspire the world to reuse.
- Engagement: Statistically, eventgoers are more satisfied with events when they feel there is a valuable learning component or key takeaway. People are connecting to content more than ever. Creating relationships between brands and people, materials and purpose, and relationships with value will drive attendance and profits for years. The most important part of your planning process is designing for key stakeholders to be impressed and wanting more.



TERRAMAR DMC, A DMC NETWORK

Coronado, CA

www.terramardestinations.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Sunny Irvine, Owner & CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 500

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$25 million

19TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

Capabilities: Founded in 1994, with roots that go back over 45 years in the DMC world through the original San Francisco office (Cappa & Graham), Terramar DMC operates across Mexico, Panama, California, Nevada, and beyond. From event design and production, to staffing, transportation, and activities, Terramar DMC can assist with programs of any size and providing unparalleled service and experiences.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023: From providing the surprise and delight at a 45,000-person 3-day event in San Francisco, to designing and producing multiple meeting and event industry-focused incentives, Terramar has raised the bar in creative event design and execution.

Most notable:

- Terramar participated in the DMC Network Exchange, which brought 60 top clients to Milan for four days of curated experiences. They hosted Terramar's Annual Signature Event at the Conrad Punta de Mita for 35 top clients and were the DMC of choice for five broker events in various regions and countries, with their favorite being in Napa Valley with 180 of our closest friends.
- Award Winning insurance company incentive event in Punta Mita, Mexico, including a CSR program where more than 2,500 boxes of hope containing food items for one week for a family impacted more than 7,000 people in need. Terramar's artisan marketplaces

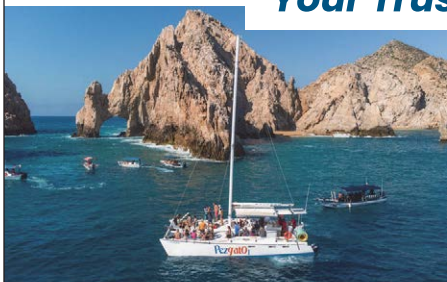
were also a fundamental part of incentive programs in Mexico, very well received by most of the group programs looking for a responsible way of traveling and give back to the visited destinations while their guests enjoyed beautiful hand-made gifts.

Trends to Watch: The biggest trends are new locations that have yet to be on people's radar, experiencing unique regions and venues. Sustainable events, as well as inclusively designed experiences, are top of Terramar's radar, as well as quality over quantity with attendees. There's a higher spend per person to create a memorable experience that creates deeper and more meaningful connections. Terramar forecasts:

- Sustainability: Lowering the carbon



Your Trusted DMC Partner @TerramarDMC



TERRAMAR DMC *Delivering unparalleled service*

LOS CABOS • SAN DIEGO / ORANGE COUNTY / PALM SPRINGS • LAKE TAHOE + RENO

SAN FRANCISCO / NAPA + SONOMA / MONTEREY + CARMEL / SACRAMENTO

PANAMÁ • CANCÚN / RIVIERA MAYA / TULUM • PUERTO VALLARTA / RIVIERA NAYARIT



TERRAMAR, A DMC NETWORK COMPANY
USA | MEXICO | PANAMÁ Locally operated, worldwide.

terramardestinations.com
info@teamterramar.com
#TerramarDMC



footprint of programs is increasingly important

- Luxury accommodations: Still valued as an integral part of a successful incentive program
- New destinations: 66% of participants desire new destinations
- All-inclusive resorts: 51% prefer all-inclusive resorts
- Destinations closer to home: 49% seek destinations closer to home
- Participants desire something beyond the ordinary beach vacation and are interested in options such as exhilarating off-roading trips or ziplining through the jungle



360 DESTINATION GROUP

Irvine, CA

www.360dg.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Shelly Archer, Managing Partner & Trevor Hanks, DMCP, Managing Partner

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 750

Estimated 2023 Revenue:

\$75 million

Capabilities: For over 45 years, the team at 360 Destination Group have been the go-to gurus for crafting events that break the corporate mold. Their secret sauce? A customized approach that turns stuffy meetings into unforgettable experiences that'll have attendees talking for years to come. From concept to execution, the rockstar team at 360DG isn't just thinking outside the box—they're flipping it, shaking it, and giving it a whole new groove. Services include: event design and development, unique décor and theme concepts, team building, CSR programs, off-property venue selection, entertainment, professional event staffing, group transportation, client gifting, dine-arounds, tours, activities, registration desks, and hospitality room solutions.

Their team of over 170 movers and shakers are turning heads in 18 major destinations nationwide. With over four decades of experience, they're not just pioneers—they're trailblazers, and they're not slowing down anytime soon.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023:

- Fit for a President – 2024 ADMEI Award Winner: What do you plan for a group that's seen everything? An event fit for a President. And that's exactly what 360DG did. With a two-month lead time, their client requested a custom curated event to wow the client's top executives. Without hesitation, the Reagan Library was selected as the event backdrop, blending historical depth with modern flair. In one evening, guests experienced intimate tours, dined beneath Air Force One, and danced the night away to the surprise musical act: The Beach Boys. From local sourcing to seamless event progression, the team showcased their ability to create unparalleled experiences with innovation and precision.
- A Seaside Escape – 2024 ADMEI Award Nominee: When 360DG's client requested a luxury destination within driving distance from Los Angeles that was distinct from their past experiences, they knew the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art was a perfect fit. A cocktail reception on the terrace in the fresh ocean air began the evening perfectly. The stunning seaside backdrop and neutral tones of the space blended flawlessly with the ocean inspired tablescape for the ideal golden hour dining experience. With expert planning, the client's dream of a seaside escape became an unforgettable reality they will cherish for years to come.

Trends to Watch: In 2024, we're seeing a welcomed shift from the wild ride of extreme highs and deep

lows to a more stable and steady business landscape. This equilibrium brings endless possibilities for clients as vendors and partners are fully staffed and better suited to manage the steady flow of business. From a design perspective, trends are becoming more sophisticated with the rise of Japandi—a chic blend of Japanese minimalism and Scandinavian functionality. And chrome is definitely the new black, standing out as the featured metallic in everyone's vision boards. And as anticipated, DEI initiatives remain centerstage, showing attendees what really matters. This translates into selecting partners that understand how to deliver on DEI offerings and considerations. It's proving to be a balanced blend of business stability, sophistication, and camaraderie shaping the corporate event scene this coming year.

OVER \$100 MILLION IN REVENUE

HELLO! DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Orlando, FL

www.Hello-DMC.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Paul Mears, III, President & CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 3,500

Estimated 2023 Revenue:

\$150 million

Capabilities: Since 1986, Hello! Destination Management has been a premier, full-service destination management company. Currently, Hello! operates in over 30 of the nation's meeting hotspots in destinations like Arizona, Chicago, Colorado, California, Florida, Las Vegas, Nashville, New York, Texas, and Washington D.C. The company offers traditional DMC services like transportation logistics, offsite

19TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

events, uniquely branded and themed programs, dine-arounds, enriching tours, dynamic activities, team building, hospitality staff, and more. Hello!'s operational processes, combined with the intimate insights about the markets they serve, gives them the unique ability to curate extraordinary event experiences and deliver services that transcend expectations.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023:

- In 2023, Hello! Destination Management wowed industry insiders with their exceptional event expertise. Hello!'s Celestial Celebration event, recipient of both a NACE One Award and ILEA ESPRIT Award, exemplified their commitment to innovation and creativity. This event seamlessly blended employee recognition with supplier showcases, offering the event planner guests an unforgettable evening filled with breathtaking experiences. From a glamorous awards ceremony to an enchanting aurora borealis-themed dinner, and two unforgettable after-parties: the energetic "Moonlit Night Club" and the sophisticated "Sun Afterglow" speakeasy, ensured a journey beyond imagination for all.
- Another standout event, Hydro Technics Exchange, garnered acclaim for its immersive, technology-driven experience. Awarded with an ILEA ESPRIT Technical Production award, Hello! transformed the venue into a futuristic spectacle, including a drone show, stunning pyrotechnics, and a band performing on water. Every element of this event showcased the evolution of technology while taking creative risks to deliver a truly unique and special experience.

Trends to Watch: As the events industry continues its evolution, Hello! Destination Management anticipates a continued demand for in-person events to foster corporate culture and reinforce messaging in hybrid work environments. With a focus on guest personalization and authentic experiences, Hello! embraces innovations in décor, technology, and catering to enhance the guest journey. In an era of shortened attention spans, Hello! recognizes the pivotal role of events in providing tangible, immersive experiences that resonate with attendees. A key trend Hello! is weaving into events is sustainability. Incorporating eco-friendly touches especially when it comes to teambuilding activities, offering giveback opportunities, and sourcing gifts from local artisans to support the communities in which their events are held.

HOSTS GLOBAL

Las Vegas, NV

www.hosts-global.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Kurt Paben, CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 703

Estimated 2023 Revenue: \$160 million

Capabilities: Hosts Global is an award-winning, full-service destination management company (DMC) with over 65 years of experience. With a presence in more than 350 captivating destinations worldwide, Hosts Global provides unparalleled access to local knowledge and creates legendary moments for meeting and event planners. Hosts' services are delivered to the highest industry standards and are adaptable based on clients' needs. All partners are vetted to ensure only premier service

is provided along with the best local offerings. Hosts Global offers the following DMC services: event design, unique venue experiences, experiential activations, dining experiences, decor, site inspections, tour programs, entertainment, team building and CSRs, transportation and logistics, staffing and convention services, and emergency preparedness.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2023:

Hosts SoCal: The Hosts Southern California team masterfully crafts unforgettable experiences spanning Orange County, San Diego, and Los Angeles. Highlighting their logistical prowess is the remarkable 2023 program in Orange County, boasting a grand welcome party for 4000 guests, three consecutive nights of simultaneous ceremonies and afterglows, and a charming Boardwalk-styled lunch complete with seamless transportation arrangements for all attendees. Each event was meticulously curated with distinct entertainment, engaging activations, and exquisite decor. With their unparalleled expertise in orchestrating memorable occasions, the SoCal team continues to set the standard for innovative and successful events.

Trends to Watch: The events industry is evolving, with distinct trends that will shape destination events in 2024. Here's what Hosts Global sees:

- **Suppliers matter:** The importance of suppliers is growing, with clients showing more curiosity about partnerships than ever before. They want to know the diversity and ownership details of suppliers and also demand rigorous standards for green practices. The sustainability of suppliers is a key factor in the decision-making process.
- **Convenience is key:** Travel time

is crucial when considering offsite events. Seamless transportation that ensures punctuality and reduces stress is now expected. Lines and waiting times for food and beverages must be minimized to keep the guest experience smooth and enjoyable.

- Formal is out, fun is in: Formal, multi-course dinners are losing favor as clients prioritize fun, interactive events. Unique decor and lounge seating are essential, as are interactive elements that engage attendees. The demand for venues with built-in entertainment is growing, and themed events.
- More isn't more: Clients want tailored solutions that align closely with their goals, emphasizing quality over quantity. Understanding the client's vision and bringing a strategic perspective is crucial. A well-curated theme is more effective than presenting a slew of options that miss the mark.
- Clients want to pamper their guests: The focus is on making guests feel special with welcome gifts, take-home items, wellness activities, and relaxation lounges. Thoughtful touches like these create memorable experiences and lasting impressions.
- Innovative design and activities: Creative design and activities are in demand. From non-floral centerpieces and curated menus to AI photo booths and vibrant colors, fresh design approaches are making an impact. Nostalgia is also trending, with cotton candy, Ferris wheels, and roller skating adding playful charm to events.

The landscape of destination events is changing, and 2024 will see a surge in demand for suppliers who prioritize diversity and sustainability, events that prioritize convenience and fun, and curated, thoughtful experiences that align closely with client goals.

OVATION GLOBAL DMC

Rue Du Pre-Bouvier, Switzerland
www.ovationdmc.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Sebastien Tondeur, Group CEO

Average Number of Programs/

Events Per Year: 4,000

Estimated 2023 Revenue:

\$300 million

Capabilities: With 30 years of experience, Ovation counts its worldwide reach and standard operating procedures as two of its noteworthy capabilities. The company has offices in more than 100 destinations across five continents; operations comprise 26 wholly owned offices and approx. 62 strategic DMC partners. They are the only global DMC with so many wholly owned offices. The company serves a broad clientele, from the "biggest brands" in banking, consultancy, automotive, IT, and pharmaceuticals to direct selling. An online learning platform to constantly train and develop the team's talents has been in place for nearly a decade.

Noteworthy Programs/Events

in 2023: Ovation is the official DMC partner for the IBTM World. Ovation Global DMC operated major Direct Selling Incentive/recognition programs of 1,000-3,000 attendees in various locations around the globe. On top of that, Ovation provides services for corporate financial, insurance, fintech, pharma, and automotive companies regularly in its 100+ destinations.

Trends to Watch:

- Experience is king: Forget passive participation. Attendees are seeking immersive experiences that connect them to the destination's culture, history, or environment. Think workshops, local tours, and interactive activities.
- Sustainability reigns supreme: Eco-conscious practices are no longer a niche. Event planners are prioritizing sustainability by using local vendors, reducing waste,

and choosing venues with green initiatives.

- Data drives decisions: Event data is becoming a goldmine. Organizers are leveraging data to personalize the attendee experience, optimize logistics, and measure event success with greater accuracy.
- Tech enhances, not replaces: Technology is a powerful tool for engagement, not a replacement for human interaction. Expect to see AI chatbots answering questions, AR/VR experiences adding new dimensions, and event apps streamlining communication.
- Accessibility for all: Inclusivity is a growing concern. Venues that cater to diverse needs and offer accessibility features will be in high demand.
- Events as marketing powerhouses: Events are transforming into strategic marketing tools. They'll be designed to generate brand awareness, build stronger customer relationships, and drive sales.
- The rise of the ROI-focused planner: Cost-effectiveness is paramount. Event planners will be under pressure to demonstrate clear return on investment (ROI) for destination events.
- Centralization for efficiency: Expect to see a rise in centralized platforms that streamline event management, bookings, and communication, making destination events more efficient.

These trends are expected to continue shaping the destination event landscape in 2024 and beyond. ●

Maximizing Marketing Efficiency Using AI Chatbots



By embracing AI chatbots and other tools, businesses can streamline their processes, gain valuable insights, and deliver personalized experiences that resonate with their audiences.

By Shannon Tarrant

Marketing is key for any business in the event industry, where competition is fierce and standing out is essential. Industry veterans remember the days when managing just a few funnels was enough. Now, the dozens of lead-generating opportunities to drive revenue can be overwhelming.

The main hurdle? Traditional marketing methods can be time-consuming and expensive. Limited resources and fierce competition demand efficient and effective marketing strategies.

Enter AI chatbots—or tools that use natural language processing to generate conversational dialogue similar to human interactions. These game-changing resources can streamline your marketing efforts, enhance customer engagement, and drive growth.

For small businesses in the event industry, this type of AI presents great opportunity to compete with larger players.

Identifying the right AI strategies

Start by evaluating your current marketing strategies and overall business goals. Identify areas where using AI could give your business a boost, such as content creation or SEO-keyword ideas. One of the best advantages of AI chatbots in marketing is their ability to repurpose and repackage your content into different types, freeing up valuable time to focus on more strategic activities.

Next, research AI solutions that will work for you and your needs. Consider things like ease of use, cost, scalability,

and the specific features offered by each solution. Available AI technologies include a wide range of capabilities, most of which are more advanced than the needs of the average event professional.

And of course, seek out educational opportunities like [Catersource + The Special Event](#), webinars, or workshops to learn about the latest AI trends and applications.

AI chatbot options

Unsure where to start? ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, provides a simple entry point into the world of AI, offering a basic interface that doesn't require advanced technical skills. Plus, the setup is basic and user-friendly.

Several alternatives to ChatGPT exist, each offering their own unique features. Here are some notable competitors worth looking into:

- Google Gemini
- Claude
- Microsoft Copilot

The key is to find the one that you can get the most familiar with as quickly as possible. ChatGPT is the overall winner as a free starting point for any age and tech level.

Now that you know where to start, you might be thinking, “How does this help with my marketing?”

Enhancing content creation with AI chatbots

Nothing is worse than staring at the cursor on the screen when it's time to write social media captions, blog posts, or articles.

Chatbots can brainstorm and generate creative ideas for blog posts,

These game-changing resources can streamline your marketing efforts, enhance customer engagement, and drive growth.

articles, and social media content. By providing a starting point or topic, you can use these tools to overcome writer's block, refine your ideas, or flesh out thoughts.

AI chatbots can even help improve the clarity of your written content by suggesting edits, restructuring sentences, or providing alternate phrasing. Just copy and paste your writing into the platform and give it the right prompt.

Is there one blog post on your website that's performing well? Chatbots can expand on existing content by providing additional information, examples, or insights, helping enrich the content and offering more depth and context.

Have you been hoping to rank your website for more keywords? Chatbots can help optimize content for search engines by incorporating relevant keywords, phrases, and topics. By analyzing SEO trends and best practices, these tools can help improve the visibility and ranking of content in search engine results pages.

Is your current content falling flat? Quality content is crucial for engaging your audience and building brand credibility. AI chatbots can analyze vast amounts of data to determine what type of content resonates most with your target audience.

Now that you know what they can do, the real question is how to get better results.

Unlocking maximum potential

The first step is to train the model! It's your job to provide chatbots with sufficient background data and

feedback to improve performance and accuracy over time.

These smart virtual assistants can provide instant responses to your requests, also known as prompts. Effective prompts are a necessity to get the most out of ChatGPT.

- **Be clear and specific:** Avoid vague terms and be direct about what you want. Clear instructions help it understand your request accurately. Re-read your prompt before submitting, adding in adjectives and qualifiers anywhere possible.
- **Relevant responses:** Give context to your prompt so that ChatGPT can provide a more relevant response. For example, "I'm a small business in the event industry. What are some effective marketing strategies?" Consider specifying the perspective or role that ChatGPT should take. For example, "As a social media marketing manager, create a detailed Instagram content strategy including ideas for Reels, Carousels, Posts, and Stories."
- **Ask open-ended questions:** Open-ended questions typically get you more detailed answers. For example, instead of asking, "Is social media marketing effective?" ask, "How can social media marketing benefit my (type of) business in the event industry?"
- **Explore multiple perspectives:** Prompts like "What are the advantages and disadvantages of [xyz]?" encourage the model to explore different angles of a topic.
- **Build on previous responses:** Use follow-up prompts to dig deeper into a topic. If the initial response is too broad or misses certain points, ask for more. For example, "Can you give more details on how...?"

- **Clarify and refine:** If the response isn't what you need, provide feedback and clarify your prompt. For instance, "That's helpful, but can you focus more on...?"
- **Specify the format:** If you need a list, summary, or a specific format, mention it in your prompt. For example, "List five [xyz] of..."
- **Set the tone and style:** If you need a formal, casual, or technical response, specify the tone. For example, "Explain [xyz] in a casual tone."
- **Set limits:** If you need a concise response, set word limits. For example, "Explain the benefits of [xyz] in under 200 words."

AI is not just a buzzword but a powerful tool that can revolutionize marketing for businesses in the event industry. By embracing AI chatbots and other tools, businesses can streamline their processes, gain valuable insights, and deliver personalized experiences that resonate with their audiences.

As AI technology continues to evolve, its potential to transform marketing will only grow, offering even more opportunities to thrive in a competitive market. ●

Shannon Tarrant is on a mission to help event pros learn a proven system for success. With over 15 years as an off-site caterer and venue manager, she developed both companies into local powerhouses. A professional go-getter today, she is a no-BS speaker and co-host of her podcast, *The Wedding Sassholes*, sharing her industry wisdom while co-founding her own businesses, [Wedding Venue Map](#) and [Venue Help Desk](#).



ON TREND

Find Your True Color

Color theory 101 to
elevate your event

By Amanda Nicklaus

A split theme for a wedding at the Four Seasons Atlanta. Event by By Brian Green
Photo courtesy Andre Brown Photography

Event's Colors to nts

As innovative visual aesthetics become increasingly important in the event world due to the fast-paced demand of new internet content, your event's design needs to be top-notch. And while some of that inspiration can come from new, exciting creative ideas (turn to page 48 for design inspiration), there is value in going back to the basics of artistic design.

Enter color theory.

"Color theory is the study of how colors work together and how they affect our emotions and perceptions," states [The Interactive Design Foundation](#). "It's like a toolbox for artists, designers, and creators to help them choose the right colors for their projects. Color theory enables you to pick colors that go well together and convey the right mood or message in your work."

In his well-attended session at [Catersource + The Special Event 2024](#), *Applying the Principles of Color Theory to Elevate Your Events*, industry pro Brian Green (By BrianGreen) broke down the basics of color theory, defining it simply: "Color theory is both the science and art of using color."

The study of color has existed

for centuries, since Sir Isaac Newton developed the color wheel (more on that in a bit). Since then, artists and designers of all kinds have played with the relationships of color, working to understand why certain colors have certain effects. In event design, understanding color theory is a must. Here are the basics of what you need to know.

The impact of color

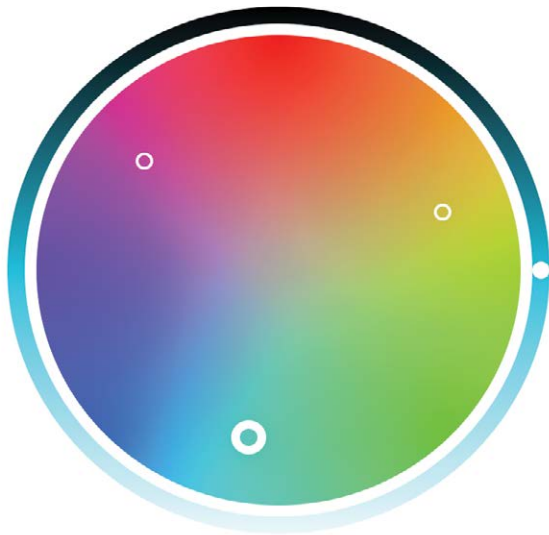
There are many advantages to utilizing color theory in your event designs. In his session, Green gave three important reasons: it helps designers determine which colors look good together; it describes how color can affect our mood, development, and productivity daily; and it can influence the decisions people make.

This sphere of influence typically applies to marketing, but it is also commonly used to influence the tone of different physical spaces. "The color used directly impacts the look, feel, and the reactions of your attendees as they enter a space," says an article from event company [Encore Global](#).

From the moment your attendees enter your event space, the colors you use—and how you use them—can sway them and determine how they feel about the rest of the event. By understanding how to use color theory to communicate the message you want, you can ensure your event design will leave the impression you desire.



ON TREND



1. Pick a color



#24bddb

2. Choose a color combination

Triadic



#24BDDB

#DB24BD

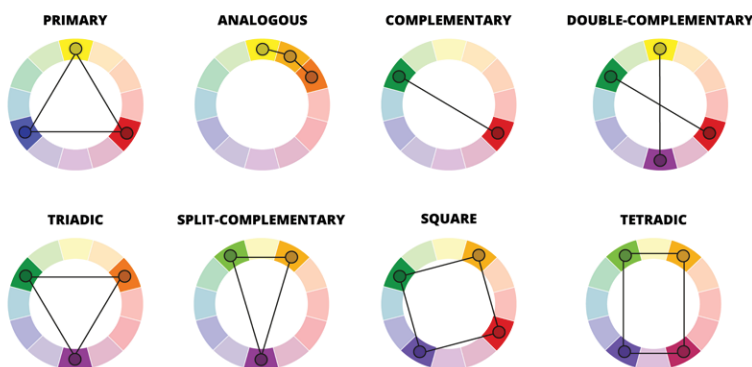
#BDDB24

3. Use this color combination

Create a graphic

Export palette

COLOR RELATIONSHIPS



Top: Canva's Color Wheel tool allows designers to plug in colors and test out different palettes.

Above: There are countless color schemes that you can use in event design.

Get to know the basics

To truly understand how to use color to your advantage, let's take an elemental look at what it is in the first place.

Color wheel

"When light shines on an object, some colors bounce off the object and others are absorbed by it. Our eyes only see the colors that are bounced off or reflected," says color authority [Pantone](#). When Newton discovered light shining through a prism in the same main seven colors each time, he created the color wheel, which visually demonstrates all the colors and how they are related.

These colors can be broken into categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary colors. Primary colors consist of red, yellow, and blue, and from these three, you can create any other color. They also can't be created by mixing any other colors.

Secondary colors are created by mixing two primary colors (red + yellow = orange; yellow + blue = green, blue + red = purple). Tertiary colors are created by mixing a primary color with a secondary color (e.g., red + orange = red orange).

The color wheel is a helpful visual tool you can use to understand the relationships between colors.

Color components

There are five ways to talk about the components that contribute to all the color variations.

- **Hue:** The raw color as it is (green, purple, red). This is a color's purest form.
- **Temperature:** How warm or cool a color (or color palette) is. Reds, oranges, and yellows are warm; blues and purples are cool. Pinks, greens, and greys can be in between.
- **Shade:** When black is added to a color to darken it.
- **Tint:** When white is added to a color to lighten it.



Clockwise, from top left: Versions of purple, orange, and green are a vibrant and eye-catching way to invite guests to an event (and are a great triadic palette). Photo courtesy Tracy Autem & Lightly Photography

These light fixtures feature tassels in a triadic color scheme. Event by Harbor Entertainment. Photo courtesy Sara Krauss Photography

Periwinkle, gold, and blushy pinks create a soft, romantic look using a triadic color scheme. Photo courtesy Melani Lust Photography

An analogous color palette of pinks, oranges, and yellows creates a warm and bright floral table arrangement. Photo courtesy Tracy Autem & Lightly Photography



ON TREND

- **Tone/intensity:** The saturation of the color. The lower the saturation, the grayer the color.

Color schemes

A color scheme, or palette, is the purposeful combination of two or more colors. Here are the most common schemes.

- **Monochromatic:** Using one color and all its variations. Green shared that this is a clean, elegant, and soothing scheme. It works well for floral palettes as well as corporate events. If a client wants to stick with one color—especially white—a monochromatic scheme can add dimension, especially on camera.
- **Complementary:** Using a color and its direct opposite on the wheel (e.g., orange and blue). These are often found in corporate branding, because this strong palette is easily remembered. It's widely used in children's movies and sports teams, says Green. "Complementary colors always work well together."
- **Analogous:** This palette consists of colors found side by side, three in a row, on the color wheel (e.g., green, blue, purple). This scheme is often used in interior design, "which, if you're in event design, we steal a lot of stuff from interior design," says Green. It is also used often in fashion and works well for weddings.
- **Tetradic/rectangular:** These colors form a rectangle on the wheel (e.g., orange, red, blue, green). These are favored by clients who want lots of eccentric color. This color scheme is tough for events, however; it's typically only used by graphic artists in comic



This page, top: This wedding by By BrianGreen features an elegant complementary palette. Photo courtesy Charlton Inije Photography

Above: A monochromatic color scheme with added touches of black to make the look pop. Event by By BrianGreen. Photo courtesy Charlton Inije Photography

"Through the use of color, you can change moods, encourage an audience to act in a specific way, you can create intimate spaces or conversely create spaces that feel expansive—all through color theory."

—Brian Green





Left: Red and green are the classic holiday complementary color palette; this strong color combo was used for a Christmas-themed baby shower by Marcy Blum Events. Photo courtesy Finch Photo

Above: Shades of teal are complimented by bright pops of fuchsia in this floral arrangement by Weirdo Weddings. Photo courtesy Pink Light Images



books and children's toys. Green joked during his session, "Typically you're praying no client's walking in asking for this. And if they do, please @ [at] me, because I want to see what the final product looks like."

- **Triadic:** This color palette consists of colors that form a triangle on the wheel, equidistant from each other. "Think Superman," says Green, referencing the red, yellow, and blue as a triadic scheme. This palette works very well for branding but is typically not used in events.
- **Split:** This scheme forms a "Y" on the color wheel, with a color and colors close to its opposite, often a bold color among a couple of muted ones. This palette is used frequently in fashion and event design.

It's psychological

Colors carry symbolism, cultural associations, preferences, and perception. They show up in our language, and they communicate meaning in rituals and traditions, especially ceremonies. The study of color shows that each color has a different effect on people's moods and feelings. Just remember, color psychology can vary depending on cultural associations.

"Many people don't realize that the meaning of colors varies in different countries or within different cultures," says Green. "Different colors have different meanings in different parts of the world." He advises doing your research, because this can mean the difference between colors that connect to your clients and colors that offend their culture.

Left: An ABC Oscar Party by AOO Events, Inc. used an analogous color scheme with gold accents. Photo courtesy AOO Events, Inc.



ON TREND



For the *Crazy Rich Asians* premiere party, Kristin Banta Events, Inc. used a color palette of green, gold, and pink. In Eastern color theory, these colors represent (respectively) prosperity, wealth, and marriage, all themes in the movie. Photo courtesy Kristin Banta Events, Inc.

Another way to say it: color is not universal. Green pointed out that in Western design, blue is associated with trustworthiness, masculinity, and corporate things. However, in Eastern design, this same color indicates femininity and wealth.

Another example: in Western and Middle Eastern culture, mourning is represented by black. However, in Eastern culture, this same somber emotion is represented by white.

And besides leveling up your design skills, understanding color theory makes you a more valuable planner.

“Understanding your client, understanding what the color is going to do for that event already makes you have the ability to charge more,” notes Green, “because now I can walk you through why the palette you thought you needed isn’t necessarily the right palette to convey the message that you

want to convey.” Color theory doesn’t just help you make better design choices; it helps you sell your events better, too.

Start painting

Now that you know the basics of color theory, how can you apply them to your events?

For Green it starts with the client and their vision for the event and what it’s about. Ask them questions that help you get the feel of their personality and the event’s vibe:

- What are your favorite colors?
- What mood, feeling, and emotions do you want to invoke for the event?
- What is the goal of the event?
- Are there any colors you dislike?
- If you were to walk the Red Carpet at the Academy Awards, what color would you wear?

These are questions Green asks to get an idea of what emotions and messages the client wants to communicate. “I use those questions to determine what the client’s color scheme might be with them so that we have a starting point to create the perfect palette. Ultimately it is driven by their likes and themes for the event.”

Next, use your knowledge of color theory to find what colors will best represent your client and the event.

“From there I work on applying the principles of color theory on what works best with what complementary colors, what tones, hues, shades, and tints may work, and whether we are playing into a traditional color scheme to truly tell the story pleasingly and cohesively to the eye,” says Green. “Then I create a mood board with those colors and then we shift into adding textures, to bring it to life.”

Color Trends

When we think of trending color schemes, most of us immediately think of Pantone's Color of the Year. This year's color, Peach Fuzz, has inspired many warm, soft peachy palettes (head to the [Spring Issue](#) of *Catersource* magazine for some ideas featuring this color).

But many designers fight the urge to roll their eyes when clients request the Color of the Year. There are other colors that cycle through event spaces and become trendy. In her session *Kristin*

Banta's Design To Impact In 2024 at Catersource + The Special Event 2024, Kristin Banta highlighted chartreuse and browns gaining popularity.

Here are the color trends predicted for 2024:

1. Luxurious neutrals
2. Bright bubblegum
3. Digital noir
4. Sharp citrus
5. Oceanic color waves
6. Industrial after-dark
7. Pearlescence
8. Regal hues
9. Tonal apricot

Above information courtesy of Vistaprint

Canva has a helpful [color wheel tool](#) that allows you to play with various schemes across the color wheel.

When it comes to the bringing-it-to-life part, think about what your guests' eyes will be drawn to first.

"Worry less about floors, ceilings, and walls in a venue," advises Green. "Floors get covered approximately 80% by tables, chairs, and a huge dance floor and stage. Walls and ceilings can be manipulated by lighting or drapery. When guests enter the space, they will not see the crazy carpet pattern; they will see the amazing design you thoughtfully curated."

Now that you are familiar with the fundamentals of color theory, you can experiment, bringing more mindfulness into your designs and elevating the outcomes of your events. After all, event planning isn't just a job; it's an art in its truest form.

"Have the most fun! Color theory is so incredible," says Green. "Through the use of color, you can change moods, encourage an audience to act in a specific way, you can create intimate spaces or conversely create spaces that feel expansive—all through color theory." ●

CULTURAL CONTEXT OF COLOR	RED  <p>EASTERN brides, happiness, prosperity, good fortune</p> <p>WESTERN passion, excitement, danger, love, anger, stop</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST danger, caution, evil</p>	ORANGE  <p>EASTERN sacred, happiness, spirituality</p> <p>WESTERN harvest, autumn, warmth</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST mourning, loss</p>	PINK  <p>EASTERN marriage, feminine</p> <p>WESTERN feminine, caring, romance</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST no colour meaning</p>
	YELLOW  <p>EASTERN courage, prosperity, recent death</p> <p>WESTERN happiness, cowardice, hope, summer</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST mourning, masculine</p>	WHITE  <p>EASTERN death, mourning, unhappiness, misfortune</p> <p>WESTERN brides, medical, purity, cleanliness, holiness, surrender, peace</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST purity, mourning, high-ranking status</p>	GREEN  <p>EASTERN fertility, prosperity, infidelity,</p> <p>WESTERN nature, money, jealous, luck</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST fertility, money, colour of Islam</p>
	BLUE  <p>EASTERN wealth, strength, immortality, feminine</p> <p>WESTERN trust, depression, corporate, masculine, conservative</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST heaven, spirituality, mourning</p>	PURPLE  <p>EASTERN wealth, nobility, spirituality</p> <p>WESTERN royalty, wealth, death,</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST wealth, virtue, royalty</p>	BLACK  <p>EASTERN health, knowledge, prosperity, stability</p> <p>WESTERN funerals, death, rebellion, mourning, strength</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST mourning, mystery, rebirth</p>

Above information courtesy of Halo Media Group

Tech Tools to Transform Your Design Process



No matter what you design, technology is a tool to enhance your creativity and expertise, not replace it.

By Nora Sheils

The world of design is constantly evolving, and technology is at the forefront of this change. By embracing the right tools, wedding planners, florists, catering teams, and many other event professionals can streamline their workflows, create more impactful designs, and ultimately, leave clients in awe. Here are a few tech tools that can improve your event designs.

STREAMLINING COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION

Cloud-based software

Ditch the endless email chains and file versions! Cloud-based software allows real-time collaboration on mood boards, floor plans, documents, and presentations. This fosters a smoother design process and ensures everyone is on the same page. The tech stack we love is Canva for design and presentations.

Project management platforms

Tools like Trello offer a centralized hub for managing projects, assigning tasks, and tracking deadlines. This keeps your team organized, reduces miscommunication, and allows clients to access project updates easily while also being able to see their design all laid out in one easy place.

ENHANCING CLIENT VISUALIZATION

3D modeling software

Take your design presentations to the

next level with 3D modeling software like Merri or Prismm (formerly AllSeated). These tools allow you to create virtual representations of the event space, complete with furniture, floral arrangements, and décor. This gives clients a realistic picture of their dream event and fosters a more interactive design process.

Virtual Reality (VR) technology

While still in its early stages for event design, VR offers exciting possibilities. Imagine allowing clients to virtually walk through their wedding venue, experiencing the ambience and layout firsthand. VR can be a powerful tool for creating a lasting impression, so don't be afraid to check out new tools and tech!

ELEVATING THE GUEST EXPERIENCE

Interactive event day apps

Event apps are not just for conferences anymore. Consider creating a custom app for your clients' weddings or events as an extra add-on service. This can provide guests with real-time information like schedules, menus, and venue maps. Interactive features such as photo sharing or polls can also enhance your client's guest event experience.

Digital signage

Ditch the static signs and embrace digital displays. Use them to showcase your clients' photos, provide a welcome message as guests arrive, or even play interactive games during cocktail hour. This adds a dynamic element to your event and encourages clients to share

By embracing the right tools, wedding planners, florists, catering teams, and many other event professionals can streamline their workflows, create more impactful designs, and ultimately, leave clients in awe.

a cool feature on social media, giving your business an engagement buzz and keeping guests entertained.

No matter what you design, technology is a tool to enhance your creativity and expertise, not replace it. Focus on using tools that streamline your workflow, personalize your client experience, and ultimately, design unforgettable events your clients and their friends will be talking about forever. ●

Nora Sheils is the founder of award-winning planning firm *Bridal Bliss* and co-founder of *Rock Paper Coin*, a client management platform that offers a streamlined approaches for the wedding and event industry. Nora is a well-known and sought-after speaker on national stages. Recognized as one of the Top 500 Event Professionals by BizBash, Nora has also been heralded as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the Event Industry by Eventex. More recently, Rock Paper Coin was celebrated by the Stewie Awards as the Best Startup in Technology Services.



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FOOD FOR FÊTES

Setting the

Tablescape featuring peach colored roses for a private backyard event. Event by and photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering

Table(scape)

How to create an effective, eye-catching table design

By Amanda Nicklaus

Society might consider proper table settings an antiquated practice, but every event planner worth their salt knows the importance of a perfectly crafted tablescape. Both a science and an artform, creating a tablescape requires practical design and innovative flair. Chef and food blogger Stephanie Stiavetti rejects the classic definitions of tablescaping and describes this practice with more warmth: “Tablescaping is the act of creatively and intentionally arranging a tabletop so that it conveys a specific theme, mood, or experience.”

Tablescaping is more than setting a table, more than decorating said table, more than combining a seating arrangement with your

florals and catering setup. It is a creative skill that, when done properly, ensures a seamless dining experience for guests and service alike; that guarantees the dining portion of your event is as memorable and transcendent as any other aspect of the affair.

“It is all about strategy and making sure that your design concept works. And it needs to work to create an experience,” said Jackie Watson (Jaclyn Watson Events) in her session *Table Talk & Design Strategy* at this year’s [Catersource + The Special Event](#).

Here’s all you need to know about creating intentional, effective, and showstopping tablescapes.

Why it’s important

As with any creative process, it’s important to understand the “why” behind what you’re doing. Crafting an effective tablescape is more than ticking off a checklist in hopes of creating a “perfect” table; it’s about determining what will make your event story shine through to your guests.

In her session, Watson shared five reasons why it’s important to set a table properly:

FOOD FOR FÊTES



An Alice in Wonderland themed tablescape from 2024 Gala Award nominee "Alice, Curiouser & Curiouser." Event by Peace Arch Hospital Foundation. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy Photography



A simple yet elegant garden-forward tablescape by Celebra Rentals, featuring green and crystal glassware. Photo courtesy Celebra Rentals

- 1. Ambiance and atmosphere:** This is the first thing guests see. By engaging all five senses, guests can be fully immersed in the event story. Your tables should fit seamlessly into the larger event design.
- 2. Guest experience:** The better the dining experience, the more your talent will shine. When table settings are arranged thoughtfully, guests are directly impacted and feel like they're part of the event. Also, your next client (aka, impressed guest) may be seated at the table!
- 3. Visual appeal and photography:** Your tables should be part of the captured visual experience that can be used for social media and marketing. "The small, intricate details are also what get you published (turn to page 8 for more) in the world of wedding magazines," says Watson. Give your photographer a shot list; these photos can help you get published and give you marketing material.
- 4. Personalization and theme expression:** A proper table feels personal to those breaking bread around it. Create a questionnaire for clients before they sign. Get to know them, ask very detailed personal questions (including memories, family issues, etc.).
- 5. Coordination and cohesiveness:** Well-coordinated table settings contribute to the overall coherence and design. A

well-produced event whose table design is lacking is a miss for your brand.

Once you have a compass for your design, you can start the process of putting the tablescape together.

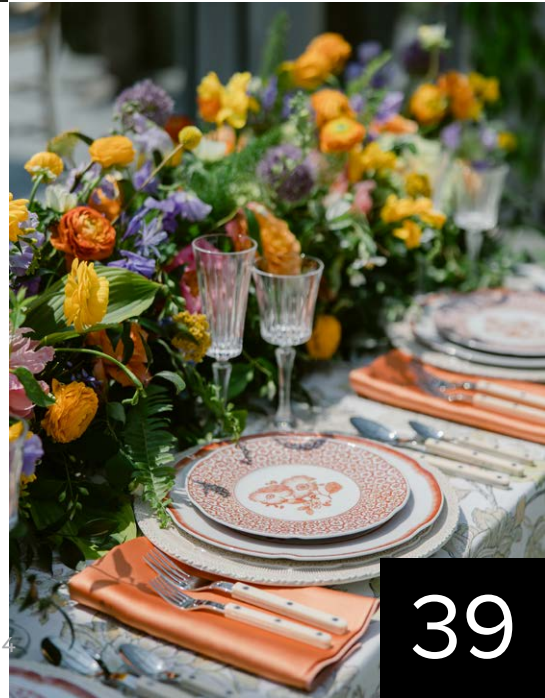
Getting started

As with any good process, it's important to start with a good plan. This means fully understanding as much as you can

Opposite page, top row from left: Individual planters give this table a clean look; This backyard event table uses bright florals and wood furniture for a rustic appearance; Lemons as placecard holders bring a whimsical touch. Events by Eatertainment Events & Catering. Photos courtesy Bruce Gibson

Middle row: Peach toned roses and rose gold flatware provide a trendy color scheme; A corporate dinner uses palm fronds for tropical flair; This all-white wedding dinner is accented by blush roses. Events by and photos courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering

Bottom row: Caramel apples make eye-catching party favors (turn to page 76 for more). Event by and photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering; Vibrant pink florals and linens by House of Joy. Photo courtesy Lauren Peterson Photography; A layered tablescape makes for visual appeal. Event by House of Joy. Photo courtesy Amanda Donaho Photography





FOOD FOR FÊTES



Many textures come into play in this table design by House of Joy, from the linens and florals to the table and chairs. Photo courtesy Leslie Rodriguez Photography



Several elements of nature are used in this butterfly themed wedding table design by Jaclyn Watson Events. Photo courtesy Kate Seymour Photography

about your client and all who will be in attendance.

“My process of design begins with a 16-page—yes, 16-page—questionnaire,” says Watson. That’s how important it is to have a thorough understanding of the attendees. You can also use data from your previous events to gain a better understanding of the types of people you attract as clients.

Then comes the brainstorming. “After they fill out the questionnaire, I carefully go over and create a color palette,” says Watson (more on that on page 26), “then research all the latest trends and create a mood board for them to peruse. I look at so many things from *Vogue* magazine, *Architectural Digest*, Pinterest, other weddings, and storefronts, and I gain ideas that way.” Not only does Watson create a mood board—she shows it to her client and has them sign and date that they’ve approved it.

Creating the design takes more than an eye-catching mood board, however.

“When I design a tabletop, it is about using all five senses and asking myself when guests see a table, how it will make them feel, what they will smell, what they will see, what they will taste when they sit down, and what they will touch,” shares Watson. (For more on sensory design, read *Once Upon A Theme* from our [Spring Issue](#).) This means thinking about how the linens will feel against someone’s leg, how the colors

will stir up certain emotions, how the sensory experience will transport a guest throughout the dining portion of the event.

Fausto Pifferrer (Blue Elephant Catering & Events) wholeheartedly agrees. “When a couple enters the room for the first time, their eyes take in everything: furniture, linens, lighting. Why not have the table setting give the same energy?”

Watson also suggests creating layouts with platforms such as Primm (formerly AllSeated), Merri, Tripleseat, or whatever works with the rentals. This allows the client to see what you are envisioning, too.

It’s important to note that this is not necessarily a quick process. “The design takes me months to figure out, which is why I do all the logistics first—finding vendors—then I work through the design process,” says Watson. “I work with the florist to understand what they envision for florals, the same with catering, how everything is plated, and what food we are doing that represents the colors we are using.”

Breaking down the elements

Table design can be broken into seven main elements: tables and chairs, linens, florals, dishware, stationery, decor, and food

Tall, elevated floral arrangements allow guests to see each other from across the table. Event by Jaclyn Watson Events. Photo courtesy JAG Studios

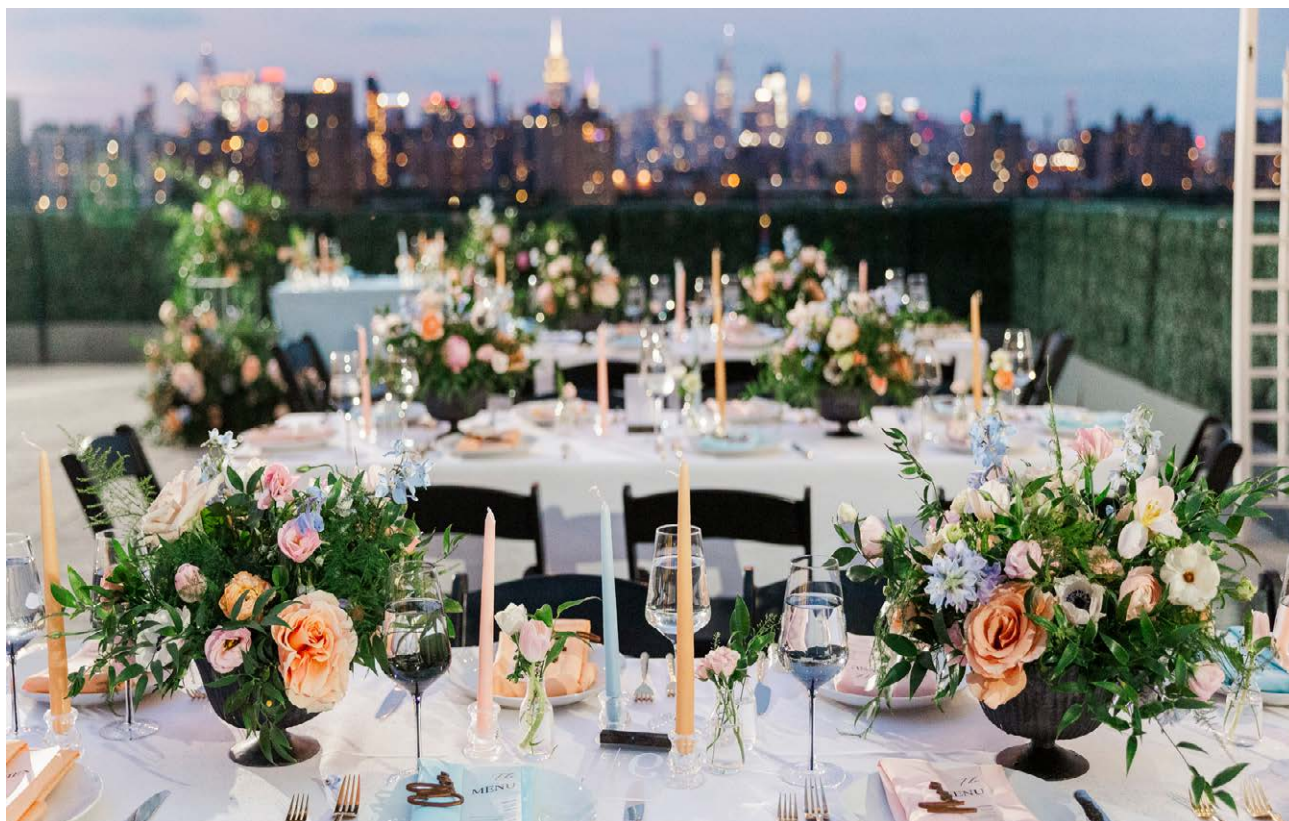




FOOD FOR FÊTES



Red streamers act as a motif that tie this wedding reception table to the ceremony. 2024 Gala Award recipient for Total Decor, event by Beijing Chaoran Yingfeng Consulting Co., Ltd. Photo courtesy Rayson Wong Studio



Larger floral arrangements are accented by smaller, single stem pieces and similarly colored candles. Photo courtesy Megan & Kenneth



Pops of light blue from menus and bright greens from floral arrangements create an earthy feel against this wooden table. Photo courtesy Megan & Kenneth

presentation. All of these require attention to detail. “One of the things that I find that happens the most often is that certain small details like silverware, napkins, florals all get forgotten about, because everybody’s thinking about ‘The Big Picture’, the big details, and it’s the small intricate details that make everything count and that actually leave a lasting impression,” says Watson.

Tables and chairs

Tables and chairs are the starting structure, and the material, shape, and spacing of them will greatly impact the comfort, conversation, and mood of the guests.

Make sure to have adequate space for tables: the catering team should be able to move freely, so accommodate for two people moving side by side between tables. If everything is smushed together, you’re not the only one who will notice—guests can tell if they’re cramped in. “At the end of the day, they’re not going to like the look either,” says Watson.

Know how many people can comfortably fit at a table, too. “A 72-inch table will hold 12 guests,” says Pifferrer. “A 60-inch table will hold 10 guests—unless you use a charger.” Give people enough space to sit comfortably.

He also values detail in table and chair layout. “Straight lines are very important to me. Make sure that the chairs are all in a perfectly straight line.” He adds, “Never tuck the chair into the tablecloth—the linen should hang straight without interference and go to the floor.” Chairs should not be pushed in; “they should barely grace your tables,” says Watson.



Bread plates are more formal and visually appealing than bread baskets. Photo courtesy Megan & Kenneth

Linens

That leads to the next element: linens. Nothing looks worse than linens that don’t fit the table properly. Linens must be floor length and should hang straight, not dragging or slanted.

Regarding napkins, pay attention to detail. Watson warns against oversized napkins and refolds them to make them look tidy. “It’s a small detail that means the world to your clients.”

Florals

Florals are a wonderful way to beautify a table—if guests can see the person across from them. No one likes having their view blocked (and their conversation stifled) by an oversized floral arrangement. If you don’t take this into consideration, guests may take the florals off the table altogether.

Watson suggests measuring by leaning on your elbow so you can see what they’ll see. The florals should either be lower than eye level or elevated to be above eye level.

Finally, they shouldn’t be touching anything or at risk of getting knocked over. At weddings, don’t put flowers in front of the cake either; this will block the view. Put vases around the cake to create a clear view.

Dishware

There’s a lot to keep in mind about dishware. There are many approaches to the correct setup, but dishware should create an easy dining experience for guests, not a confusing one.



FOOD FOR FÊTES



Here, twinkling candles of various heights atop the tables play into the twinkling lights along the venue walls. Photo courtesy Melani Lust Photography

In terms of glassware, include one wine glass, one champagne flute, and one water goblet. These should create a triangle above the plate. Watson notes that you don't need to worry too much about red versus white wine glasses unless it's a wine tasting or black-tie formal event. She also advises always doing pre-poured wine or champagne to create a lasting impression. Another thing to note: never flip glasses over, because this creates an unwelcoming feel.

Regarding flatware, it's vital to only set what will be used. "If you aren't having soup, there is no need for a soup spoon," says Pifferrer. Never use flatware as decor—you don't want to confuse guests or create clutter. Everything should be evenly spaced, too; use your thumb to measure and place flatware equidistant from each other and the plates. If you have limited space, avoid chunky flatware.

Chargers should be appropriately sized; a common mistake is using chargers that are too big and take up too much table room. They should also never hang over the edge of the table. As for plates, more is sometimes best; a higher number of plates indicates to guests that they will be well-fed.

Finally, think about the functionality of extra dishes. "I am not a fan of bread baskets," says Pifferrer. "A bread plate is more formal." When using bread plates, be sure to leave enough space between bread plates and entree plates.

"I feel the same about carafes or pitchers of water," adds



Intricate snake-detailed plates and napkin rings work with ornate candleholders to create a rich tablescape. Photo courtesy Melani Lust Photography

Pifferrer. "Catering is to cater to the guests. Have your team fill glasses as needed."

Every dishware item needs to be coordinated with each other and fit comfortably with the overall feel of the table. Remember that when people sit down, the linens get pulled, so you'll want to accommodate with enough space for everything to move around a bit.

Stationery

Stationery such as menus and place cards can be both functional and decorative. They should fit in with the other decorative choices made. One thing to avoid, Watson says, is standing menus up—they can fall over and, if you have lit candles on the table, could catch fire.

Detail decor

Decor is probably the most fun part of table design—this is where you add your creative flair and incorporate any theme elements. You can keep it simple and affordable with candles and small touches—a note, a eucalyptus sprig, perhaps—or you can go all out with intricate and well-thought-out details. The same rules apply here: don't overcrowd, and make sure the decor adds to the experience instead of overwhelming it.

Food presentation

Don't forget to include the food itself in your design plans!

"Make sure your guests will remember the food that they ate," reminds Watson. The food presentation should make you stand out as a designer, and it should be interactive to help create a memory in guests' minds.

If you can, avoid family style meals in favor of **plated**. Family style meals are difficult for florals, are more expensive, wasteful, and take up a lot of space and often crowd guests. Plated meals, conversely, are elegant, classic, refined, and more dignified. They provide a chance for the table design to shine and for you to create an experience. If you must do family style, Watson suggests only doing family style salad and bread.

She also notes that preset salads can mess with the integrity of the table. If you do have a preset salad, make sure the photographer can come in early to capture the fullness of your tablescape design before the salad gets set.

Collaborating with catering

There can often be tension when asked who is responsible for setting the tables. Is it the caterer? The planner? What about the florist? Aren't rentals involved?

The answer, of course, is that all these teams are responsible to some degree. But as for who should take the lead: Watson says it's the caterer, and Pifferrer agrees. There's a caveat, however: if the planner wants to dress tables, then it's their responsibility. If the planner wants to oversee only part of the design, such as deciding linens, they must let the catering team know.

If the planner does decide to take on the full design, however, open communication between all teams is still incredibly important. This is where a mockup or ghost table comes into play.

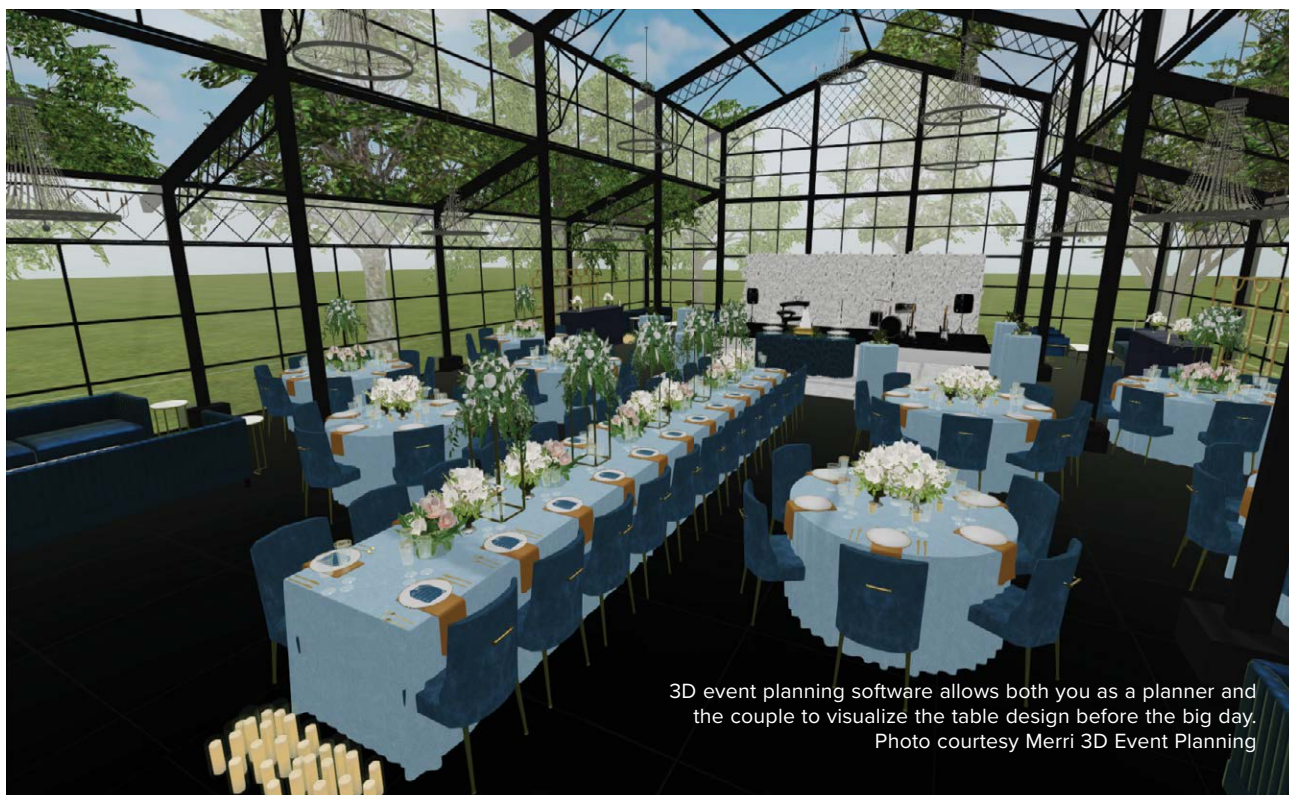
"If we are not the planner of an event, I set up a ghost table and go over the entire tablescape with the client and planner," says Pifferrer.

"That way, we're all on the same page with the layout and design, and there will be no surprises on the event day. Remember: even if the planner designs the tablescape, the catering team usually does the physical work and ensures perfection on the tabletop."

If using a ghost table, it's important that the entire catering team is trained in, not just the head caterer. Training the entire team with one table ensures consistency across the board.

The other thing to keep in mind when working across teams: let everyone see the rental list!

"Not allowing the catering team to see the rental list beforehand or make suggestions for tableware based on the menu," is a common gap between planners and caterers, says Pifferrer. "An example of this is square white china. This can be a great look but often impractical for a seated meal. Not only is square china heavy for the catering staff to carry compared to traditional round china, square plates also often don't fit comfortably on a round table.



3D event planning software allows both you as a planner and the couple to visualize the table design before the big day. Photo courtesy Merri 3D Event Planning



FOOD FOR FÊTES

The wrong china can also affect the meal presentation. If a larger than standard plate is ordered, the food looks too small on the plate.”

If caterers know what rental items are being used, they can design the food presentation to fit better, or offer suggestions to make the table come together better.

Five Things to Focus On

In her session *Table Talk & Design Strategy* at this year's Catersource + The Special Event, Jackie Watson (Jaclyn Watson Events) shared five aspects of table design to include to ensure a successful tablescape:

- Balance & symmetry
- Layering & texture
- Guest comfort
- Personalization & detailing
- Harmonizing with centerpieces

And if you're not the one placing the rental order, make sure to see it. “Always have what you need! If you are not placing the order with the rental company, make sure you get to see the rental list so that your team can design the menu around china and know what you have. You never want to be caught off guard with missing pieces or too many of something,” advises Pifferrer.

The same goes for floral—if they see the rental list and know what the table design will look like, they can create arrangements that contribute to the overall desired look and provide a better experience for guests.

Being intentional with your tablescape design has a handful of benefits—your guests will have a more memorable experience, your client will be happy, your creativity can shine, and you can build a better brand for your business. Your relationship with your caterer will benefit as well; when you work together, you can both improve designs and come up with innovative ideas.

“To share a table with someone is to share everything,” said author Paul Krueger. Share your creativity, and those gathered around the table will experience more than a good meal—they'll experience your love of events, they'll experience you. ●



Once you've created a mood board and generated a simulation with 3D planning software, show your client and have them sign and date that they've approved it. Photo courtesy Merri 3D Event Planning



Leading Caterers of America (LCA) is comprised of the top caterers and event venues in the United States and Canada. When you need a caterer to make your next event exceptional, perfect and delicious, choose a LCA caterer.

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LCA specializes in corporate events of all types - marketing, celebratory, client related, employee morale, and others. Whether held in the host's facility, or in an off-premise location, LCA members are able to deliver a high value corporate event experience.

Photo Credit: Catering Creations



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Most LCA members have dedicated wedding specialists on staff to ensure this most important day is executed flawlessly, no matter the level of complexity.

Photo Credit: Bonura Hospitality Group



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Bar and bat mitzvahs, First Communions, quinceañeras, retirements and graduations, and even funerals are all important life cycle events. Superb food and service are crucial to making these events special and memorable, and the LCA is a perfect resource for those products.

Photo Credit: Catering by Michael's



Nonprofits

Galas and fundraisers are key to the success of most charitable ventures - including both financial and membership. The LCA is highly attuned to the needs of most charities, and is a great resource for all the necessary components to make these gala events successful.

Photo Credit: G Catering

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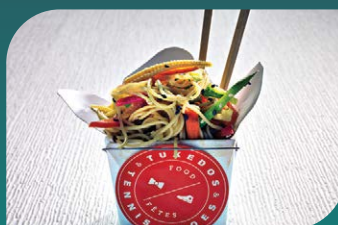
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Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia

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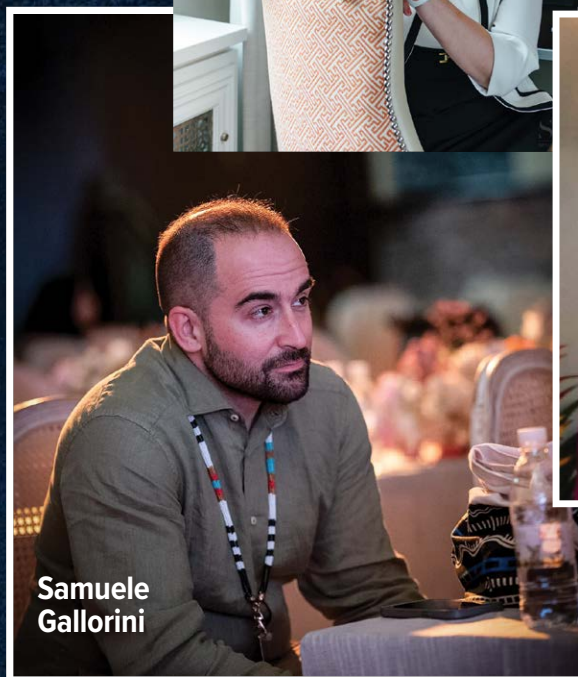
Great INSPIRATION

How to keep the creative juices flowing

By Amanda Nicklaus

It's easy to feel like social media is the main pipeline for inspiration these days—even when our feeds start filling up with creators copying each other. For event pros, Pinterest and TikTok can be useful up to a point, but for truly creative and innovative designs, it's important to gather inspiration from a wider realm in this vast, intricate world.

We asked some of today's prominent event pros how they stay inspired. If you need a refresh on your own creative process, here's what they recommend.



y Talarico

Kawania
Wooten

David Merrell

Sarah
Chianese

Robin
Selden

Jordan Heller

Shelly Tolo

Teri
Jakob

Sebastien
Centner

Keith
Willard

ITION

What designers do you admire or are inspired by, and why? (This can be from any genre, from event to fashion to architecture.)

David Merrell (AOO Events, Inc., CEO/Creative Director, Los Angeles, CA): **Kristin Banta** (her different artistic perspective); David Stark (his bold designs); John Varvatos

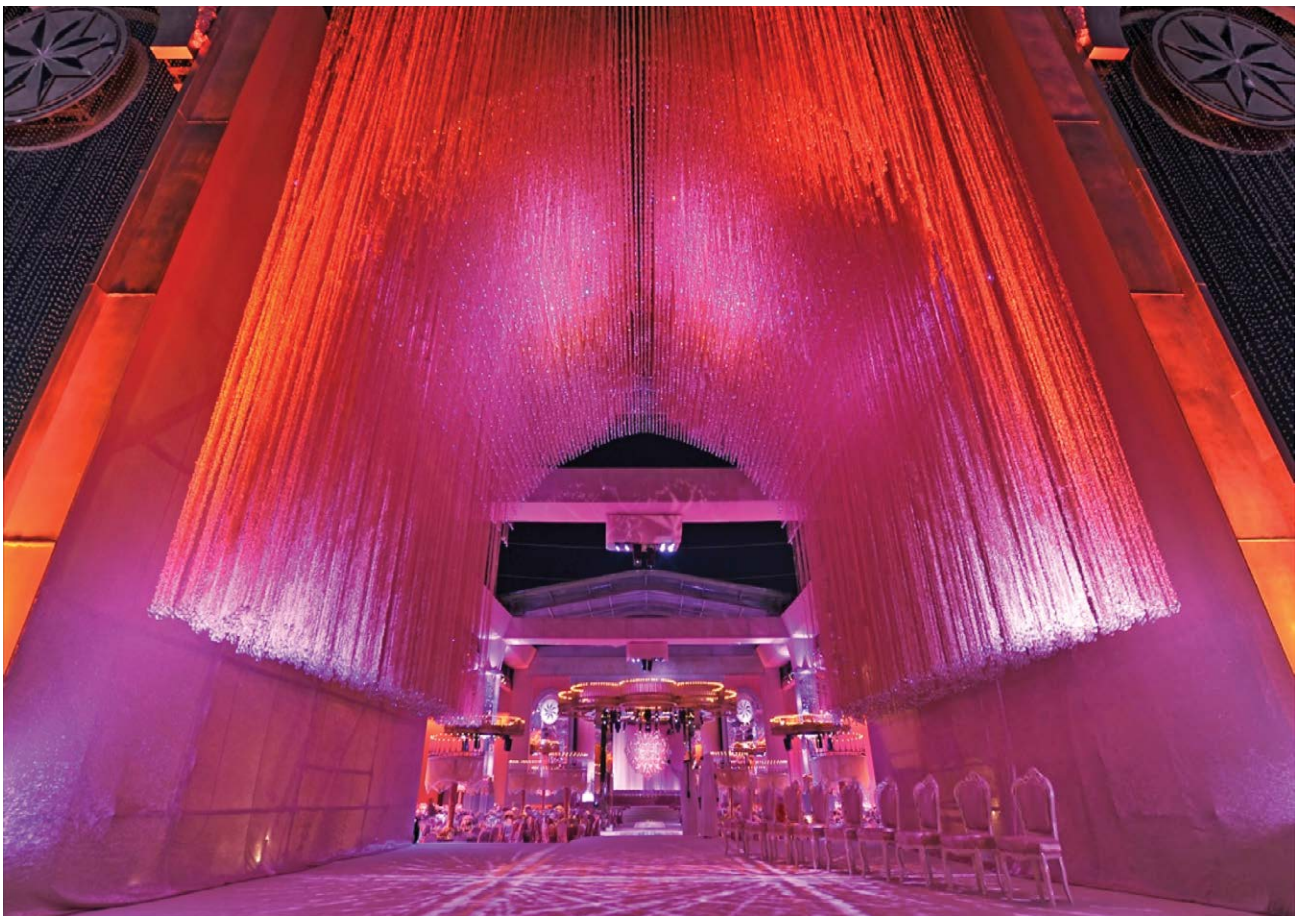
Jaclyn Watson (Jaclyn Watson Events, Planner/Designer, Hyde Park, VT): Many people do not know this, but Audrey Hepburn and Givenchy often teamed up, so those are two designers that I deeply admire. They were at the top of their game in fashion back in the day! Givenchy's designs were all about that classy, effortless vibe, and Audrey, well, she was the epitome of understated elegance in my book! I often try to design and dress around that concept. Most of the time, my clients ask for exactly that!

Another designer I admire is Preston Bailey. I remember when I first started in this industry over a decade ago, his designs always inspired me as to what I wanted to be when

I "grew up," so to speak. Preston's work was and still is an innovative approach to design and his ability to transform any space into a breathtakingly beautiful setting is unreal.

Jordan Heller (Suncoast Wedding and Event Leaders (SWEL), Owner/Event Planner, Sarasota, FL): The Disney[®]* Imagineers[™] are constantly inspiring my event design. They are the masters in creating an immersive experience from overall theme to minute details. From individual attractions to entire sections of theme parks, they use a blend of techniques that invoke emotion from all five senses. Their standard of design where they create sight lines so that a fairytale land and a futuristic land don't intersect and ruin the illusion is wild.

Kawania Wooten (Howerton+Wooten Events, Creative Director and Principal Consultant, Bowie, MD): I am very inspired by the fashion stylist Law Roach. I admire his bold approach to crafting unforgettable looks for his celebrity clients. His fearless styling is a fusion of inspiration from his client's body of work, iconic looks of the past, and his own boundless imagination. There's no formulaic



Color drenched venue event design by Preston Bailey. Photo courtesy Preston Bailey



Audrey Hepburn with French fashion designer Hubert de Givenchy in his workshop, in Paris. Photo courtesy Sunset Boulevard/Corbis via Getty Images



Eccentric floral design for an event at International Market Square in Minneapolis, MN by D'Amico Catering. Photo courtesy Anna Grinets Photography

repetition in his work; rather, he tailors each look to capture the unique essence and individuality of his clients, ensuring that the spotlight shines on them, not on him.

Keith Willard (Keith Willard Events, Owner/Planner, Fort Lauderdale, FL): I'm a big fan of David Tutera and Colin Cowie. I had the pleasure of interviewing them both on my podcast, *Behind The Veil*. To hear that David used to be the kid that was shoved into lockers and kept his joy ... also, he is so open about his journey, that when he first started to do the TV show, his business almost had to close because everyone assumed they could no longer afford him. He really did pull the curtain back to showcase that persistence is the key to long term success.

Colin Cowie got his start by creating fun events for his troop! He was enlisted in the army and anything about war can wear down a person's mind, body, and spirit. He found ways to use materials on base to create themed nights that helped refill his troops' souls. And even though this idea of creating events was born out of necessity for an awful time in life, he used that experience to propel him to new heights!

Lenny Talarico, CSEP, CHE (Lenny Talarico Events, Owner, Las Vegas, NV): I admire the work of so many diverse designers. One of my favorites for live event creative happens to be a friend and collaborator, Andy Walmsley—the Emmy Award Winning set designer for shows that include *American Idol*, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* and *X Factor*.

In bespoke spatial design I love the work of interior designer Roger Thomas, known for his work creating leading hospitality designs for world class venues such as The Mirage, Bellagio, and Wynn/Encore Resorts in Las Vegas.

Melissa Brannon (Uncommon Events, Founder/Event Planner/Designer, Philadelphia, PA): I am intrigued by AI. I follow @TinkerTailorArt on Instagram. I find their ability to manipulate an architectural structure or a piece of clothing fascinating. I see the future of mood and story boards to be driven by AI. Anything you can think of can be replicated with just a few prompts.

Robin Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events, Managing Partner & Executive Chef, Stamford, CT): I love the retro and playful design of Jonathan Adler. His humor and personality shine through his designs and his use of color is beautiful. I can say the same about the artist, home and fashion designer Kerri Rosenthal. I love them both as they are both sophisticated luxury brands that bring joy to people when they see or experience them, which is something I strive to do with our food when given the opportunity by our clients to be playful like this.

Samuele Gallorini (Gallorini Giorgi Events, Wedding designer, Florence, Italy/Dallas, TX): I truly love and am inspired by Italian furniture design and fashion brands like Gucci, Ferragamo, Yves Saint Laurent.



Conceptual AI design for a bar with dark turquoise crystalized interior by Hera Kim, who goes by @tinkertailorart on Instagram. Photo courtesy @tinkertailorart



AI design for a blue and white ceramic inspired dress. Photo courtesy @tailortinkerart

Sarah Chianese (Mangia and Enjoy!, Owner, Springs, Colorado/Hudson Valley, NY): There are so many designers to choose from, yet the one I admire most and get the heartiest inspiration from is nature. From flowers to leaves, branches to clouds, mountains to hills, food to bark, and water to animals, there is a wealth of inspiration to spark every concept. From minimalistic to maximalist, nature provides me with every mood, structure, color, movement, and emotion.

Some fashion designers I admire and am inspired by are the romantic and architectural couture styles of Ralph Rucci and Georgina Chapman.

I am motivated by wedding and event designers with vast imaginations to create their client's ideal visions filled with everything from whimsy to ultra elegance, such as Alejandra Poupel, Preston Bailey, David Beahm, and the explosive color in Bruce Russell Events.

Traveling also plays a considerable role in my inspiration. Architectural inspirations heavily influence me in nearly every area of the world and global flavors. Between the buildings, farm bounty, aroma, and vibrant color of world spices, those three elements can create vivid imaginations,

all merging into visions eagerly awaiting manifestation into a client's dream vision.

Sebastien Centner (Eatertainment Events & Catering, Creative Director, Toronto, Canada/Miami, FL): Lately my biggest admiration is for new digital artists who are really pushing the envelope when it comes to large scale immersive environments, like Refik Anadol and Marco Brambilla. The work they are doing is groundbreaking and inspirational.

Shelly Tolo (Tolo Events, President, Seattle, WA): Luly Yang is a fashion designer based in Seattle and she is very inspirational to our team. Natural elements inspire her elegant fashions, but she is also gracefully able to incorporate architecture into her fashion designs—which makes things exciting. We love to use the natural world and architecture for inspiration too, when given the opportunity. In the event world, we always love to see what David Stark is up to.

Teri Jakob (UPMC Pinnacle Foundation, Associate Director, Special Events, Harrisburg, PA): I admire Kristin Banta and her use of colors, textures, and mix of styles while incorporating feelings and personalities into her designs. The way she incorporates the natural into the settings she uses, blending the scenery of mountains into the floral. She has been a huge inspiration to me for so many years. There is something so tranquil and yet invigorating about her designs. They are intricate and delicate, yet bold. You can feel the personal touches flowing throughout.

I am so inspired by [Mary Crafts](#) and her team at Culinary Crafts in Utah. They leave me in awe constantly. Their blend of joy through hospitality, food, and passion for life resonates in the work they do. Listening to Mary's podcast or scrolling through their catering Instagram is sure to leave me smiling and uplifted. I had the opportunity to talk with Mary in Austin this spring at the [Catersource + The Special Event](#) conference and speaking with her immediately touched my soul. She left a cherished impression on me.

Which cultural works (films, magazines, etc.) do you pull from?

David Merrell: All movies, new and old. They are constant inspiration. *Architectural Digest*, *Dwell*, *Vogue*, *Restoration Hardware* and every other catalogue for architectural furniture I can get my hands on.

Jaclyn Watson: I pull inspiration from all sorts of cultural goodies! Films are a huge one for me—I just love diving into the visual storytelling and picking up on those little details that make a scene pop. I am also a sucker for all the wedding-planning movies!



Musician Billy Joel performs on stage during the 66th Annual Grammy Awards at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles. Photo by VALERIE MACON/AFP (Photo by VALERIE MACON/AFP via Getty Images)

Magazines are another go-to, especially for keeping up with the latest trends and getting a feel for what's hot right now in the wedding world. But honestly, I'm always on the lookout for anything that sparks my creative juices, whether it's a piece of art, a fashion spread, or even just a stroll through the city streets. Inspiration is everywhere; you just have to open your eyes and look!

Jordan Heller: Not surprisingly, I use a lot of Disney® films in my events. They run the gamut from cultural themes like *Coco* and *Mulan*, futuristic vibes from Tomorrowland™ to *Strange World*™, adventurous films based on rides like *Jungle Cruise*™ and romantic fairytales like *Beauty and the Beast*. Their engaging dining experiences and theme park lands have led to some of my favorite retro events with USO and Mid-Century tiki themes as well as events based on holidays from around the world like Dia de los Muertos and Lunar New Year.

Kawania Wooten: I draw a lot of inspiration from the interior designers I follow on social media. Also, reality competition shows, like Bravo's *Top Chef* and *Project Runway* and HGTV's *Rock the Block* inspire me to think creatively.

Keith Willard: I'm a huge sci fi fan! Imagining worlds that did not exist until someone created them, like new color combinations and lighting from red, orange, and blue suns to their clothing. When *Star Trek* first came out, everyone thought the flip phone was never going to happen. But because someone thought of it, it inspired someone else to design it, and even more, they figured out how to make it work.

Lenny Talarico, CSEP, CHE: Everything old can be new again. I watch many older films and musicals to see how sets were used to create these cinematically beautiful moments. Shows like *American in Paris*, *Gigi*, *My Fair Lady*, the set designers of those movies were extremely creative with how they used theatrical stage craft to transport viewers to the time and place of the movie.

I also follow popular award shows like the Tonys, Grammys, ACMA, and of course the Oscars, to gather inspiration that can be translated to corporate, social, and nonprofit events I work on.

Travel is a huge personal passion of mine. I collect photos from my trips of the most unusual things which I keep on my phone for ideas. Retail store windows are a huge driver

for me, as is restaurant architecture and design. Who doesn't love a great copy of *Architectural Digest*?

Melissa Brannon: The cultural works I use for inspiration are mainly artworks in the mediums of paint and sculpture. Living in a large city, I am surrounded by inspiration in the museums, architecture, and sculptures that I experience daily.

I designed a Wonka event that was incredibly fun yet challenging. The original movie was the inspiration. Designing the right pieces to create that puzzle was the challenge, but the result was spectacular.

Robin Selden: *Womenswear Daily*, *Vogue*, *Bon Appetit*, *Glamour*, *Fashion week*, *Cherry Bombe*, *Milk Street*, *Saveur*, *Food & Wine*, *Donna Hay*, *Plate*, and of course *Catersource*!

Samuele Gallorini: Movies, rock music, street art, artisanal crafts, Renaissance masterpieces.

Sarah Chianese: Film, art, music, and books have always sparked my creative inspiration. From film noir filmmakers such as John Huston to contemporary producers who have made visually stunning and intriguing scenery and wardrobes such as *Boardwalk Empire*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, and *The Queen's Gambit*, along with hundreds of others, there is no limit to sparked creative thought.

Fine artists from every culture inspire me, as do music and books. Reading books feverishly as a youngster has allowed me to be as creative as I am since I had nothing to rely upon other than the writer's words to create what I saw in my mind's eye.

Music from nearly every genre has also been a strong inspiration throughout my life. I have played instruments such as cello, French horn, piano, and percussion, each of which has always lent great visuals to my imagination, along with emotions, to create a beautiful palette to rely upon.



A block party designed by Jordan Heller's Suncoast Wedding and Event Leaders (SWEL). Photo courtesy Ying Photography

Sebastien Centner: I used to spend much more time watching films and buying design magazines (one of my favorites is still *Wallpaper Magazine* started by Canadian Tyler Brul ) but nowadays social media and the internet are where I find myself wandering around looking for inspiration. Although more so than any magazine, film, or online resource, my biggest inspirations come from my travels where I love to pick up ideas and make them my own.

Shelly Tolo: Certainly with corporate

and nonprofit events, our clients love a good theme. Currently our clients have us designing event themes around Wonka, Yellow Submarine, Supermarket, Vikings and Mystical Creatures (yes, quite a variety!). Once presented with a specific theme, we then search out cultural works for inspiration, whether it be a movie, going to a museum (or grocery store) for inspiration, or sometimes listening to the lyrics of music that support the theme.

Teri Jakob: I don't think I pull my



A Kristin Banta wedding design, this collection of greenery and bursting overgrown florals in lavender, purple, dusty rose cream, and aubergine carved out the central aisle that led to an overgrown mirrored chuppah structure, which disappeared under the wild ascending florals. Photo courtesy John and Joseph Photography

event design style from anyone in particular. Most events have their own look and feel. They have intention and purpose incorporated throughout in ways that aren't always obvious but unravel through the event. I admire artists of so many places, especially stage writers and designers like *How I Met Your Mother* and *Ted Lasso*, who incorporate messages and hidden easter eggs into the sets, who create messages they place into the work they do. It encourages people to think, pay attention, look for more, crave more. For example, small details such as providing aluminum can koozies as favors and reminder of the 14-ounce babies in our NICU, the same size of soda cans, who would benefit from the money raised from that beautiful day on the golf course. I am inspired by creators that put extra details and meaning into the stories they tell because these leave transformational impressions.

Is there anything specific you do when you have a lightbulb moment of inspiration?

David Merrell: I usually put the need or intention out to the universe and the solution usually comes in the most unexpected ways. It's mostly about freeing your mind, and not allowing the obsession of finding the answer to get in the way.

Jaclyn Watson: Watch out as I go on a tear when that lightbulb goes off! I generally write it down in one of my many notebooks.

Then, it's all about getting into that creative zone. I put on some tunes, usually the Eagles, and have a cup of tea or take a quick walk to let the inspiration flow. And, of course, I love bouncing ideas off my team or trusted colleagues. I also have full one-on-one conversations with myself!

It's amazing how a little brainstorming session can take a spark of inspiration and turn it into a full-blown wildfire of creativity! I get so excited when I am inspired, and many people have told me I am like the energizer bunny, as I must get the whole idea out at that very moment!

Jordan Heller: When I have a great event theme (turn to page 26 in the [Spring Issue of Special Events](#) (for more on themes), I always need to match it with the right venue. I don't want to cover over a space to make it unrecognizable. I want the venue and the event design to be in harmony. Sometimes the event theme comes from looking at the space. I must ask myself "what was the design inspiration for this area?" and "where else are those elements found in the world, throughout history, in pop culture?" If you answer those questions, you'll find a theme within.

Kawania Wooten: I make a point to capture the inspiration by writing it down right away. Whether it's in

Sometimes one piece of inventory can create a whole theme—a chair, a textile, a costume donned by a musician, and so much more. Creating cannot be done in a vacuum and it takes a whole team to complete a vision. — Jordan Heller

the pages of one of my Appointed notebooks, the Evernote app, or even on the back of an electrical bill, the location is inconsequential. What's important is preserving the spark of creativity before it slips from my memory.

Keith Willard: When there is an “Ah Ha” moment, I write it down! This happens a lot in the shower and early in the morning. I tend to wake up at 3:00 a.m. full of ideas. I quickly put it on the pad next to me and then go back to sleep. Same for the shower. There is always a pad and pen on the counter.

Lenny Talarico, CSEP, CHE: I take photos and fill my phone with written notes or weblinks when I see something that can be used for a project.

Melissa Brannon: I use the notes app in my phone when having light bulb moments. In these busy, overwhelming

times of social media, it is easy to lose your thoughts. We have all gone down the rabbit hole of Instagram.

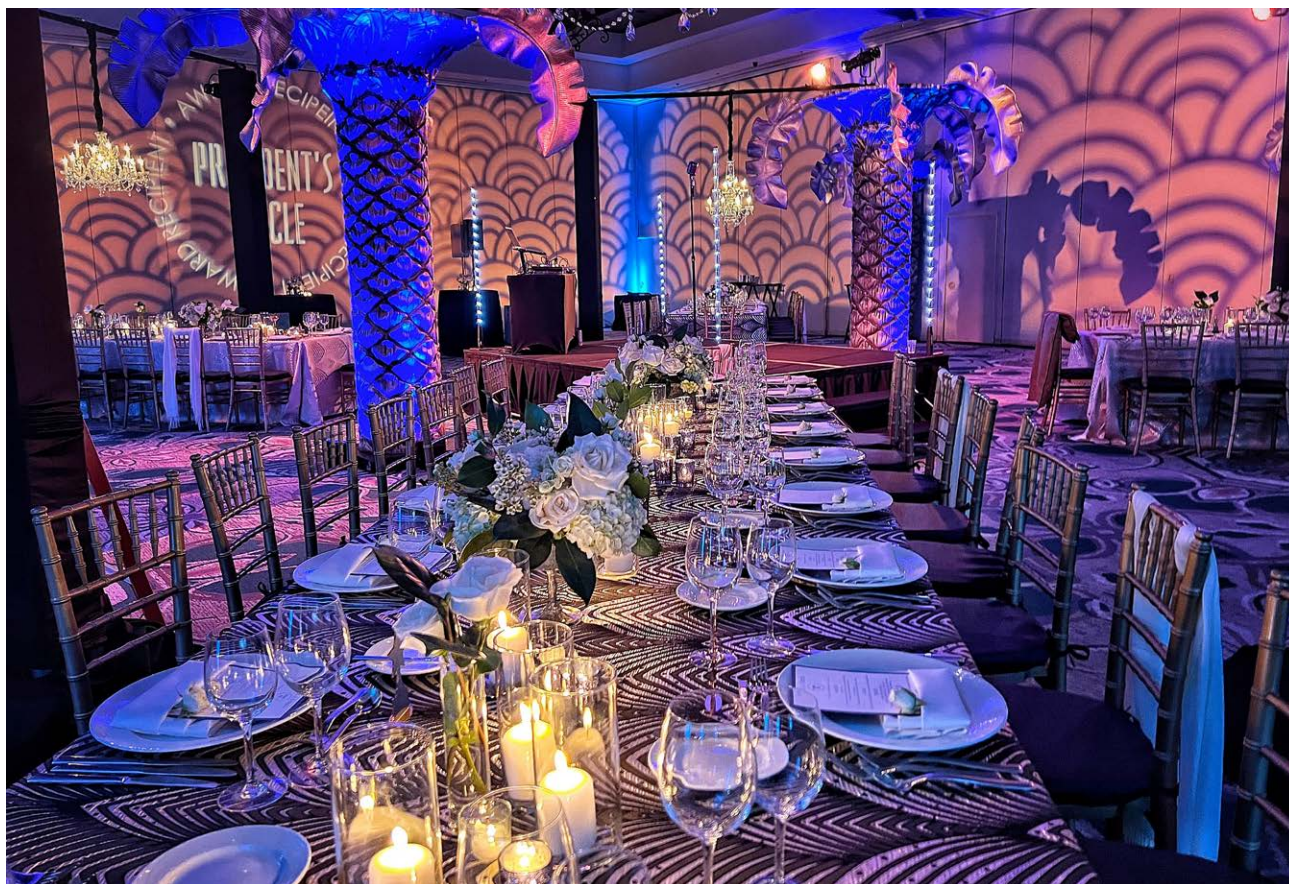
Robin Selden: I have a notebook and pen on my bedside table as I always wake up to great ideas and need to scribble them down so I won't forget them. These ideas often make their way into our R&D and many become new food and beverage concepts for us to use and sell.

Samuele Gallorini: I start drawing and taking detailed notes of the inspiration to make sure that I will be able to properly develop it when I will be back to my studio.

Sarah Chianese: If I can access my phone, and the inspiration is visual, I snap a photo. If it's a word, phrase, or concept I hear, I write it down or place the inspiration into my phone's notes app. If I don't have access to something to record the note, I attempt to make an association to



An Emerald Gemstone-inspired dinner room by David Merrell (AOO Events, Inc.), the 2024 Gala Award Designer of the Year.
Photo courtesy David Merrell



An elegant, luminous dinner room designed by David Merrell. Photo courtesy David Merrell

remember so that I can jot it down and capture the idea as soon as possible. If it's music, and I can access a recording method, I will record a snippet. If it's a feeling, most likely, I'll remember it forever. Then, to the drawing board, to place the bits together.

Sebastien Centner: Go headfirst into it. When I first started working on creating an immersive event venue in Toronto, I literally would go in on weekends and play with the system seeing what new things I could get it to do. This is typically my approach; when the lightbulb goes off, I need to get into it ASAP, and that generally leads me to get more and more passionate which drives my creativity.

Shelly Tolo: Lightbulb moments definitely happen! When you visualize an element that will make the design unique or provide a cool element for the guest experience, we typically meet as a team to work through the details to see if we can make it happen (within budget). When everything does come together, and you know it is what made the event—it's very exciting.

Teri Jakob: When I have a moment of inspiration, I think my brain literally lights up and glows on the inside. I just make notes: on Post-it® notes, my phone, on my

computer, the back of envelopes, anywhere. Lists, sketches, brainstorming galore! No idea is too big or too small when I get a streak of inspiration. I could stay up all night thinking of things. After I've journaled it, I'll take to the computer to create idea boards and digital drawings, create Pinterest boards and enter a wormhole of searching the interwebs for more ideas. That's when the magic starts to flow and take shape quickly for me. Sometimes it can all start from a word, phrase, color, or shape. Once I have it and a direction to go, it's like the floodgates open and I will be in a state of pure flow.

What do you do when you're in a creative rut or dry spell?

David Merrell: Of course I do get them. Everyone does. Many times, it is about clearing your mind. If your mind is heavy or weighed down, the ability to create is stifled. Clear your mind ... there are many ways to get there ... in that open space, new thoughts will fill it up.

Jaclyn Watson: When I hit a creative rut or dry spell, I don't panic—I pivot! First, I take a breather, maybe step away from my desk, and walk outside to clear my head.

Then, I dive into my treasure trove of inspiration—flipping through old mood boards, revisiting favorite films or magazines, or even just scrolling through Pinterest for a fresh perspective. Sometimes, a change of scenery does wonders, so I might hit up a local art show or grab coffee at a new café to shake things up. And if all else fails, I reach out to my fellow creatives for a good old-fashioned brainstorming session—two heads (or three or four!) are always better than one when it comes to reigniting that creative spark!

Jordan Heller: I turn to my creative partners when I cannot come up with something new. Sometimes one piece of inventory can create a whole theme—a chair, a textile, a costume donned by a musician, and so much more. Creating cannot be done in a vacuum and it takes a whole team to complete a vision.

Kawania Wooten: When I find myself stuck in a creative rut, it's usually a sign that exhaustion, stress, or overthinking has taken its toll. To break free, I block a few afternoon hours in my schedule, turn my phone on “do not disturb,” and allow myself the opportunity to unwind with

some salty snacks paired with a few large glasses of a robust, bold cabernet or a super Tuscan. Without fail, this simple ritual awakens my creativity and rekindles my inspiration.

Keith Willard: I have a spaghetti session! This is something I do with all my clients. The ground rules are that there are no rules. Get rid of the idea of costs, availability, time constraints, etc. Then we start small ... usually I focus on decor and then build that out to enhancements like menus, place cards, door hangers and so on. I then work on what would be amazing for someone to experience when they arrive to check in to the hotel or arrive for the wedding. Experiences are thrown in there, crazy locations, games, transportation... it gets pretty crazy. I then take all those ideas and filter them down to those the couple really likes. The process continues until we have three or four amazing unique moments that are specific to this wedding.

For me personally, I like to get together with other professionals and do the “I wish” game. I wish that there was a projector that could mimic being in the Caribbean ... the smell of salt water, the wind, the light. Or I wish that there was a device that allowed me to know where everyone in the



A tablescape from a butterfly/spring-inspired wedding by Jaclyn Watson (Jaclyn Watson Events). Photo courtesy Andy Madea Photo



A central dance floor with a Belgian rug inspired print, which reflected the entry rugs from the estate and all the invite graphics. The stage facade in peacock blue matched the stage backslash, also adorned with brushed gold LED lit frames and flanked by trees. Design by Kristin Banta (Kristin Banta Events). Photo courtesy John and Joseph Photography

wedding party was at any moment. That then leads to the "you know what I just saw?" moments.

So in a nutshell of what I do when I'm in a creative rut: I change my location or change who I am talking to or call a friend that I haven't spoken to in ages. I let my brain relax and focus on something else.

Lenny Talarico, CSEP, CHE: I scroll some of my favorite industry colleagues' work to help ignite the spark. ATOMIC Design is a gold mine for creative scalable solutions to incorporate into an event. I love the furniture companies who offer unique products; Revelry, Luxe Events, and of course Modern Event Furnishings.

Melissa Brannon: Work through it. Give it time. Don't become frustrated. Meditate to clear the mind.

Robin Selden: Step away from the project immediately. Move on to something else and come back to it when I've been recentered and re-energized.

Samuele Gallorini: I visit local markets, artisanal and antique shops, watch movies, and walk in the nature that surrounds my house.

Sarah Chianese: I have never found myself in a creative rut or dry spell; instead, I am sometimes overwhelmed by the plethora of ideas that race through my mind, so it is editing I struggle with more. For my colleagues who have asked me what to do when they are in a dry spell, I suggest they travel. If they can't travel in person, the fortunate thing about this age is the world is at our fingertips between our computers, social media, and industry magazines.

Sebastien Centner: Great question. Day to day it's hard to just "turn on" your creative thinking since there are so many menial tasks to get done, and distractions, so I like to carve out some "alone time" where I can just sit with whatever creative project I am working on and follow a bunch of different thought paths to see where they lead.

Shelly Tolo: I try to be patient as I know something will eventually inspire me. Sometimes it just takes scanning through page after page of Google images, as I might find just one small image that piques my interest to get back on the right track for what I'm designing.

Teri Jakob: I will usually focus on a different area and not try to force things. If I concentrate on the other details, by being curious and open, something will trigger for me. I also talk to my industry friends. I don't know what I'd do without them. Creative people understand each other like no one else. Conversations with those involved or reading about the project are also often helpful. I work with fundraising events, and I find it important to tie my program theme to the purpose and mission. Sometimes it's a creative play on words or something that brings meaning

to what we are doing. One year, during planning the annual Tea for Mammograms, I was stumped for a fresh idea. While researching the technology, I learned that when doing a self-breast exam, a person could feel a lump the size of one centimeter, but the new machines could detect a lump as small as one millimeter, or the size of a small lemon seed! Well, that did it: "When Life Gives You Lemons, Make Pink Lemonade!"

What do you wish all event designers knew about staying inspired in this industry?

David Merrell: If you are truly a designer ... a creative ... you can never stop learning. AND you can never close your mind off to anything. Shutting off new experiences, new possibilities, and new perspective views is a certain path to making yourself irrelevant.

Jaclyn Watson: What I wish all event designers knew about staying inspired in this industry is that it's all about finding your unique source of inspiration and embracing it wholeheartedly. Don't be afraid to think outside the box and explore different avenues of creativity. Keep your eyes open to the world around you—there's inspiration hiding in every corner, from the way light filters through the trees to the texture of a fabric. Staying inspired is as much about nurturing your passion as it is about honing your craft. I always want to stay curious, open-minded, and above all, stay true to my creative vision. There is an abundance of us in this industry and it pays off to be uniquely you!

Jordan Heller: You can pull design ideas from almost anything. A can of sparkling water on your desk can give you a color palette. The TV show you binge each night can give you a time period. A client's favorite food can be used to build a whole vibe. You can use what's hot in pop culture right now like *Barbie*, *Palm Royale*, and *Bridgerton*, but you have to find a way to put your spin on it and make it your own!

Kawania Wooten: When it comes to event design and orchestration, our role is to lead and ignite our clients' imaginations. While they may provide inspiration through carefully curated Pinterest boards, it's our responsibility to not only listen to their preferences but also to surpass their expectations with design concepts that are both innovative and well, superior to their Pinterest boards.

Also, make it a habit to silence the noise of your competitors on social media—mute them or unfollow them. Direct your attention toward creatives in diverse fields. For instance, as an event designer, seek inspiration from interior designers, pastry chefs, dress designers, and fine artists. By doing so, you'll cultivate a unique perspective that steers clear of replicating your competition's ideas.

Keep your eyes open to the world around you—there's inspiration hiding in every corner, from the way light filters through the trees to the texture of a fabric. Staying inspired is as much about nurturing your passion as it is about honing your craft. — Jaclyn Watson

Keith Willard: I don't think I wish for knowledge for designers in staying inspired. I wish for joy. I wish for event designers to remember that this is about a celebration or inspiration, and how amazing that our job is to create events that bring smiles, love, a sense of community, and/or new experiences. It is so easy to get jaded in this profession. There is always a budget, there are always naysayers, but I find that because I am so passionate about what I do, so excited, that it becomes infectious. There have been so many instances of working with a committee focused on "that's what we have always done," to "what can we do differently?!" I have the best job ever. I get to create moments that people will remember. In weddings, this will be one of the best days of a client's life. For my corporate clients, being able to have true pride in the event is important.

Lenny Talarico, CSEP, CHE: Focus on the objectives of the actual event and the functionality of how products need to work both for the event and logistically to make it all come together. By focusing on how guests interact in an event setting and what works to make the experience enjoyable, you'll become a better event designer. That doesn't happen behind a computer screen creating a rendering; it happens by observing real live event experiences.

Melissa Brannon: Human connection, conversation, and sharing of thoughts and ideas is how we all thrive. Brainstorming is not done alone. Share your ideas, seek others' opinions, and collaborate. Travel, seek new experiences, and ask questions. Life is huge. As event designers, we are lucky to be in the "make people happy business."

Robin Selden: As I am coming from a culinary design perspective, I wish that others would allow themselves to embrace their ideas and get out of their own way. We all have moments of doubt and insecurities and the only way to break from that is to just go for it. Not every idea will be a winner and in fact some will even be failures, but to get to the greatness you need to learn from these moments. Some of our best and most creative ideas for food and food design have come from an idea that we initially conceived as being a crazy or silly, but once we took the time to finesse them, we found amazing new ways to present or reinvent something.

Samuele Gallorini: You should be brave and open minded, there are no boundaries to infusing beauty into

wedding design projects.

Sarah Chianese: Look around you rather than merely whiz by life. Moments of inspiration may come to you in unexpected places or scenarios. The other day, I saw a double white teardrop flower, and an entire image formed like a magical script in my mind's eye. A child blowing bubbles in a park may hit the sun and background foliage so that you're suddenly transported into your imagination, which forms the vision of an event you may have been struggling with. Remain open, offer attention to your surroundings, scents, sounds, and textures, and let the full spectrum of your senses render your creations.

Sebastien Centner: It's our creativity that will raise the industry so we can never stop pushing the boundaries. It's not only our job, but it's our responsibility to those who will come after us, to lead and teach, to collaborate and share, so our industry continues to grow and evolve long after we are gone!

Shelly Tolo: When we have potential clients who want a quick turnaround of a design proposal, I often think to myself, "it's really hard to vomit creativity." We can turn around proposals quickly, but if you want to present something exceptional, you must explain that you need time. My advice to event designers isn't about staying inspired; my advice is to give yourself enough time to be inspired.

Teri Jakob: Be open to stepping outside the box, try new things. Every event doesn't have to look the same or be in a ballroom. Those are beautiful locations and perfect for many parties. Some of my favorite events have occurred in an old Texaco airplane hangar or a hospital parking lots-turned -antique circus. Your imagination can transport you and your guests into magical destinations. Don't be afraid to call an industry friend for advice. Share your challenges and new discoveries. No one will ever be able to do it like you, but by sharing our thoughts together we can learn and inspire each other to do more than we ever could alone.

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The highlight of the evening was the Crowning Ceremony, paralleling the ceremony taking place in the UK.



The Royal Monarch's jeweled crown, scepter, and sword were theme props that elevated the Coronation to the next level.



California Charles' wife wore a wig to look like Queen Camilla.

CONF



Crowning Accomplish

Gala Award-receiving event was a regal affair

By Amanda Nicklaus

All photos courtesy Curtis Dahl Photography



The birthday Coronation Ceremony took place on a stage set with a throne.

Born in 1953? Check.

Both achieving a milestone event in 2023? Check.

Both named Charles? Check and check.

The last Royal Coronation took place 70 years ago, and when King Charles III was coronated last year, a different Charles—of Sherman Oaks, Calif.—turned 70 and decided to use the parallels between himself and the new King of England to his advantage.

High Rise Events was approached to create a coronation-themed birthday party for this Charles, whose mother apparently said that if that name was good enough for the future King, then it would be good enough for her son.

Held on the day of the actual King Charles' Coronation, the birthday Coronation in California mimicked the British Royal event, transforming the client's modest home into the grandeur of Westminster Abbey, announcing the event with an old-timey scroll, welcoming costumed guests with a red carpet, sating them with a British gourmet dinner and English teas, and honoring the birthday boy with a crowning ceremony.

There were challenges in transforming the client's home into a grand affair for 100 guests, but High Rise Events worked their magic to create a palatial setting. The entrance set the scene as the narrow driveway was covered in a plush red carpet lined with gold stanchions swagged with crimson cords, where two Kings' Guardsmen saluted incoming guests. The gates and fencing along the driveway were covered with custom Royal Coronation Banners featuring a Coat of Arms emblem encrusted with the client's headshot. Meanwhile, a 20' x 10' custom backdrop of Westminster Abbey was designed to camouflage the detached garage, which became the focal point for the Coronation Celebration.

Then there was the matter of transforming the small yard into a Royal Garden. The Gardens needed to set the



King Charles handed out crown chocolates to departing guests as a memento from this iconic celebration.

CONFETTI



Above: Guardsmen greeted and saluted arriving “noble” guests as they held up the scrolled invitation, which was a formal scroll with Royal verbiage and gold tassels. The invitations were delivered in decorated tubes, and guests were asked to respond using a Noble Royal Title and dress in Coronation attire.

Top right: The gated entrance into the Royal Gardens revealed the regal setting for the Coronation.

Bottom right: High Rise Events created a Westminster Abbey custom backdrop to conceal the garage and act as a theme background for the event.





scene for the Crowning of the King and accommodate formal seating for 100 guests. Every inch of the space was plotted out so that when it was “Coronation Time,” the client (California Charles) could reign over the soiree. The Royal Garden yard space was also the setting for showcasing the pre-recorded actual Royal Coronation on a large monitor throughout the evening.

The dining portion of the evening was certainly a royal affair. The Guardsmen stood at attention, inviting guests to take their seats at an opulent dining table, dressed in crimson and gold satin linen. Gold candelabras, chalices, gilded crowns, jewels, and candlelight embellished the tabletops while Tivoli lights sparkled overhead.

The highlight of the event was the Coronation Ceremony. An ornate vintage throne stood upon a Royal Stage adorned with a jewel-encrusted crown, scepter, and sword, which rested upon a velvet tableau. Above the throne was a lighted marquee signifying The Coronation of (California) King Charles.

Just to play out the parallels as much as possible, the client’s wife sat on an adjacent throne, sporting a Camilla wig. The client also honored his mother’s legacy with a stand-up silhouette of “The Queen,” recreated with a photo of his mother’s face, in a nod to the British Coronation honoring the memory of the recently departed Queen Elizabeth II.

The King handed out crown-shaped chocolates to guests as they departed this royal celebration. This memorable affair not only left a royal impression on guests—it received the honor of the Special Events Gala Award for Best Private Event for an Individual. Congratulations High Rise Events. ●

Submissions Now Open

It's once again time to celebrate the best of the best!

Submissions are now being accepted for the Special Events 2025 Gala Awards! We invite you to submit your best work from the past year. Join in the excitement and the spirit of our industry as we celebrate the hard work and exceptional accomplishments of our peers.

To submit an entry to this year's Gala awards, please visit our awards portal at <https://ace-gala.awardsplatform.com/>

Important Dates

• **September 1, 2023-August 31, 2024** |

Eligibility Period for Entries

• **Sunday, September 15, 2024** |

Regular submission deadline (\$125 fee)

• **Tuesday, September 30, 2024** |

Late Bird submission deadline (\$175 fee)

POP GIRL SUMMER:

Art Inspires &

Lean into the vibes from chart-topping musicians for new event inspiration

By Miro Diamanté, DMCP

Show of hands, anyone else obsessed with the way our favorite pop girlies have kept us well fed in 2024? As a self-identifying queer Latinx individual, I know all too well (get it?) how dynamic acceptance truly is, and we are often on the search for solace and understanding. For me, music has always been a safe space and a welcomed reprieve from the noise and negativity of both our personal and professional lives.

Fortunately for us, the music world has been abuzz with groundbreaking releases

from some of the most influential current female music artists of our time. Ariana Grande's ethereal (and my personal favorite) *Eternal Sunshine*, Taylor Swift's poetic double album surprise, and Beyoncé's culture-shifting and genre-redefining *Cowboy Carter* have all left an indelible mark on both the music industry and me as a person and designer. These artists offer a wealth of inspiration that I find have helped in transforming and elevating the special events industry. Here's how their art can inspire, heal, and shape how we work.

Ariana Grande at the 62nd Annual GRAMMY Awards at STAPLES Center on January 26, 2020 in Los Angeles, California. Photo courtesy Frazer Harrison/Getty Images for The Recording Academy

Experiences



1. *Ariana Grande:* *Embracing ethereal elegance*

I'm still not well from this album, and don't think I truly ever will be. However, Ariana Grande's *Eternal Sunshine* is a true testament to ethereal beauty and emotional depth. From me yelling "boy bye," to cry dancing to "We Can't Be Friends," the album's dreamy, introspective soundscapes have inspired me to sit back, relax, and breathe, which has directly translated into my designing through surprising avenues (trust me).

- **Soft, ambient lighting:** Use gentle warm light to create a calming atmosphere to help find your "eternal sunshine."
- **Intimate spaces:** Design areas that promote personal reflection and connection, akin to Grande's introspective lyrics.
- **Sensory experiences:** It's all about Zen. Integrate soothing sounds and fragrances that transport guests to a state of ease and calm.

Grande's ability to channel personal healing into her music serves as a reminder of the power of vulnerability and authenticity in our work. While my personal nature is to go big and bold, that doesn't necessarily hold true for many folks, especially those who are neurodivergent. Pay special attention to [developing experiences](#) that can cater to a diverse audience.

*By drawing from
[musicians'] artistry,
special event
professionals can
infuse their work
with new energy and
vision.*



Ariana Grande performs onstage during The 2024 Met Gala Celebrating "Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion" at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo courtesy Kevin Mazur/MG24/Getty Images for The Met Museum/Vogue



Ariana Grande's ability to channel personal healing into her music serves as a reminder of the power of vulnerability and authenticity in our work. Photo by Kevin Mazur/MG24/Getty Images for The Met Museum/Vogue

2. *Taylor Swift: Storytelling through structure*

I know, I know, another article about Taylor Swift, groundbreaking. But hear me out, take out her personal life and just examine her business prowess and you'll be quite surprised at just how great a salesperson she is. Taylor Swift's surprise double album not only showcases her evolution as a songwriter, but she completely flipped the script on the structure of songwriting and is experimenting with poetic lyrics and narrative complexity that challenged both the listener and her as the creator. Event planners can draw from Swift's ability to embrace change.

- **Thematic depth:** Develop rich, layered themes that unfold throughout the event, much like a (love) story.
- **Personalization:** Create personalized experiences for guests, making them feel like integral parts of the narrative.
- **Creative challenges:** Encourage your team to break free from conventional planning structures, exploring new formats and ideas, even if just for a "fortnight."

Swift's approach reminds us that challenging the status quo and embracing innovation can lead to profound and memorable experiences.



Taylor Swift's approach reminds us that challenging the status quo and embracing innovation can lead to profound and memorable experiences. Photo by Kevin Mazur/TAS24/Getty Images for TAS Rights Management

Taylor
"Taylor"
Franc
Image

Swift performs onstage during night four of
The Eras Tour at La Defense in Paris,
France. Photo courtesy Kevin Mazur/TAS24/Getty
Images for TAS Rights Management



3. *Beyoncé*: Shifting culture and celebrating heritage

I mean, need I say more? Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter* is a cultural tour de force, period. I can say with 100% certainty that a Beyoncé and Post Malone collaboration was not on my 2024 Bingo card, or that my catchphrase would now be, "This ain't Texas!" Blending historical references with contemporary sounds, she celebrates Black heritage and identity in a way that resonates deeply with diverse audiences. Despite facing criticism from some in the country music scene, Beyoncé expertly navigated this by collaborating with industry titans like Dolly Parton and Willie Nelson, while also tapping into the talents of newer POC country artists. Event professionals can draw inspiration from this approach by:

- **Cultural inclusivity:** Design events that celebrate and respect diverse cultures and histories. Empower those communities to have a presence at your event, sharing their culture in a celebratory and prominent way. Don't believe me? The icon Linda Martell says it best on the track "The Linda Martell Show" that "this particular tune stretches across a range of genres, and that's what makes it a unique and listening experience."
- **Intergenerational collaboration:** Develop a team of planners (or the real dreaded "C" word: "committee") that includes both seasoned professionals and emerging talents. This blend of experience and fresh perspectives can lead to innovative and immersive event experiences.
- **Bold statements:** "Jolene" isn't the only one called out by Bey. Don't shy away from making powerful yet respectful statements through your event's design and programming. Use bold themes, messages, and visuals to make your event memorable and impactful.

Beyoncé's work encourages us to use our platforms to elevate voices, celebrate heritage, and make meaningful cultural contributions. By incorporating these elements, and fostering intergenerational collaboration, event professionals can create experiences that are not only entertaining but also culturally enriching and socially significant.



Beyoncé accepts the Innovator Award from Stevie Wonder onstage during the 2024 iHeartRadio Music Awards at Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles, California. Photo courtesy Kevin Winter/Getty Images for iHeartRadio

iHEART RADIO INNOVATOR

The recent releases from Ariana Grande, Taylor Swift, and Beyoncé are more than just albums—they are blueprints for inspiration, healing, and innovation. By drawing from their artistry, special event professionals can infuse their work with new energy and vision. Whether it's through ethereal elegance, narrative depth, cultural celebration, or genre-defying creativity, these artists provide a wealth of inspiration to elevate the events we create. Let their music be the soundtrack to your next extraordinary event, shaping it in ways that resonate deeply and linger long after the final note. ●



In 2017, **Miro Diamanté** joined the Accent team and has been showcasing his creative talents ever since. He is known for his attention to detail and has helped curate many award-winning events. In addition to his work in the industry, Miro also juggles performing regularly as his alter-ego Neon, the "sparkling diamond of Indianapolis" drag queen. When not dreaming of table linens or performing drag, you can find Miro walking his sweet dog, Lilly, cleaning up after his mischievous cat, Gerald, or seeking fun in the sun. Miro is an avid reality TV competition show connoisseur and can recite song lyrics for any social situation. He also regularly volunteers and fundraises for local LGBTQIA+ organizations that specialize in helping youth and transgender individuals have access to healthcare, safe housing and financial assistance, and promoted DEI initiatives to not only special events, but communities as a whole.



STEAL THIS



'90s-style personalized CDs | 24 Carrots Catering & Events | Photo courtesy Villa Visuals



Beverage kits for superhero-themed nonprofit event | Butler's Pantry | Photo courtesy Butler's Pantry



(Top and above) DIY BBQ spice jar blend | Eatertainment | Photo courtesy Bruce Gibson Photography

Say, “Thank You”

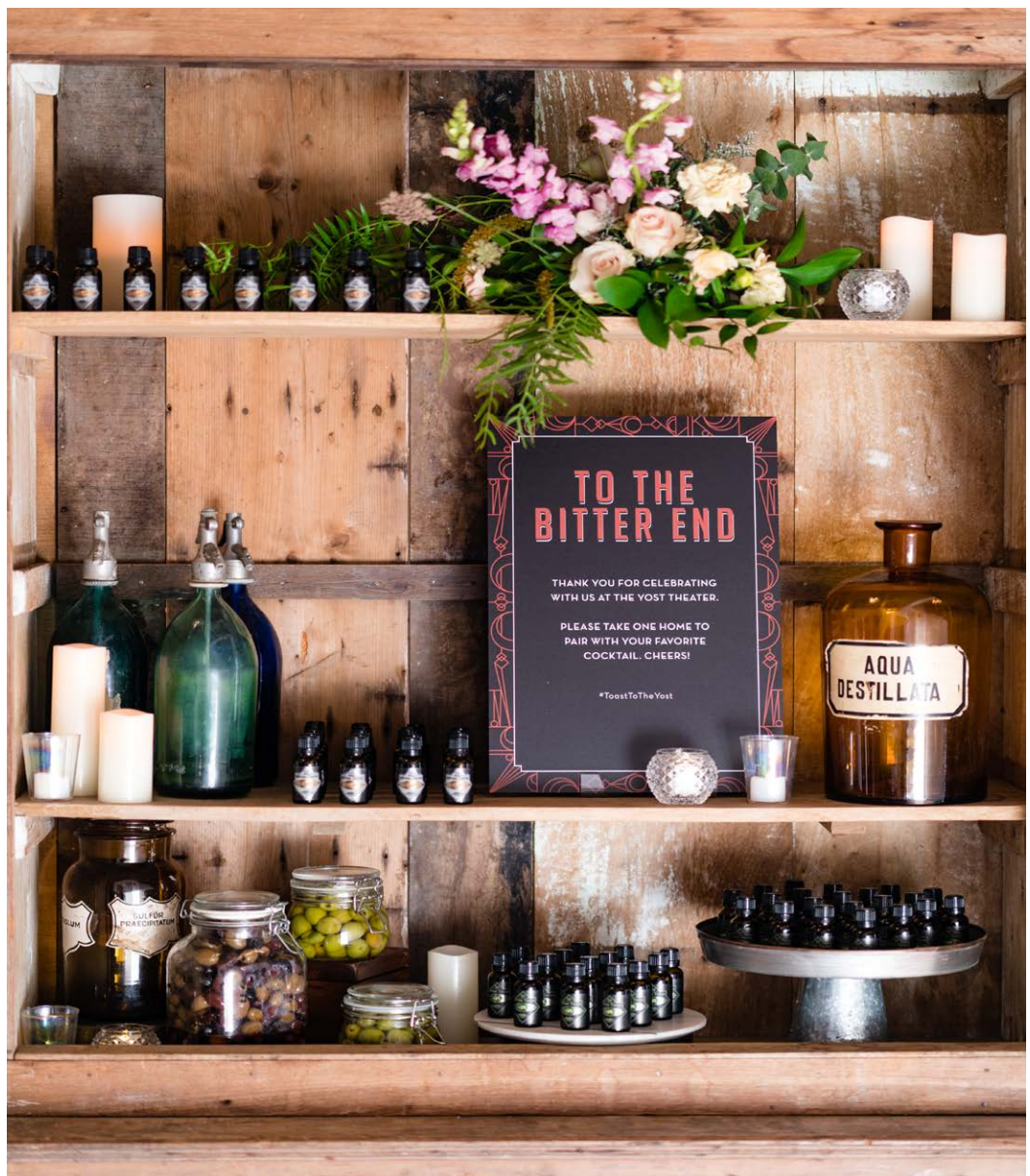
In the age of increased sustainability and novelty, when every aspect of an event must be original and photo-worthy, party favors may seem like a waste. After all, you don’t want the gift to end up in the landfill after the event ends.

In a Q&A on Instagram a few months ago, Marcy Blum (Marcy Blum Events) was asked by a follower if wedding guests still care about favors and whether people still do them. Her response: “Only if they’re thoughtful, clever, or edible.”

Don’t let party favors be an afterthought; use them to show off your creativity and define your expertise. When done well, they can live long past the event, even if only in a vivid memory. Here are some unique party favors that will impress your guests and make you stand out from the crowd. ● —Amanda Nicklaus



Events & Catering | Photo courtesy



Customized cocktail bitters | 24 Carrots Catering & Events | Photo courtesy Villa Visuals



STEAL THIS



Miniature strawberry shortbread cakes for chic summer baby shower | Bellwether Events | Photo courtesy Deb Lindsey Photography



Personalized candles for wedding | Jaclyn



Personalized teabags | Jaclyn Watson Eve



Hongbao, a Chinese traditional gift of coins in a red envelope or box meant to represent good fortune and ward off evil spirits | Colton Simmons Photography | Photo courtesy Colton Simmons Photography





Jaclyn Watson Events | Photo courtesy Bethalee Photography



Custom art kit | Momental Designs | Photo courtesy Danielle Coons Photography



Jaclyn Watson Events | Photo courtesy Andy Madea Photography



Local maple syrup for Vermont wedding | Jaclyn Watson Events | Photo courtesy Rodeo & Co



Blankets | Jaclyn Watson Events
| Photo courtesy Michael Tallman
Photography



Whistle Pig whiskey, maple syrup, and locally baked cookies | Jaclyn Watson Events | Photo courtesy JAG Studios

●●●
STEAL THIS



Decorated caramel apple
 | Eatertainment Events & Catering
 | Photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering



Monogrammed sugar cookie |
 Eatertainment Events & Catering
 | Photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering



A small jar of chimichurri | North Pond Restaurant |
 Photo courtesy Special Events staff



French macarons | Jaclyn Watson Events | Photo courtesy Andy Madea Photography



Artisan jam | Jaclyn Watson Events
| Photo courtesy Andy Madea
Photography



Staying focused on what you're good at is the best way to avoid those toxic feelings that bring us down.

Finding My Flow

By Bobby Dutton

“Flow State” is that feeling you get when you're doing what you were born to do. You're fully in the moment; you're hyper-focused, and everything else fades away. You're thriving.

It can happen when you're feeling highly skilled and highly challenged at the same time.

The place where I regularly experience Flow State is in an airplane cockpit. Flying, to me, is the epitome of total freedom, achieved through a deep and hard-earned confluence of skills and knowledge.

But how can Flow State benefit us on the ground?

In the events industry, most of us experience stress more than we experience flow. And then—if we're lucky—we get a break. We shut down, disconnect, recharge, and then dive back in.

This cycle can be sustainable; and for many of us, it's our reality—but it will never get us into Flow State. Instead, we crave relaxation to offset anxiety, and as we alternate between them, we run into other toxic feelings like worry, apathy, and boredom.

How do we avoid those feelings, and intentionally pursue the good stuff? This is the question that led me to a professional revolution: How could I make work feel more like airplane flying?

In 2020, I became a licensed commercial pilot, flight instructor, and advanced ground instructor. However, I wanted to bring the Flow State I felt as a pilot into my life on the ground. I wanted to feel the way pilots sound when they make announcements: relaxed, cool, focused ... badass.

And when you think about it, that cliché pilot persona makes total sense: during a routine flight, they're relaxed and in control; they're highly skilled but not particularly challenged—and that's probably a good thing for the passengers. When challenges do arise, pilots shift into that magical mind space: Flow State. They tackle problems that they know

how to solve, and they get us back on track and safely to our destination.

Aviation is an extremely specialized field—less than 0.1% of people are licensed pilots—and this specialization is the key. Staying focused on what you're good at is the best way to avoid those toxic feelings that bring us down.

This is what made my events business ... *wait for it* ... take off.

As a company, we needed to be extremely clear about what we were good at. We needed to be specific about our mission and market. We needed to illustrate our expertise and tell the world.

We needed to define our lane and stay in it at all costs.

In an industry where broad versatility has always seemed so common, this felt backward, but I've found that it's essential. Rather than being a jack of all trades, we needed to be a virtuoso.

Once our specialty was established, we began to elevate it. We began to stand out among our peers. When we needed to incorporate products or services from other lanes, we learned to look for specialists there, too.

Our best events happen when we have all the right people and organizations, each empowered to focus on what they are *great* at, intentionally combined to create something legendary.

My daily life transformed, too. It became clear which tasks were pulling me into Flow State, and which were pushing me from it. The negative tasks were things I had always done by necessity, even though I wasn't particularly drawn to them (taxes, administrative work, etc.). Those still need to get done of course, but I started to look for ways to get them off my plate—and onto the plate of someone who was *born* to focus on that stuff!

The focus started to happen more regularly. The anxiety started to fall away. The business got stronger. The team got happier.

I found my flow. ●

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Behind the Cover

Congratulations to **24 Carrots Catering & Events** who took home the ACE award for Catered Fundraising Event of the Year for their event *Come One, Come All* during the 2024 Awards Ceremony this past February. Submissions are now being accepted for this year's awards at ace-gala.awardsplatform.com. Shown: Pretzel bites with smoked gouda fondue, and Everything Spice. Photo courtesy Amelia Lyon Photo



Goodbye & Hello

As you read this issue, I want you to pay close attention to the design. Not that the words aren't important of course. But this time, please also really look at the design of each article. Look at the beautiful opening layout on pages 76-77. Enjoy how readable the copy within

the recipe box is on page 17. And my goodness—that cover! See how that typography curves around the edge of that serving palette? That's all thanks to our very talented art director, Sharon Carlson.

This month—and it is with great regret as I write this—we must bid farewell to Sharon, who has guided *Catersource* magazine to its greatest iteration the past four years. Sharon took over the design of this magazine in 2020 and it has been a joy to collaborate with her. No shade on the designers that came before her because I really loved what's his name from up north, but Sharon elevated our magazine to new heights, with 95% patience and only 5% frustration along the years.

She moves to another division of our company, and I am supremely jealous that they now will have use of her dazzling talent, while we will not. Sharon, on behalf of the entire *Catersource* magazine team, we will miss you dearly.

But—with the departure of Sharon, I can also announce that there are also exciting things afoot with *Catersource* magazine. A new designer will be taking over our fall issue and with that, an innovative format will come into play as well. Instead of the “flipbook” format you have come to know, we will replace it with a cool “digizine” format—allowing greater readability, the capability to embed videos within, heck, I can even stop typing up these editor notes if I want to and speak them (while on camera) instead. (Note: only under extreme duress will I consider that ... I like speaking with my fingers way too much and applying makeup skillfully too little.) We are excited for this improvement in the quality and readability of our publication—watch for it in September 2024!

Make this summer count, my friends! Enjoy this final flipbook-style issue of *Catersource* and (also) keep your eyes peeled for opening day of registration for [Catersource + The Special Event 2025](#)—coming soon!

Cheers!

Kathleen Stoehr, Director of Community & Content Strategy



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By being a grill and a griddle, a smoker and a fire pit, Gather Grills takes ancestral inspiration and adds a modern twist. The rotating grill table makes it easy to use and simple to serve. The folding, removable shelves offer functionality to the cook for holding ingredients and tools as well as being a 'round the grill table for up to eight guests. After dining at the grill, convert it to a fire pit by removing the grates and adding fire wood. The rest of the night is yours to kick back and enjoy each other's company.



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Summer 2024 CONTRIBUTORS



Executive **Anthony Lambatos** explores how to ensure your values and mission “stick” with your employees



Chef **Robin Selden** discusses why taking your team to Catersource + The Special Event is a recipe for success



Sales expert **Meryl Snow** defines several effective negotiation strategies that will help close sales



Chef **Keith Sarasin** shares how chefs can leverage the power of social media to serve and inspire

What do you think of this issue? Like it? Love it? Have something to contribute to our website? We'd love to hear from you. Write us at editor@catersource.com.

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Love on the Menu:

Celebrating 2024's most delectable wedding celebrations

In the realm of wedding celebrations, few events capture the essence of culinary artistry and cultural fusion quite like the 2024 ICA CATIE Awards finalists! **Culinary Crafts** with their “Restaurant Rustica” and **Blue Plate’s** unforgettable event for David and Omar at Chicago’s Field Museum not only demonstrated exceptional culinary artistry but also highlighted the seamless integration of cultural influences, creating unforgettable experiences for all in attendance.

Ready for a behind-the-scenes look at these two spectacular celebrations of love and life?

WINNER: Culinary Crafts, “Restaurant Rustica”

Culinary Crafts demonstrated an exceptional ability to blend Italian heritage with an American twist, creating a

dining experience that was both elevated and intimate that they dubbed “Restaurant Rustica” for this multicultural couple’s foodie-centric fete.

The vision

The journey toward crafting this remarkable wedding feast began a year prior to the event, as a food-loving couple approached the Culinary Crafts team with a vision. They sought to blend their Mediterranean roots with their American upbringing, aiming for a dining experience that reflected their shared heritage while exuding elegance and familiarity.

The couple envisioned a celebration akin to a tasting menu at their favorite restaurant, combining American favorites with Old World specialties. They desired a menu that would tantalize the taste buds and evoke a sense of home for all their guests, whether Italian or American.



Culinary Crafts took home the 2024 CATIE Award for Best Catered Wedding. Photo courtesy Culinary Crafts



Restaurant Rustica. Photo courtesy Culinary Crafts

The menu

Culinary Crafts rose to the occasion, curating a menu that celebrated the best of both worlds.

The cocktail hour teased guests with Mediterranean aromas and a selection of signature cocktails while butler-passed hors d'oeuvres and an elevated charcuterie station set the stage for the culinary journey ahead.

Favorites included:

- *Classic fried squash blossoms in light beer batter
- *Roasted beet arancini with habanero apricot glaze
- *Pan-seared scallops glazed with almond caper butter
- *Savory parmesan macarons with lemon thyme gelato and candied sage

The reception dinner showcased a three-course feast, with plated citrus-focused salads and handmade black truffle and ricotta malfatti leading the way.

For the main course, the couple opted for family-style service, with entrée boards featuring:

- *Roasted half chicken with lemon preserves, Castelvetro olives, and chimichurri
- *Lemon and rosemary stuffed full branzino fish with caper butter and a sun-dried tomato, artichoke, and Kalamata olive relish, cooked in wood-fired pizza ovens
- *Grilled asparagus with olive oil, fresh lemon, and black garlic panko
- *Blistered on-the-vine cherry tomatoes

After dinner, desserts included homemade gelato with gourmet fixings, fresh churro bites with dulce de leche, chocolate, or raspberry coulis, and bacon bourbon popcorn in bamboo cones.

The challenges

Despite the seamless execution of the event, Culinary Crafts faced its fair share of challenges. From sourcing specialty wines to navigating the logistics of serving whole roasted fish and chicken, every aspect of the event required meticulous planning and attention to detail.

The execution

What truly set this event apart was Culinary Crafts' commitment to refinement and authenticity. The couple, true foodies at heart, collaborated closely with the culinary team, refining recipes and ensuring that each dish reflected their favorite flavors and dining experiences.



Guests enjoyed a tasting-style menu. Photo courtesy Culinary Crafts

Moreover, the decision to incorporate both plated and family-style service added a dynamic touch to the dining experience. By blending elements of restaurant dining with the warmth of a family meal, the company succeeded in creating an atmosphere that was simultaneously upscale, inviting, and engaging.

Perhaps one of the trickiest but most impressive features was the couple's vision of a Mediterranean open kitchen. During cocktail hour, branzino was roasting in pizza ovens, and chickens were grilled on their Santa Maria grill, all in front of the guests. Many guests came up to watch and ask the chefs questions. This created an even richer sensory experience for everyone.

No better way to celebrate a new union and family coming together as one.

Blue Plate, “David & Omar”

David and Omar’s wedding at the historic Field Museum in Chicago was nothing short of magical, with every detail meticulously crafted by Blue Plate to create an enchanting evening that would be remembered for years to come.

Against the backdrop of the museum’s newest attraction, a towering Spinosaurus, guests were treated to a celebration that seamlessly blended high design, culinary excellence, and captivating entertainment.

The vision

David and Omar wanted to transport their guests into a world of wonder and romance from the moment they stepped in the door. The choice of the iconic Field Museum as the venue set the stage for an extraordinary celebration, with its blend of history and modernity creating a captivating atmosphere. Every aspect of the event was carefully designed to enhance the overall vision of a vibrant and immersive experience.

The menu

The culinary journey began with a cocktail hour on the North Terrace, where guests indulged in an array of drinks, mezze, and hors d’oeuvres like crispy taro root

tacos and mini lamb burgers against the backdrop of the museum’s historical setting by candlelight.

As the evening progressed, guests were treated to a multi-course dinner accompanied by mesmerizing entertainment, including fire dancers and belly dancers, that added an extra layer of excitement to the celebration. A few favorite plates included:

- *Grilled peach and pear chip salad with spring mix, frisée, watercress, Marcona almonds, Amish cheese, and aged sherry vinaigrette

- *Cacio e pepe ravioli with soffrito and Parmesan Reggiano

They also had decadent dessert stations and late-night mini thin-crust pizzas featuring buffalo mozzarella and fresh basil, so guests didn’t leave hungry after dancing the night away.

The challenges

Organizing a multi-space wedding at such a unique venue presented its own challenges. With three separate kitchens and event teams, meticulous planning and coordination were essential to ensure that every celebration aspect ran smoothly.



Dinner was accompanied by mesmerizing entertainment, including fire dancers and belly dancers. Photo courtesy Blue Plate



Guests enjoyed a multi-course dinner featuring favorites such as a grilled peach and pear chip salad and cacio e pepe ravioli.
Photo courtesy Blue Plate

Despite the logistical intricacies, the decision to set up distinct kitchens and teams proved instrumental in delivering a flawless culinary experience across all event areas.

The execution

What set this event apart was its exceptional uniqueness and flawless execution. The culinary offerings, featuring culturally blended dishes and personalized cocktails, added a layer of depth and meaning to the celebration. At the same time, the festive food design touches created an immersive and visually stunning atmosphere.


Including top Chicago vendors ensured a high level of quality and expertise, while unexpected elements like the Britney Spears-themed bathroom brought a sense of humor and pop culture to the event, making it truly one of a kind.

In the end, David and Omar's wedding at the Field Museum was more than just a celebration—it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Congratulations to all our 2024 CATIE Award winners

These events were the ultimate testament to love, creativity, and the power of bringing people together in

joyous union. Through a harmonious blend of flavors, cultures, and dining styles, they created unforgettable celebrations that will be cherished by all who attended.

If you want more inspiration, uncover all the talented winners of the 2024 CATIE Awards [here!](#) 

Culinary Crafts and Blue Plate are proud members of the ICA. For more information on how to join the ICA and to be notified of future catering industry webinars, events, and education opportunities, visit internationalcaterers.org.

Ve



Carrot Orange Sour (fresh-squeezed orange juice, bourbon, carrot juice, and sugar). Photo courtesy *Proof*

veggie 'Tails

Vegetable-centric cocktails are the perfect savory end-of-summer sip

For decades, we've been conditioned to sip cocktails sweetened and mixed with fruits; everything from citrus peel to juices were fair game.

In recent years, however, the beverage industry has begun to swap these garden variety recipes in favor of a refreshing and innovative trend: vegetable-based cocktails.

Veggie cocktails, a creative fusion of fresh vegetables and traditional mixology, have taken the spotlight, offering a unique and health-conscious twist to the world of spirits. From kale-infused concoctions to beetroot blends, bartenders and mixologists are embracing the abundance of flavors and nutritional benefits that vegetables bring to the bar scene.

"Vegetable and savory cocktails seem to be rising in popularity as consumers are more concerned about what they put into their bodies," says Matt Foster (Culinary Canvas). "Plus, with consumers also being more curious and open to trying new flavors, bartenders are exploring less traditional flavor profiles for cocktails."

Drink your veggies

A key influence in the growing popularity of vegetable-based cocktails on menus is the rise in consumers that are focused on living more organically-minded, plant-based lifestyles.

"Many have been seeking creative and flavorful alternatives to traditional cocktails that can offer fewer calories or an added source of vegetables," said Grey Goose ambassador Joshua Jancewicz in an article for [The Zoe Report](#).

Freshly squeezed vegetables and vegetable juices bring with them a spectrum of different nutrients to the glass, adding depth and complexity to the drinking experience.

"These cocktails skirt our guilt of imbibing," says Shannon Boudreau (The Lazy Gourmet), "and in my opinion, there's no better way to eat your greens for the day!"

“Vegetables are good for us! They’re often packed with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and nutrients,” says Danny Childs (Slow Drinks). “Will they cancel out the negative effects that can come with excessive alcohol use? No. Will they add some element of nutrition into the glass? Absolutely.”

Not so garden variety

Although cucumbers have long been paired with gin and tonics and pickled vegetables are ubiquitous garnishes on Bloody Marys (turn to page 76 for a deep dive into fermented ingredients), today’s mixologists are now recognizing the potential in all vegetables. These

mixologists aren’t simply using fresh-grown ingredients as an afterthought buried in stronger flavors; instead, they’re highlighting the unique taste of seasonal veggies as the star of the drink.

“It was always logical,” said Nico De Soto (Mace) in an article for [VinePair](#). “Everyone knows fruits, so why not use vegetables?” he says. “These flavors have been used in cooking for sweet and savory dishes for such a long time, so it just makes sense to use them for cocktails.”

From carrots and cucumbers to beets and peppers, these ingredients offer gorgeous aesthetics with their vibrant colors, but they also bring an increased depth of flavor, including herbaceousness, zest, acidity, earthiness, and umami. Briney beverages are here to stay, with succulent vegetables and garden spices reaching their full potential in herbal-inspired sips.

“Salty, spicy, and umami flavors, traditionally saved for an evening’s entrée, are making a bold entrance into guests’ drink glasses,” says Foster. “I think people are just more curious and want to play around with more flavors. The world of cocktails has gotten more and more intricate; we don’t just have a menu of classics anymore. People want more of those unique experiences.”

Be careful though—vegetable cocktails can’t be approached the same way as a traditional fruit cocktail, since the amounts of sugar and acid will significantly differ between the two.

“Sweetness and acidity are key aspects to balancing a cocktail and both exist in copious amounts in most fruits,” says Foster. “This means they bring both flavor and function to most recipes. Most vegetables, on the other hand, bring less of both, thereby changing the basic build of most cocktail recipes while also influencing the need to accentuate other characteristics.”



The Beet Blaze. Photo courtesy Matt Foster

BEET BLAZE

Recipe courtesy Matt Foster, Culinary Canvas

INGREDIENTS FOR JUICE

- 1 ea. whole beet
- 2 ea. jalapeños
- 1 ea. small knob of ginger

METHOD

Separately juice the beet, jalapeños, and knob of ginger. Combine the juices and stir if needed.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 oz blanco tequila
- 1 oz Aperol
- 1 ea. whole lime (save a wedge to use for rimming the glass)
- Pinch of salt

Tajin to rim the glass

- 1 ea. jalapeño, slice for garnish

METHOD

Combine the blanco tequila, Aperol, lime juice, a pinch of salt, and juice mixture (made from the beet, jalapeños, and ginger) into a shaker. Add ice and shake to combine. Use your leftover lime wedge to rim the glass and top the rim with Tajin. Top a new glass, like a highball glass, with fresh ice and strain the cocktail. (Optional) Slice and deseed a jalapeño for garnish.

“These cocktails skirt our guilt of imbibing, and in my opinion, there's no better way to eat your greens for the day!” —Shannon Boudreau

“I develop recipes by first considering the flavors of the ingredients I’m trying to highlight, the profile of the cocktail that I’m trying to build (highball, sour, spirit-forward), then work backward from there,” adds Childs. “Veggie flavors are savory and complex when compared to the specific sweet and acidic profiles found in most fruits (and cocktails). So,

knowing how to utilize and balance these flavors is something that comes with practice and experimentation. Also, knowing how to extract these flavors in varied and complex ways is something that comes with experimentation and time.”

When incorporating vegetables into your cocktail recipes, there are two

different ways to approach it: either directly (juices, purées, muddling, etc.) or indirectly (infusions).

“Cocktails that use veggies directly will most likely be akin to Bloody Mary riffs and utilize purées,” says Foster. “These will be heavier and put the flavor of the vegetables as the top notes. Infusions lend a lighter touch

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The King Oyster Martini. Photo courtesy the Mushroom Council

KING OYSTER MARTINI

Recipe courtesy Danny Childs, Slow Drinks

INGREDIENTS

2 oz vodka
½ oz sherry
½ oz mushroom brine
Pickled king oyster mushroom disk for garnish (see below)

METHOD

Add the vodka, sherry, and brine to an ice-filled cocktail shaker and shake well to chill. Double strain through a cocktail strainer and mesh cone strainer into a chilled martini glass and garnish with a skewered king oyster disk.

INGREDIENTS FOR PICKLED KING OYSTER MUSHROOMS

3 cups king oyster mushrooms cut into ½-inch disks
2 cups water
1 cup white vinegar
½ cup sugar
2 T salt

1 T mustard seed

½ bunch thyme
3 bay leaves
1½ tsp allspice
¼ tsp cloves

METHOD

Blanch mushrooms in salted water for one minute, then transfer to a bowl of ice water to stop them from cooking. Use a slotted spoon to allow water to drain before transferring mushrooms to a heat proof container. Next, bring remaining ingredients to a boil in a medium saucepan. Once boiling, pour over mushrooms and cover. Move to the refrigerator once cool and allow to sit overnight. Will keep for up to one month.

with the vegetable flavors, giving the chance for more layers and nuance.”

It's all a matter of how you want to extract and preserve flavor. Juices and syrups are bright, fresh, and wonderful, but they perish quickly. Infusions are an excellent shelf stable way to extract flavors, but they don't have all the nuance of using extra fresh ingredients.


Veggies that are bright in flavor should be paired with lighter spirits, for example, while darker spirits work best with richer vegetables. Try taming bold vegetable flavors (beet, carrot, ginger, and celery) with bold spirits (gin, mezcal, and aquavit). For more delicate ingredient profiles, focus on spirits that allow them to still shine through including vodka, pisco, and white rum.

"What grows together, goes together," says Foster. "Pairing peppers, squash, and avocados with tequila will work out pretty well. Similarly, shiso or daikon radish would pair well with a shochu. It's about finding ingredients that meld together versus working against each other."

Pick the right produce

Veggie cocktails are not just about flavor and nutrition, either; they also contribute to the sustainability movement. By using locally sourced, seasonal vegetables, caterers can reduce their carbon footprint: partner with a local farm or microgreen garden or take a trip to your weekly farmer's market to see what's in season. This is also a great opportunity to invest in [planting your own vegetable and herb garden](#).

"Vegetables harvested in their ideal season will often be of higher quality, from the right sources, and this translates into more authentic, richer, and fresher flavors," says Foster. "So, if your goal is to put those flavors front and center of the cocktail, this will make that effort easier."



The Batata. Photo Courtesy
North Carolina SweetPotato
Commission

THE BATATA

Recipe courtesy Bud Taylor, Bistro
at Topsail for North Carolina
SweetPotato Commission

INGREDIENTS

1½ oz reposado tequila
1½ oz mezcal
**1½ oz sweet potato syrup (recipe
below)**
**8 drops 18.21 Charred Lime
Jalapeno and Peppercorn
Bitters**

METHOD

1. Add ice and all ingredients to a mixing tin and give a medium shake.
2. Strain over finely crushed ice in a coupe glass.

INGREDIENTS FOR SWEET

POTATO SYRUP

1 cup brown sugar
**1 cup puréed roasted Covington
sweet potato**
1½ cups water
1 tsp chili flake
½ tsp cayenne pepper

METHOD

1. Place all ingredients in a saucepan and bring to a boil.
2. Reduce heat and simmer for five minutes
3. Turn off heat and let syrup steep for five minutes
4. Double strain through coffee filters or cheesecloth to remove all pulp and fiber.



CocktailVision's Gazpacho cocktail. Photo courtesy CocktailVision

GAZPACHO

Recipe courtesy CocktailVision

INGREDIENTS

2 oz Aqua Perfecta Basil Eau de Vie
1 oz dry sherry
2½ oz Homemade Strawberry Gazpacho (recipe below)
¼ oz fresh lemon juice
1 barspoon Strawberry Rose Maple Syrup

METHOD

Shake all ingredients with ice.
Double strain into a cocktail glass.

INGREDIENTS FOR STRAWBERRY

GAZPACHO RECIPE

2 (16 oz containers) organic strawberries
1 cup seedless watermelon
1 ea. small seeded red pepper, chopped

1 ea. heirloom tomato, quartered

1 ea. small shallot minced

1 ea. small garlic clove

2 T dry sherry

2 T strawberry vinegar (or champagne vinegar)

1 T honey or maple syrup

5 fresh basil leaves

5 fresh mint leaves

Pinch of salt, pepper, and cayenne

METHOD

Add all ingredients to the food processor. Blend until smooth, about five minutes. Chill for two hours or overnight. Strain through a fine mesh strainer for smoother consistency.

“Seasonality is paramount for me,” adds Childs. “On the most basic level, ingredients taste better when they're picked in season and allowed to ripen in their own way. But it also takes the guesswork out.”

Beyond sustainable sourcing, there's also an opportunity to take things a step further by incorporating byproducts from vegetable processing, such as carrot tops or beet pulp, into recipes, thus minimizing waste and maximizing flavor.

When working with vegetables, be mindful of how you prepare your produce. If you intend to make your own juices, purées, and mixes, make sure to not only remove seeds but also do a fine strain before using to ensure you're not getting the meat of the vegetable in the juice you've created.


Additionally, unlike most fruits, roasting, grilling, or cooking the vegetables will release different flavors and can completely change the landscape of the cocktail you're working with.

Veggie cocktails are more than just a passing trend; they represent a fundamental shift in the way we approach mixology and beverage consumption. By marrying creativity, nutrition, and sustainability, the veggie cocktail movement is reshaping the landscape of the beverage industry.

“There will always be a place in the industry for them, especially as consumers look for more unique and out-of-the-box dining/bar experiences,” says Foster.

So, are you ready to raise a glass to a greener, healthier cocktail culture?

“These cocktails are fun to play around with and are not as complicated as they may seem,” says Foster. “Don't be afraid to offer your clients innovation in a glass.”

Cheers! 



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Feeding the Masses



Navigating the logistics of catering thousands at major events

By Amber Kispert

Brunch buffet from the LIV Golf tournament. Photo courtesy Behind the Scenes Catering and Events



ing to

Caterers are well-oiled machines when serving large crowds—but even the most efficient caterer can feel the stress of serving thousands of meals.

Industry trade shows. Sporting events. Festivals. If all events are puzzles, large-scale events are the thousand-piece ones, and every piece is a shade of the same color. They require an extra measure of planning, coordination, and catering grit.

“It’s a completely different animal to be able to serve that many guests,” says Susan Lacz (Ridgewells Catering). “It’s not easy.”

Events of all shapes & sizes

When talking about large scale events, we’re referring to those events that have thousands of guests in attendance. More specifically, we’re looking at those events that happen on a national stage, such as an awards show, sporting event, or other star-studded affair, thus adding to the stress of it all.

Some examples include:

- **M Culinary Concepts** caters the WM Phoenix Open for 800,000 over several days.
- **Proof of the Pudding** caters myriad major sporting events nationwide, including the PGA Tour Players Championship (30,000 guests over four days), PGA Tour Championship (24,000 premium guests over four days, plus 50,000 guests in concessions), PGA Tour Presidents Cup (40,000 guests over five days), Circuit of the Americas Formula 1 (30,000 premium guests over three days, plus 430,000 guests in concessions), University of Georgia Football Premium Suites and Clubs (2,800 guests per game), Auburn University Football (7,500 guests per game), and Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show (100,000 guests over five days).
- **Ridgewells Catering** has serviced the US Open Golf Championship for more than 30 years (over 70,000 meals). They also cater the Preakness Stakes.



Avocado Crisps. Photo courtesy Behind the Scenes Catering and Events



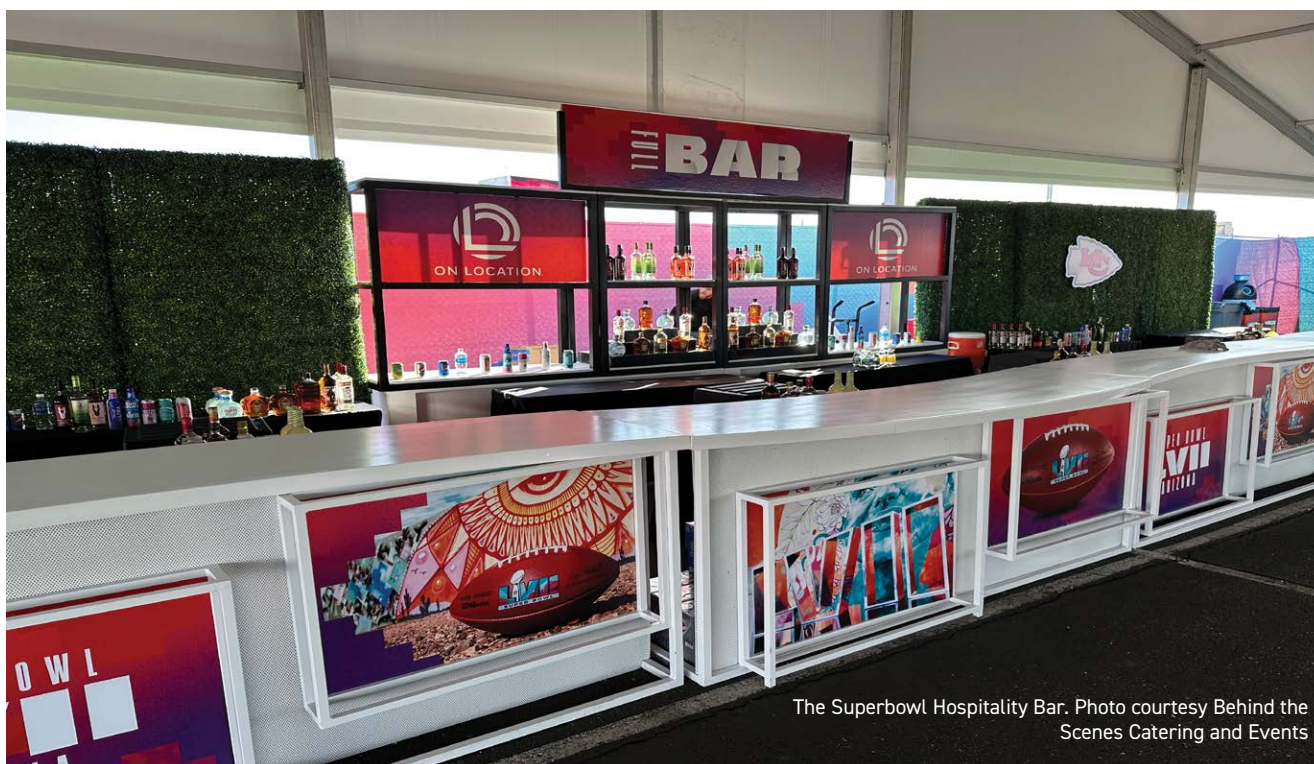
Bruschetta Board. Photo courtesy Behind the Scenes Catering and Events



BTS Catering is bound for the Paris Olympics this year. Photo courtesy Behind the Scenes Catering and Events



Daisies and Disco Charity Gala. Photo Scenes Catering and Events



The Superbowl Hospitality Bar. Photo courtesy Behind the Scenes Catering and Events



courtesy Behind the



Granddaddy Tailgate Bar during the Rose Bowl.
Photo courtesy Behind the Scenes Catering and Events

“Event success begins and ends with the planning and execution of the actual food and beverage, but greater success happens with properly planned logistics.” —Jeremy Campbell

- **Behind The Scenes (BTS) Catering and Events** will be catering the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris. They’ve also catered the Super Bowl and LIV Golf.
- **CBK Catering & Events** fed 8,000 people during Super Bowl LV.
- **Footers Catering and Good Gracious! Catering & Events** teamed up to feed 3,000 plus people during Super Bowl LVI.
- **Chartwells Higher Ed** annually feeds 6,000 people a day during the Walmart Associates Week and

Shareholders Celebration.

- **Sodexo Live!** regularly feeds thousands of people during conventions and tradeshows at the Orange County Convention Center.
- “Large events attract influential guests and provide opportunities to showcase your skills to a wider audience, and they’re always a great networking opportunity,” says Warner Peck (Sodexo Live! at the Orange County Convention Center) “Tackling the complexities of large-scale events can inspire creativity

and innovation in menu design and execution for future events. They can create new opportunities and solutions to new challenges.”

Planning to perfection

Large events attracting big crowds can be a game changer for catering companies, and if pulled off with finesse, these large events can put you head and shoulders above competitors.

An American Culinary Team in Paris

Based in San Diego, chef/owner John Crisafulli of Behind the Scenes Catering and Events (BTS) has catered 12 Olympic Games. This year he and his team have been traveling to Paris to source products and vendors for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. After the red tape of Sochi, Russia and being put under house arrest in Beijing, China, for a false case of COVID-19, Paris has been a cake walk.

The team will be creating food for broadcasters and media, working with some top sponsors on their VIP hospitality, and possibly providing the food for one or two National Olympic Committees at a hospitality venue hosted by Paris to entertain their special guests, athletes, and dignitaries.

Between now and the Paris Games, Crisafulli, Chef Melissa Chickerneo, and their team are traveling to Paris almost monthly to:

- Meet with vendors, check their supply chain safety systems, test and taste certain prepared items that will be purchased in local markets, and work with the Paris organizing committee on the buildout and to install temporary kitchens at competition and non-competition venues.
- Recruit hundreds of local staff that will be trained to support everything from working crew meals to high-end VIP hospitality for athletes and heads of state.
- Coordinate sustainability plans with Paris 2024 goals and guidelines for the Olympic Games. There are a lot of moving parts to coordinate vendor deliveries, cold storage logistics, health and safety plans, menu planning based on local market resources, as well as French laws, tax rules, and supply chain systems.
- Create menus and recipes that incorporate the local flavors and culture of France (Crisafulli and Chickerneo have been creating and testing Parisian-inspired menus at San Diego events).

“As you can see there are a lot of layers to the planning for an event of this caliber,” says Crisafulli. “It’s like creating a new business in every country we operate; working with bureaucratic rules, navigating health and safety, and building important new relationships with vendors from scratch.”

Information above courtesy Behind the Scenes Catering and Events

“It’s an adrenaline rush to be doing all these logistics,” says Lacz.

Be warned, however: large-scale events demand a well-organized logistical plan. The key is precision and efficiency.

“Event success begins and ends with the planning and execution of the actual food and beverage, but greater success happens with properly planned logistics,” says Jeremy Campbell (Proof of the Pudding). “A detailed to-do list or event blueprint is necessary.”

Plan ahead

Successful large-scale event catering begins with meticulous planning. Understand the event’s theme, guest count, and any specific requirements. Collaborate closely with event organizers to guarantee seamless coordination and ensure that your catering team is equipped to handle transportation, setup, and breakdown efficiently.

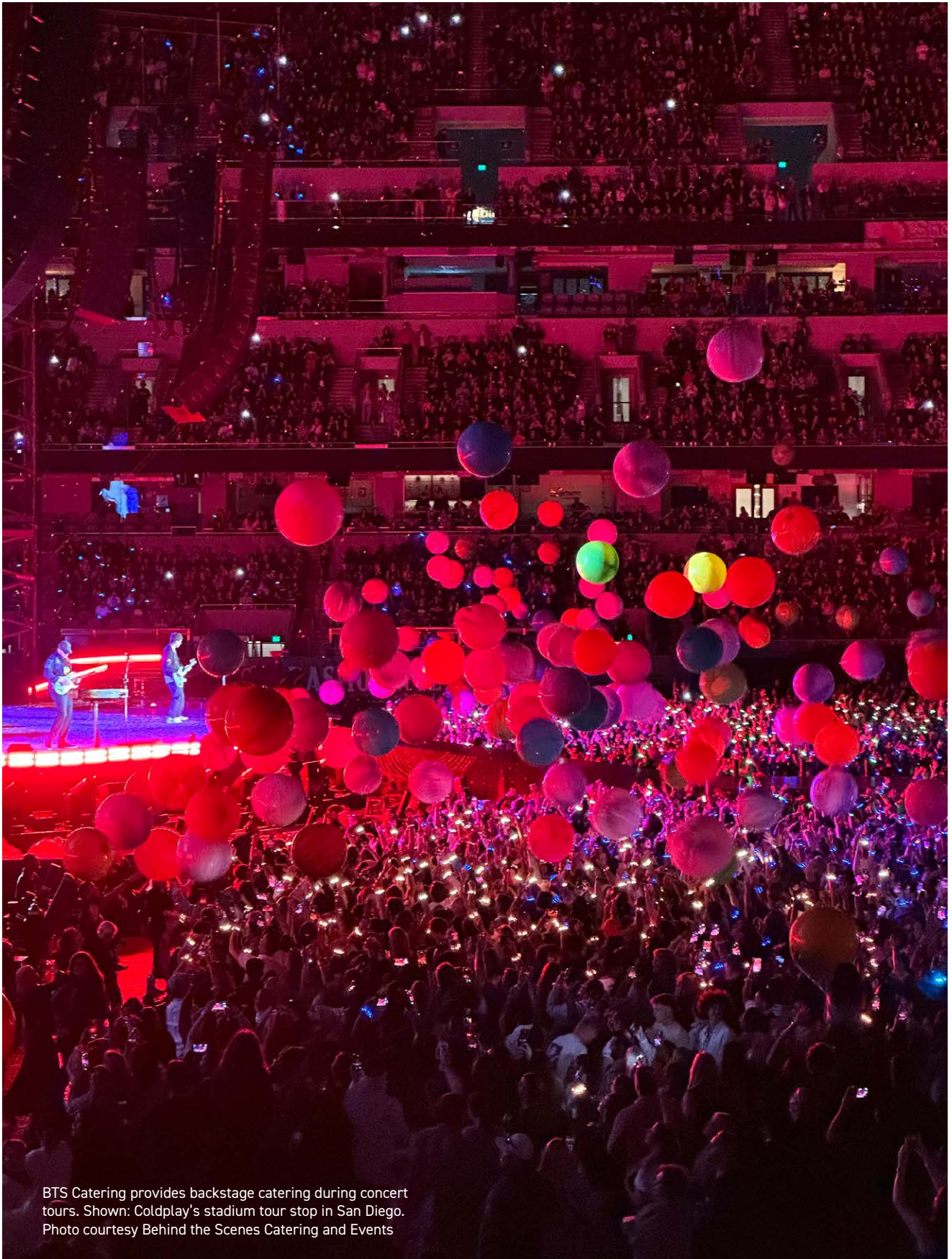
Additionally, don’t forget to consider the venue, the equipment, and the timing of your service. You need to ensure that you have enough space, power, refrigeration, heating, and storage facilities to handle your menu.

“Details, details, details will make or break your success at an event,” says John Crisafulli (Behind the Scenes Catering and Events). “Think of it as steering a ship or boat and you need all those on the ship rowing/moving in the same direction.”

Consider putting together comprehensive planning booklets for each member of your team detailing setup, menus, preparation, and all other logistics.

Consider this tip: if you’re doing multiple events within a single major event, treat each individual event as a standalone event.

“I don’t want to compromise the quality or the presentation because we’re feeding 60,000 people,” says



BTS Catering provides backstage catering during concert tours. Shown: Coldplay's stadium tour stop in San Diego. Photo courtesy Behind the Scenes Catering and Events



Lacz. “We break each event down and look at them individually; that way the staff working in one sponsor tent doesn’t have to worry about the other tents and that helps the clients feel like they are the only client on the golf course.”

Crisafulli agrees.

“While we have successfully produced large events all over the world for our clients, your reputation is only as good as your last event,” he says. “Our reputation depends on our current clientele and events, so with that there is always pressure to perform and to put our best foot forward for every event, both large and small. There are always curveballs thrown at us by clients and guests, but with experience you learn how to navigate these situations and make every guest feel special.”

Make a list

Remember to put together a detailed packing list including all the essentials (utensils, risers, buffets, food, serving vessels, stoves, ovens, refrigerators, etc.), but also include items that may not necessarily be top of mind, such as a printer/scanner (for reprinting menus, service plans, time sheets, etc.), and an emergency kit (featuring such essentials as a First Aid kit, cutting gloves, paper towels, napkins, extra silverware, pour spouts, and a wine opener).

“The devil is in the details,” says Campbell. “Knowing that you need 40 ovens for an event is no more important than making sure you have the spoons, forks, and people to serve food.”



CBK Catering & Events packed over 8,000 boxed meals for staff during Super Bowl LV in Tampa Bay. In addition to staff meals, the team also provided roughly 2,500 meals during a healthcare hero event. The boxed lunches included a variety of wraps and sandwiches made with Boar’s Head meats and cheeses. Photos courtesy Chase Meyer

Lastly, don't be caught off guard by some requirements that you may not be thinking of, such as fire regulations and health department or liquor board approvals.

"It's all these little details that you wouldn't think twice about normally that can have a pretty big domino effect later in the week," said Chase Mayer (CBK Catering & Events) in an article for [Catersource](#).

Put together a timeline

A surefire way to help with executing large-scale catered events is to create a detailed timeline, covering everything from menu development to setup and breakdown, to ensure that every aspect of the catering process is well-coordinated.

"We definitely need to get started early," said Jack Ervin (Chartwells) in an article for [Special Events magazine](#). "We keep copious notes so that we can always stay way ahead of the game, but it really comes down to constantly sharing because there's only so much we can plan ahead for—we do a lot of it on the fly."

For example, Sodexo typically adheres to the following timeline:

- **At six months out:** Sodexo has an initial consultation where they learn and understand the client's vision, budget, and expectations.
- **At four months out:** Menu design begins, working to create something that reflects the event's theme, dietary needs, and budget. Sodexo then finalizes logistics planning (supply ordering, organizing staff, and other setup requirements).

Walmart and Chartwells at the University of Arkansas teamed up to feed 6,000 people a day during the Walmart Associates Week and Shareholders Celebration. Photos courtesy Walmart Inc.



The Power of Food Prep Equipment: **Cooking Up Efficiency**

Catering operations, whether traditional or in the realm of ghost kitchens, thrive on efficiency and precision, and having the right food prep equipment can be a secret weapon. Caterers navigating this terrain can benefit immensely from strategizing menu choices, playing equipment Tetris, and ensuring ingredients are accessible.

Be intentional about the menu

In the world of catering, where the name of the game is quantity with a side of quality, crafting the perfect menu is crucial. Caterers should apply the Pareto principle, focusing on the star dishes that resonate with their audience. These items should not only be crowd-pleasers but also travel well without compromising quality. When selecting food prep equipment, prioritize pieces that efficiently churn out your signature dishes and core menu items.

Get creative with equipment placement

Ghost kitchens are designed purely for function. Take advantage of this freedom by strategically placing equipment for maximum efficiency and accuracy. By reimagining conventional

kitchen layouts, you can streamline workflows and cut down on unnecessary steps. Placing prep equipment within arm's reach of workers reduces marathon dashes across the kitchen—efficiency with finesse.

Keep food & ingredients close

Accessibility is key in large-scale catering operations. Make sure ingredients are within arm's reach to minimize downtime and keep production flowing. Storage solutions such as undercounter carts or vertical racks make the most of every inch of space without sacrificing accessibility. With ingredients nearby, there's no need for kitchen staff to go on a wild goose chase for a sprig of parsley.

By embracing these principles and choosing scalable infrastructure that can adapt to the size of the event (including transportation vehicles, kitchen equipment, and serving stations) and is tailored to their needs, caterers can take operations from ordinary to extraordinary, delighting customers and emerging victorious in the cutthroat world of large-scale catering projects.

Information above courtesy
[AyrKing](#)

• **Execution:** When it comes to execution, Sodexo implements the plan while maintaining flexibility to adapt to unforeseen challenges.

“There has never been and there never will be a ‘perfect’ event,” says Peck. “You have to be ready for the curveballs. Being calm, prepared, and finding the ‘win/win’ for the operation and the guest makes for a perfect response.”

It takes a village

Ensure that you have enough staff members to handle the crowd efficiently. Divide responsibilities among your team, including cooking, serving, cashiering, and cleaning. You can even separate your team among the different menu components: have a team designated for hot foods, have one for cold, one team that strictly handles sauces, and yet another team that handles bakery.

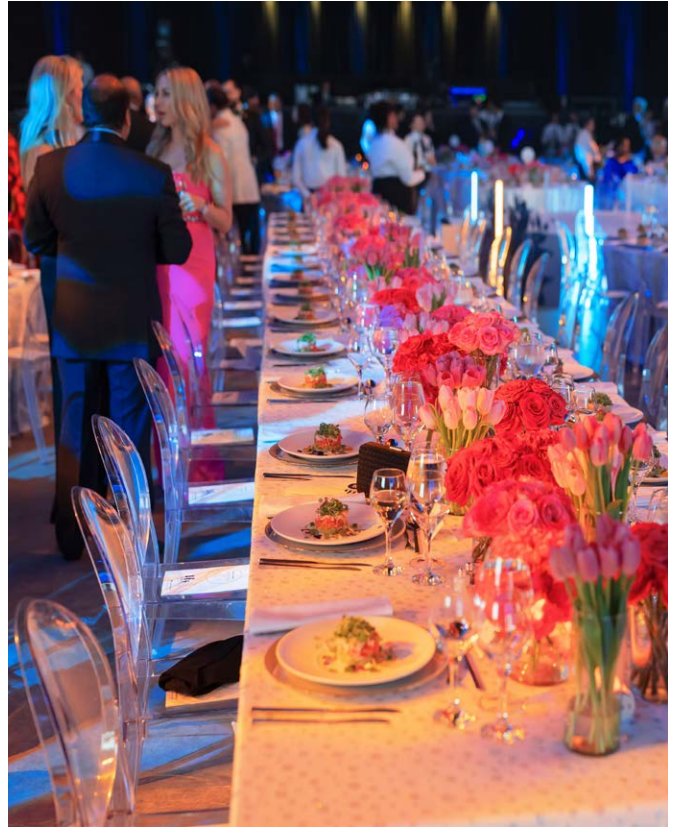
A well-trained and well-coordinated team is crucial for the smooth execution of any event.

If you don't have robust enough staff to handle events of this caliber, consider hiring temporary staff through recruitment/hiring fairs or by partnering with colleges and universities. You could even partner with other catering companies to utilize some of their skilled staff.

“Surround yourself with people who have the experience and necessary skills and knowledge to handle large-scale catering effectively,” says Peck.

Remember, you'll most likely have to not only secure uniforms for all your temporary staff, but also all housing depending on where the event is taking place.

Occasions Caterers catered the Children's National Hospital Annual Children's Ball, a 1,200 person fundraising gala that took place across two venues that featured a cocktail hour and dinner. Photos courtesy Children's National Health System





“We don’t get to choose our schedule; the schedule of events is set by the events themselves, so many on our team spend days or weeks traveling to sometimes far away locations to produce our events,” says Crisafulli. “So, work sometimes gets in the way of personal time and this can take a toll on those with young families.”

One of the most important things to keep in mind with any large event is that something is bound to go wrong.

“Plan for what can go wrong,” says Crisafulli, “and you will be ready for what will go wrong.”

Mastering the menu

Not only do large events require a bit of finesse with logistics and operations, but the menu itself must also be tailored to feed thousands of people in a consolidated timeframe.

“It’s important that your sales team and culinary and operations teams work hand-in-hand when preparing proposals for large event clients,” says Crisafulli. “Both clients and catering sales staff like to get creative in their menu offerings but forget that the culinary team needs to be able to produce these menu offerings, often onsite with limited space and equipment restraints, and operations needs to be able to execute the service. It is not just about writing an over-the-top menu; you also need to be able to execute the menu and wow the guests. That takes teamwork, starting with the initial planning.”

First, start by understanding the event’s demographics, expected



Good Gracious! Events (with the help of Footers Catering and Blue Ridge Catering) was tasked with handling orders for upwards of 5,000 people during several Super Bowl events in 2022. Photo courtesy Footers Catering

(Top left) Raspado de Tamarindo. Tamarind shaved ice, lava salt, and Tequila 1800. Photo courtesy Footers Catering

attendance, and any dietary preferences or restrictions.

A simple way to achieve balance within your menu (thus ensuring all guests have plenty of options to enjoy) is to use the rule of thirds: one-third of your menu should be vegetarian or vegan, one-third should be meat or poultry, and one-third should be seafood or fish.

When deciding on what types of dishes to include within your menu, consider a mix of both hot and cold options, while also considering the complexity of a dish. You do not want to be serving something that slows down service when thousands of guests are waiting for food. People attending events want to get back to the action quickly, so streamline your food production by offering a concise menu that caters to a variety of tastes but isn't overwhelming.

"We know we're not going to put Baked Alaska on the menu," says Lacz.

Focus on popular items that are easy to prepare and serve quickly. Also, ensure that your food items are easy to eat on the go. Portable options like sandwiches, wraps, or finger foods are usually preferred at events where people may be walking around.

Consider the location of the event, too, and bring a bit of local flare to your menu since guests at these large events come from all over.

"Whenever you can bring in the local brands or flair to the menus and offerings, it tends to be very well received and shows the local community that when a large event comes to town, they are committed to supporting the local community," says Crisafulli.



(Top right) Food preparation for the Super Bowl events in 2022 took place in the Good Gracious! Events kitchen. Photo courtesy Footers Catering

Behind the scenes at the Good Gracious! Events kitchen. The culinary teams from both Footers Catering and Blue Ridge Catering traveled to Los Angeles in 2022 to assist Good Gracious! Events in executing a number of Super Bowl events. Photo courtesy Footers Catering



Don't fall victim to preparing standard options, however. This is your chance to stand out.

"The standard of quality should not get lost in translation when moving between premium hospitality and concessions," adds Campbell. "Great food is in our DNA [as caterers], so whether it's a fresh lobster roll, 16-hour smoked brisket, or a cheeseburger, there is no drop off in quality of ingredients and presentation."

Bonus tip: consider items that utilize similar ingredients to cut down on inventory lists.

"Repetition is your friend," says Campbell. "Although final items can have varied finishes, base proteins need to be as similar as possible to manage production and labor and to maintain consistency."

Additionally, make sure to consider timing for all of your hot items as a way to ensure that you never run out of an item, while also keeping the quality high.

Plan menus that allow for as much pre-cooking and food preparation as possible prior to the event. Cooking and preparing food in advance will save a great deal of time at a large event. Some dishes do not lend themselves well to this process, which is why it is so important to carefully plan your menu beforehand.

When considering service styles, most large-scale caterers advise against plated, and instead opt for buffets, grab-and-go, and stations. However, if you do choose plated service, focus on elegant presentation and efficient service to ensure timely delivery of meals to each guest. For buffets, the design of a well-organized buffet layout will facilitate smooth flow



The Footers Catering team during the Super Bowl in 2022. Photo courtesy Footers Catering

(Top left) A plated salad that was served during the Super Bowl in 2022. Photo courtesy Footers Catering

and minimize wait times. For retail concessions, emphasize convenience and portability while maintaining quality and freshness.

One service style that is growing in popularity during large-scale events are “food halls,” where several vendors (mainly concessions) will set up in a designated food tent with myriad options.

“This has been introduced as a follow up to the food truck movement that started several years back,” says Crisafulli. “Like the food trucks, it is one of those concepts that looks good on paper, but in practice it doesn’t work well with large crowds, especially when each booth is individually operated by independent vendors. The best way to manage this food hall concept is for one operator to produce all the menu offerings from a centralized BOH kitchen space and then the Front of House client facing sales can be divided up by product and brand ... so guests feel that it’s individual booths but in reality, it’s one operator producing different branded food or drinks.”

Lastly, don’t neglect your presentation. Just because you’re feeding thousands of people doesn’t mean they can’t be elevated to the same level as a moderately-sized event.

“Consistency is key here,” says Peck. “Everything must be high quality and presented well, no matter how many guests.”

Zeroing in on waste

Major events pose more than a culinary challenge. They also require sophisticated sustainability programs (turn to page 42 for a deeper dive on



(Top right) Portable yogurt parfaits served during the Super Bowl in 2022. Photo courtesy Footers Catering

Some of the Good Gracious! Events catering team that helped out during the Super Bowl in 2022. Photo courtesy Footers Catering



Meijer Gardens Culinary Arts & Events at the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park hosted the kick-off event for the LPGA Classic Tour, which was attended by nearly 1,000 guests. (Top) A "station-in-the-round" setup served up small plates; (Above) Signage for the Nitro Ice Cream station. Photos courtesy Emily DeKoster

sustainability) and hiring techniques. In today's world, clients appreciate and often demand environmentally conscious practices. Implement sustainable initiatives, such as using eco-friendly packaging, minimizing food waste, and sourcing locally whenever possible. Communicate these efforts to clients as part of your commitment to corporate social responsibility.

A large undertaking


With all of the extra planning and logistics that go into catering these large-scale events, what's the incentive to take on such a massive undertaking?

"In our industry, our margins are getting thinner and thinner," says Lacz, "so the larger the event, the bigger the margin."

These events also challenge caterers to get creative with logistics and operations, which can help them execute all their events (not just large-scale) flawlessly.

When considering incorporating large-scale events into your repertoire, it's essential to go in with your eyes open because there are a lot of added challenges to contest with.

"Large scale events are not for everyone—they take a great deal of time and careful planning," says Crisafulli. "If the only motivating factor in one's interest in large-scale events is the potential money to be made, it's likely not for you. If you are a creative person constantly looking to challenge yourself and your skillset, it may be the perfect playground for you. Just be ready to devote lots of time and effort if you want to be a success.

"Caterers need to be careful that they don't bite off more than they can chew when it comes to large-scale events." 



During the LPGA Classic Tour event, Meijer Gardens Culinary Arts & Events served Campfire S'mores Sundaes with hickory-smoked vanilla ice cream, chocolate syrup, graham cracker, and toasted marshmallow (top) as well as Chicken & Waffle Cones with bourbon maple syrup and barrel-aged hot sauce (above). Photos courtesy Emily DeKoster

Feeding Minds & Appetites

Why taking your team to Catersource + The Special Event is a recipe for success

When I joined my mom's catering company over 25 years ago, I never imagined we would be where we are today! Truthfully, from the beginning I used to joke that if we didn't fight or kill each other, we'd potentially have something pretty special.

In the catering world, staying ahead of the curve, and the competition, is the name of the game. I can't think of a better way to sharpen your team's skills than by sending them to the amazing world of educational inspiration that is [Catersource + The Special Event \(CS+TSE\)](#).

I know that it was a game changer for me when I attended my first conference many years ago! It's all about unleashing the power of creativity and building a

team that's ready to conquer any challenge. So, let's dive into why investing in your team's conference adventures is a smart business move.

Knowledge is power

Knowledge is power and CS+TSE is a serious treasure trove of industry insights, where your team can uncover the latest trends, strategies, and technologies to help build on their current skillsets while also helping you to keep your company ahead of the competition.

I will never forget my first conference. The session that changed everything for me was taught by Meryl and Andy Snow. I sat in the front row, eyes wide open, feverishly taking notes as I didn't want to miss a word. I remember thinking, "They understand my world and what I do and are going to help inspire me to be better and to take this knowledge back to our (at the time) small but mighty team to inspire and excite them too!" I remember Meryl mentioning the International Caterers Association (ICA) and I thought, "I must be a part of that too." Meryl can tell you that I literally followed them down the hallway after the session firing question after question and thinking this was the most incredible moment and that I finally found my tribe and people that cared as deeply as I did about our industry. Needless to say, we became fast friends, and joining the ICA (and later serving as president) was one of the highlights of my professional career.



Robin Selden at Art of Catering Food 2024. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos

I believe wholeheartedly that igniting the passion and motivating yourself and your team by attending CS+TSE and other educational conferences is the best way to uncover industry insights, forge meaningful connections and friendships, and boost morale.

Educational conferences like CS+TSE are not just about collecting business cards—they're about forging meaningful connections that can lead to exciting collaborations and opportunities. I was in and focused on doing just that. Fast forward to now and I can truly say that some of the greatest people I know and have in my life as friends and mentors came from the networking and relationship building that I've done (and continue to do) through the many years of attending CS+TSE.

Motivation overload

Another huge factor at CS+TSE is that it's like motivation on steroids when you attend the sessions and really dive into the incredible education!! It's truly like hitting the reset button on motivation, injecting a healthy dose of drive into your team's work ethic. For me personally, it's the catalyst for innovation that sparks new ideas and initiatives.

Still to this day, I strive to learn and be inspired by my friends and colleagues who speak at this event. I'm that person that loves to learn, be inspired, and is excited by what we do as an industry. Just because you own a company doesn't mean you also don't need personal and professional growth, right? It's like planting seeds of knowledge and watching them grow and flourish within yourself, your team, and your organization. It also goes without saying that it boosts morale and retention rates.

Teams bonding together

One of my favorite reasons to take our team to CS+TSE is that it's full of team building! It's not just about sitting through sessions—it's about bonding with your teammates over



The Marcia Selden Catering & Events team makes a point of bonding together with other speakers during Catersource + The Special Event. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events



Robin Selden (shown with Ron Ben-Israel, left, and Chef Tavel Bristol-Joseph, right) during DICED 2024. Photo here & below courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos



Jeffrey Selden (right) served as a panelist during a session on corporate events. Also shown: Elizabeth Meyer and Michael Cerbelli.

shared experiences and some funny inside jokes. It's about breaking bread at the great restaurants in the city you are visiting and ordering food that can inspire new and exciting menu ideas to take home to your company. Where else can you hop in a Karaoke Cab with seven members of your team (like we did in Austin, TX) and enjoy a moment together that will always be an incredible and silly memory?! We are memory makers and create everlasting memories for our clients ... do it for your team too!

Registration Opening Soon!

The moment you've all been waiting for, registration for **Catersource + The Special Event 2025** is imminent!

Coming to Fort Lauderdale, FL February 24-27, 2025, we promise a showstopping event with knowledgeable speakers, education sessions, networking with catering and event planning industry peers, and cutting-edge suppliers—all in the Boward County Convention Center.

Registration is scheduled to open this July!

More details are coming soon on our new evening events, keynote speaker, and everything you love about Catersource + The Special Event.

We are so excited to see you again in Fort Lauderdale!

Get all the details at: <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/>

Brand building bonanza

Another crucial element is that it's all about building your brand and showing the world that your company is committed to excellence. Truly like a brand building bonanza! Our clients are psyched to know that our company is well respected and known throughout the country. They also love that we give back to the next generation and share our knowledge through the sessions we teach at CS+TSE.

New benchmarks

Education sessions offer your team the chance to measure themselves against industry standards and competitors, identifying areas for improvement and setting new benchmarks for success. It's like a benchmarking bash.


Each year when we return from CS+TSE, our team makes a presentation to the company to showcase what they learned and suggest new ideas that we can potentially implement. As a business owner, we need to see the return on our investment. Investing in your team's conference adventures is like riding a rollercoaster of ROI—with every twist and turn, you'll see your investment pay off in enhanced skills, knowledge, and relationships that drive your business forward. How exciting is that?

For those of you just starting out, or those who just cannot justify the expenses at this time, there are dozens of scholarship opportunities where you and your

team can attend CS+TSE for free. The amazing program that the **ICA Educational Foundation (ICAEF)** has put together offers people the opportunity for growth and learning that is like nothing they can get anywhere else.

If you haven't noticed yet, I am one of the most passionate people that you will ever meet! I believe wholeheartedly that igniting the passion and motivating yourself and your team through attendance at CS+TSE and other educational conferences is the best way to uncover industry insights, forge meaningful connections and friendships, and boost morale. There is a wealth of benefits shared by the most inspiring and dedicated people in the industry that can take your team—and your company—to new heights of success.

By providing your team with the chance to expand their knowledge, develop crucial skills, and forge these meaningful connections, you empower them to drive innovation, maintain a competitive edge, and achieve outstanding results. You not only cultivate a culture of continuous learning and excellence but also position your company for sustained growth and prosperity in an ever-changing landscape. Like they say at Nike®, "Just Do It."

So why wait? Start planning your team's next conference adventure today and get ready to watch your business soar! Who will we see next year in Fort Lauderdale, FL? 



Robin Selden is the Managing Partner & Executive Chef of Marcia Selden Catering & Events and Naked Fig Catering, where she oversees the culinary and marketing operations for her family's multimillion-dollar company. In October 2019, Robin was honored to be named to the BizBash1000 celebrating the top 1,000 event professionals in the USA in 2019 and to the BizBash 500 celebrating the top 500 event professionals in 2020 in the United States. Selden is in the President's Council as a past President of the International Caterers Association and won their Chef of the Year award.

She's a past Innovative Chef of the Year and a current Ambassador Chef for the Greenwich Wine & Food Festival.



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Making Your Values Sticky

When my father owned Footers Catering, he didn't have a mission statement, a formal vision, or defined values. He loved catering and simply wanted to provide great food and service to his clients and make a living that supported our family. While he had success, it was usually reliant on him being at the events because he struggled to translate his passion to his employees.

They lacked an understanding of why the company existed, where my dad wanted it to go, and what the company stood for. Sure, he had a handful of committed people, but overall, there was a lack of teamwork, minimal engagement, and additionally, employees also worked on or pushed their own agendas that weren't always in line with the company's best interests.

Fast forward to 2010 when my wife, April, and I purchased the

business from my dad. Our number one priority was to transform Footers Catering into a great place to work and the first step we took on that path was to formalize the foundation for how we would do business moving forward. We asked the current team why they worked at Footers, what was important to them, and what made us unique. Their answers, combined with our vision for the company, led us to the formation of our mission, a compelling vision statement, and eight core values. We quickly realized that our work was far from done. This was just the start of our journey to having those values mean something and have significance in our organization.

Companies often have core values, but many of their employees don't even know what those values are. If leaders want their team members to live by those values, they not only have to communicate them, but they also must provide ways for their team to remember them. Like mud on a shoe, the sugary residue

of cotton candy on a child's fingers, or a fly to one of those adhesive fly traps, if companies want to find ways to make their values stick in the minds of their team members, they should get creative.

Acronyms

Acronyms are a great way to shorten a string of words or help people remember a list. Our original acronym for our core values was: "C BIG TREE." We had a fake tree that lived in our office with all eight values taped to the plastic leaves. After a year or so, we realized we needed to make a few changes to our values. "Customer Service" became "Service;" we added "Fun," and changed "Excellence" to "Awesomeness." We wanted a word that went beyond just doing a great job, something unique that embodied the moment people stop, take note, and say "Wow, that's cool." This sparked the need for a new acronym and after having way too much fun rearranging the letters to find what words they could create,

“WHEN WE MAKE OUR VALUES STICKY, THEY STAY TOP OF MIND LONG AFTER REVIEW IN AN INITIAL ORIENTATION AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE LIVED BY THE TEAM EVERY DAY.”

we landed on “FAB TIGERS.” When the acronym creates a new word or phrase it can take on a life of its own. At Footers, we have our FAB TIGERS den in our lunchroom which is a comfortable tiered seating area with a jungle motif and tigers covering the wall. Nine teal tigers are mixed in, each with one of our values below their fierce face. Tiger trophies are given at our annual core value awards to the team members who embody each of our nine core values. There is also a “FAB TIGERS” channel on our Microsoft Teams page that is for all company updates; and it’s not uncommon to see people wearing tiger apparel (sometimes matching) at company events.

Alliteration


Alliteration is the repetition of the same sound at the start of a series of words that can give a lyrical or emotive effect. The playful and musical rhythmic effect helps the content to be more memorable. Companies have used this for years to help their organizations be more recognizable. Think about Dunkin Donuts®, PayPal™, and TED Talks. The team at Butler’s Pantry in St. Louis, MO put this into action when they created the “Four Peas” to help their team remember their four core values: Positive, Passionate, Poised, and Putting People First. They reinforced this with “Pea Pod” lapel pins containing four “peas” that their team can wear to events. When guests ask about the pins, they proudly share that they represent the

values of the company and explain what they are.

Three things

“The Rule of Three” alludes to the idea that information presented in threes is more memorable, satisfying, and effective to an audience; our brains have evolved to recognize patterns to find shortcuts to process logic and remember facts. Additionally, “three” happens to be the smallest number of elements required to create a pattern. These examples are easy to find. In storytelling, there are Three Little Pigs and Goldilocks and The Three Bears. Most of us remember “Life, Liberty, and The Pursuit of Happiness” when asked about the Declaration of Independence. It’s not a coincidence that the slogan for Rice Krispies® was “Snap! Crackle! Pop!” and Nike® uses “Just Do It.” The Rule of Three inspired our “three bullet mission statement” at Footers and it can be applied to core

values as well. Maybe you choose three core values or six values that are lumped into two groups of three. You could come up with three phrases or tenets that your company lives by. Or get creative and find a way to incorporate three characters, three stories, or three items to help make your values stick.

Values in an organization should constantly be reinforced, but before they can be reinforced, the team needs to know what those values are. When we find ways to help our team members remember our core values, we raise awareness of those core values; it increases the frequency in which they are mentioned, highlights how important they are, and provides talking points for them to be discussed on a more regular basis. When we make our values sticky, they stay top of mind long after review in an initial orientation and are more likely to be lived by the team every day. 



Anthony Lambatos grew up in the catering business working for his father and founder of [Footers Catering](#) in Denver, Colorado. Anthony and his wife, April, purchased the business in 2010 and have successfully made the transition to a second-generation family business. They recently moved Footers Catering into a new facility that will also house their newest venture—an event center called [Social Capitol](#). Anthony is passionate about helping other companies create great places to work and inspiring people with heart leadership and does that through his sister company [MIBE](#) (acronym for make it better everyday).



Components of Sustainable Catering, Part 2

Editor's note: This is the second in a series of articles that will look at the relationship between sustainability and catering. Check out part one [here](#).

Catering and banquets collectively represent a relatively small but still significant component of the overall U.S. foodservice industry, somewhere in the 5% of revenue range.

However, because of the social importance and high visibility of many of the events executed by caterers, an industry-wide effort to create green awareness could help drive broader acceptance of the sustainable food options available to our clients and guests.

Not every catering client or event guest feels strongly about sustainability. However, recent polls show that somewhere in the 75% range of adult Americans support efforts to address climate change. And from other recent polling, almost 60% of U.S. consumers are willing to spend more for sustainable

products. This indicates that there is an opportunity for caterers to both do the right thing and prosper at the same time.

This bias toward sustainability is confirmed by the fact that the vast majority of large and sophisticated U.S.-based companies promote their own environmental efforts via marketing to the public; and as of 2023, 98% of the companies in the S&P 500 generate voluntary sustainability reports for their stakeholders every year, an indication of how seriously they take this issue.

There are several areas which caterers can and should address to improve their sustainability quotient. In this article we will focus on both input and output considerations.

Input/output sustainability

In the catering world, where we constantly endeavor to create and deliver products to please our clients and guests, the demand/input side is upstream from the supply/output side. In this context, demand refers to the items selected by our clients

after being presented as food and beverage options.

We believe that the focus here should be on offering as many sustainable options to our clients as possible—encouraging flexitarian eating. Red meats such as beef and lamb have the most environmentally negative impacts of common catering proteins, yet they are often presented as the default main course option. This is the case not only for high-end full-service events where tenderloin is often the instinctive choice, but also for company picnics where hamburgers and hot dogs are usually all beef.

There are many reasons why beef is so frequently chosen in a catering context. This is partly because of familiarity since many Americans were raised on beef. Beef is also widely available, which is another consideration. But because of its environmental impact, in the catering world beef should be *an* option, not the option.

Other menu challenges arise because alternatives to beef such as pork, shellfish, and veal have cultural

“We believe that the focus here should be on offering as many sustainable options to our clients as possible—encouraging flexitarian eating.”

baggage, while poultry items are often perceived as being down-market alternatives. However, with sufficient creativity, there are other possibilities for our culinary teams to present to our clients—both menu items that currently exist, and ones that will be created in the future.

Some alternatives to traditional meats are a challenge for the risk-averse but can be excellent choices for those willing to try something different. For example, lion's mane mushrooms make outstanding faux crab cakes, and Moulard Magret duck breasts are a superb substitute for tenderloin.

Seafood is another important component of the caterers' culinary repertoire. As described by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), seafood is the most environmentally efficient source of protein on the planet. NOAA defines [sustainable seafood](#) in the following manner: [sustainable seafood](#) is fish, shellfish, and seaweeds harvested or farmed in a manner that provides for today's needs while allowing species to reproduce, habitats to flourish, and productive ecosystems to be available for future generations.

With up to 8% of the U.S. adult population self-identifying as vegan or vegetarian, the number of clients and guests willing to consider going meatless altogether is greater than it has ever been in the past. Since any plant-based option is by definition more sustainable than any meat, these should be part of every caterer's culinary offerings (though we realize that they are not an easy sell).

Moving on to supply concerns

There are other considerations besides the center-of-the-plate choices described above. [Seasonality](#) also has an impact on food sustainability. For example, if vegetable or fruit accompaniments are shipped in by air from another hemisphere, then food miles become a contributor to environmental degradation.

Some items are only grown outside of the US, but many of those items arrive here by ship—bananas arrive in from Central America in refrigerated containers, for example. The environmental consequences of items brought in by sea or moved by truck or rail are minimal compared to those transported by air.

This seasonality issue can be a challenge for caterers. This is particularly true in the northern areas of the U.S., where the [growing season](#) is relatively short. Additionally, local growers may not be able to deliver large quantities of produce on a “just in time” basis, compared to the mass production

of areas such as the Central and Imperial Valleys of California.

Clients can be a challenge as well. A catering buyer who notices out of season, overseas berries or asparagus in their grocery store may decide that they want these on their catering menu, even if they are nominally supportive of sustainable choices. Even if they realize the environmental impact of their choices, buyers can easily rationalize these selections because most catered events are special occasions.

There are no easy, “one size fits all” solutions to these supply challenges. However, some caterers have been quite successful in tailoring their menu outputs to minimize their environmental impact, and a few have even created vegetarian catering brands. We strongly recommend that every caterer have their culinary and sales teams work together on these issues, with knowledge of both the environmental impact of the products being offered, and a well-rounded understanding of seasonality and local product availability. [CS](#)



Carl Sacks has spent more than 17 years as a consultant to the catering industry, starting at Catersource, and currently as the managing member of Certified Catering Consultants. His list of clients includes many of the most prominent and successful caterers in the industry.

He is regarded as the top expert in several catering related areas, including maximizing financial returns, strategic planning, and exit strategy development and implementation. He is also widely known for his expertise in contract and venue RFP response development. Carl also provides advisory services to both buyers and sellers of catering companies, and he has been involved in many successful transactions.




Tasty bites
Photo courtesy Hilton

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By Amber L...



Summer sippers
Photo courtesy Hilton

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Beef bourguignon skewers
Photo courtesy Evrim Icoz Photography
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Intimately Sized Corporate Party

(Top left and top right) This ACE-nominated corporate party from Vibrant Table Catering & Events made a big commitment to its Halloween theme. Vintage graphics and classic haunted house props were combined with modern twists like impressive video mapping and a giant balloon sculpture. Guests were the perfect final touch—arriving in full costume and ready for the dance floor. Photos courtesy Evrim Icoz Photography

The menu

The menu included a cheese and charcuterie display that featured grapes, berries, dried fruit and nuts, cornichons, pickled peppers, olives, and stone ground mustard toasted baguettes and crackers. Photo courtesy Evrim Icoz Photography



In recent years, the landscape of corporate catering has undergone a significant transformation, adapting to the changing needs and preferences of businesses and their employees. As companies prioritize employee well-being and engagement, the corporate catering sector is witnessing a surge in innovative solutions, sustainability initiatives, and a heightened focus on diverse culinary experiences.

"Yes, corporate events have come back post-pandemic, but companies are being more thoughtful and strategic about the events they hold for their teams," says Brittney Sogge (Lancer Hospitality Group). "Companies are putting an emphasis on their teams that have helped navigate the pandemic journey, and they are ready to celebrate victories, staff morale, and how they've been able to bounce back as an organization. We are past the days of a quick meeting and food."

Time to rebuild

Following the pandemic, full-service corporate events (client/customer marketing events, product launches, employee morale events, and celebratory/milestone achievement events) faced an uphill battle as companies struggled to not only stabilize their footing, but also rebuild their company culture.

Between 2019 and 2022, the average percentage of business for full-service corporate catering dropped by 14%, according to data presented by Technomic (which delivers industry research and insights) during a session at this year's Catersource + The Special Event (held February 2024 in Austin, TX).

The dramatic drop in business can be attributed to the pandemic, the rise in at-home workers, and the layoffs that continued to plague the corporate world. In 2022, corporate delivery catering even started to struggle as restaurants and ghost kitchens began to make a major play for office lunches.

(This page) Vibrant Table Catering & Events orchestrated a prom-themed holiday party for a corporate client with 300 guests in a convention center ballroom. The goal was to create an elevated but campy event that excited and engaged the guests both in aesthetics and experience. Specially designed mini desserts (right) kept things light and cheeky. Photos courtesy Evrim Icoz Photography





“[The pandemic] threw us a curveball,” says Chris Sanchez (LUX Catering & Events), “but here’s the thing [about] adversity: there’s opportunity. We’re not just catering; we’re consultants, guiding our clients, both old and new, through these turbulent times. We’ve become adept at stretching budgets without compromising on quality, and at the same time, we’re educating emerging players on the critical role of impactful events. This isn’t just about survival; it’s about leadership, about showing the way in uncharted waters.”

Today’s corporate catering landscape is showing signs that the negative effects of the pandemic are firmly in the rearview mirror. Late last year, *Catersource* distributed its [annual state of the industry survey](#), which revealed that 35% of respondents generated the most business in 2023 from corporate catering. While lunch ranked as the most prevalent mealtime in corporate catering (53%), full-service catering came in as the most prevalent type of corporate catering (47%).

That doesn’t mean the effects of the pandemic aren’t still being felt; however, this time it’s a positive.

“We’ve never been busier,” said Robin Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events) during a session on corporate events at *Catersource* + The Special Event 2024. “The best thing that ever happened to us was the pandemic; how scary is that to even say? It made us work smarter, better, wiser, and we became a very close-knit team.”

So, what is driving catering trends in 2024 within the corporate realm? Let’s take a look.

Getting back to business

In 2024, companies are still navigating the rough waters of remote and hybrid work models (currently, 28% of employees have hybrid work schedules and offices are operating at roughly 50% occupancy, according to Technomic), while employees continue to balk at the notion of returning to a traditional work environment.

(This page) Top: Taco Station (choice of jackfruit, chicken, or fish) accompanied by slaw, hot sauce, and fresh lime from Eatertainment Events & Catering; Left: Tuna Poke Station (tuna poke in sesame dressing with togarashi soba noodles, pickled ginger, seaweed salad, and banana and taro chip crumble). Photos courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering



“Return to work plans are causing employees to be grumpy because they do not like their commute and they don’t want to come into the office because they’d rather stay at home,” said Rick Shank (Technomic) during Catersource + The Special Event 2024. “So, how is an office manager going to get them there? They’re increasingly utilizing food; food has become an extraordinarily important part of trying to even out that grumpiness, if you will.”

According to ezCater, over 85% of businesses agreed that food incentivizes employees to work onsite, and 83% said that their food-for-work budgets have either stayed the same or increased. Comparatively, **65% of employees** indicated that they are willing to plan their in-person office visits based on whether or not a complimentary catered lunch is being offered that day.

In its annual **Lunch Report**, ezCater surveyed 5,000 workers across the U.S. to explore the relationship between food at work—specifically around lunchtime habits. At a high level, findings show that providing a catered lunch is a win-win-win for companies, employees, and restaurants and/or caterers. Here’s why:

- Lunch breaks benefit both workers and employers, showing the value of workplace catering. Most workers (78%) agree on one thing year after year: taking a lunch break improves their job performance, with over half (53%) saying they have more mental clarity if they stop for lunch.
- In addition to increased productivity, 67% of hybrid workers say free lunch would impact their decision to work onsite and commute.
- Workers in Atlanta were the most likely to say their employer pays for lunch at least once a week (44% versus 31% nationally).

“There’s a growing emphasis on internal meal programs,” says Sanchez. “These aren’t just about providing food; they’re strategic tools for fostering community, enhancing employee satisfaction, and incentivizing the return to office spaces. By offering culinary experiences that employees look forward to, companies are leveraging catering as a key

(This page) Top: Steak Sauce Short Rib (smoked gouda grits, roasted cherry tomatoes, cipollini onion, bacon fat fingerling potatoes, and house-made steak sauce) from Lancer Hospitality Group. Photo courtesy The Dainty Blueberry Photography/ Sarah Marier; Middle: Charcuterie Board Shooters from Lancer Hospitality Group; Right: The Farm to Table spread is curated to include local cheeses, meats, and fruit as available from Lancer Hospitality Group. Photos courtesy Steve Legato



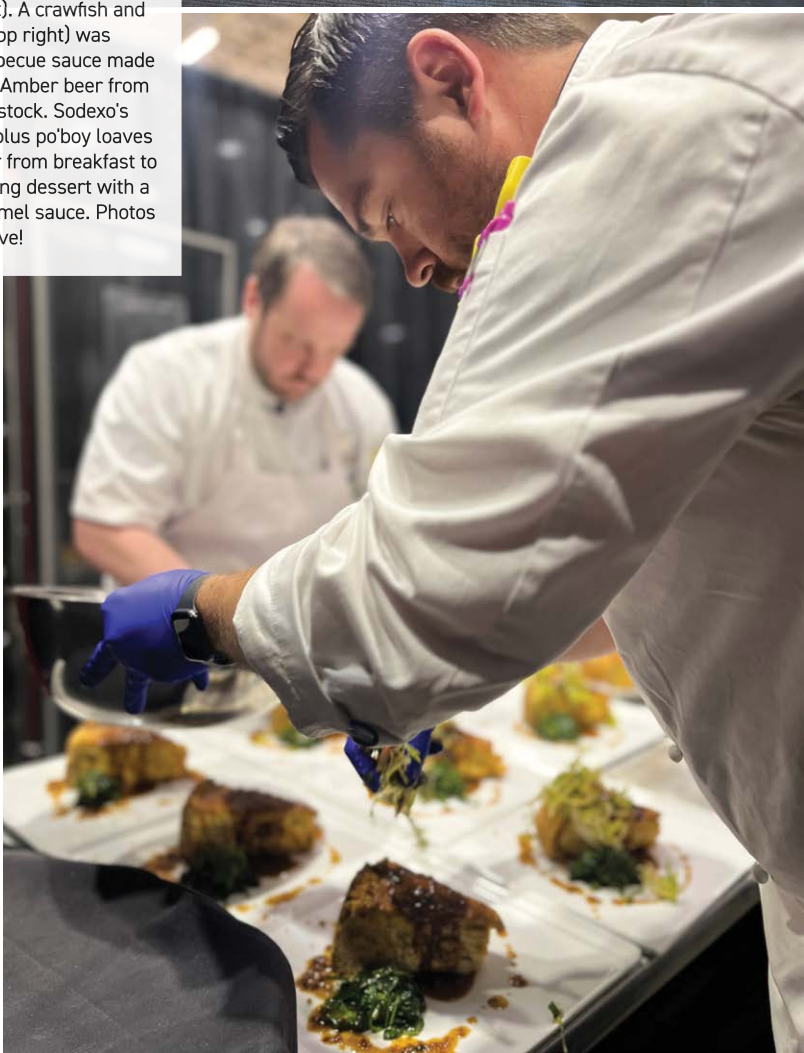


Dumpster lunch

(Top left) During the WasteExpo, Sodexo Live! served attendees a gourmet zero-waste lunch (inside of a dumpster). Photo courtesy Sodexo Live!

The menu

The first course of the dumpster lunch was a spring salad (bottom left) featuring strawberries left over from breakfast, while the entrée combined surplus seafood to create crab claw salad (bottom right). A crawfish and crab cheesecake (top right) was finished with a barbecue sauce made from unused Abita Amber beer from Sodexo Live!'s bar stock. Sodexo's chef also used surplus po'boy loaves and coffee left over from breakfast to craft a bread pudding dessert with a chicory coffee caramel sauce. Photos courtesy Sodexo Live!



component of their workplace culture and employee engagement strategies.”

According to Technomic, 65% of businesses placed catering orders weekly in 2022 versus 41% in 2018.

How food is utilized within the corporate realm has changed significantly post-pandemic. Whereas in the past, employers and managers relied solely on “small transactions” such as ordering pizzas or sandwiches for trainings and team meetings, in 2024 companies are instead putting their dining dollars into more elevated dining options as well as larger employee events.

“As we move away from these small transactional relationships, the share of corporate dining dollars have shifted in catering’s favor because many restaurants didn’t even realize they were catering (when fulfilling 15–20 person orders) because they don’t have catering programs,” said Shank. “That’s an opportunity for those of you who are positioned to go out and facilitate those types of orders; and you can probably do it better than a restaurant, to be honest.”

To capitalize on this growing trend, caterers may need to break a few of their own rules by allowing for same-day online and customizable ordering (through third-party ordering platforms such as Uber Eats, Honeycart, ezCater, and DoorDash), while also easing some of their minimums.

“It’s really hard for a restaurant to facilitate these orders, so can you fill that void?” said Shank. “This is a huge operational shift though and violates everything we know about catering orders. You’re going to be forced to operate more like a restaurant, and there’s risk in that.”

Uncharted territory

Companies and caterers alike are being faced with an unprecedented environment in 2024 when exploring how food and the workplace interact together. Food and beverage for corporate meetings, events, and conventions (turn to page 20 for more on how to feed people at this scale) were previously an afterthought

(This page) Top: Sweet Cones (cherry cheesecake, orange vanilla meringue, and chocolate pistachio canoli) from Eatertainment Events & Catering; Right: Elevated Grazing Station featuring Charcuterie Verrine (olives, grilled artichokes, and pesto), Vegetable Flatbreads (zucchini, peppers, and mushrooms), Italian Sandwich Bites (buffalo mozzarella and tomato chutney, black truffle mortadella, and panelle and lemon aioli), Maple and Harissa Roasted Heirloom Carrot Salad, Wild Rice and Mushroom Salad, Pearl Couscous with snap peas, cucumber, avocado, and herb cress, and Sea Salt Pita Chips (spicy pumpkin hummus, creamy roasted eggplant, and spinach cheese dip). Photos courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering





for many companies and were only served out of necessity. Not anymore. Gone are the days of banquet buffets; instead, employers and employees are putting a stronger emphasis on experience.

“The rebound we’re witnessing in the corporate catering sector post-pandemic isn’t just a return to the status quo; it’s a leap into uncharted territory of growth and innovation,” says Sanchez. “Today’s clients aren’t just looking for meals; they’re seeking unique, memorable experiences that resonate with their company’s culture and energize their events. It’s no longer just about sustenance; it’s about storytelling, creating a sense of belonging, and reinforcing corporate values through the universal language of food.”

Companies, event planners, and guests are getting bored with the same old thing year after year, and in a world where every corporate event competes for attention, the challenge of making one truly stand out is ever more daunting.

“Our corporate clients are having remarkable events that have carefully curated menus to reflect their diverse memberships,” says Thomas Whelan (Levy Restaurants). “We are seeing more breaks being worked into day-long schedules to get attendees interacting—whether with innovative food stations or bringing in hand-crafted beverages. Attendee engagement in all facets of events is being considered.”

Corporate catering is an art that goes beyond just serving food. It involves understanding the unique needs of corporate clients and delivering exceptional experiences that leave a lasting impression. The food should also reflect the company’s brand identity and ethos.

“You should be able to infuse the company’s mission into every bite,” says Sarah Wexler (Hilton Catering & Events Americas).

This is where qualifying information up front with the client is so essential. What type of company is hosting the event? Who are the guests attending the event? What is the budget? What are the unique needs and preferences of the client? Do they want



(This page) Top: A warm and hearty winter menu brought a holiday feel to this prom-themed corporate event from Vibrant Table Catering & Events; Left: Vibrant Table Catering & Events added kitschy nods to the school dance experience throughout the event, including a checkerboard dance floor, hanging crescent moon décor, and oversized balloon displays. Photos courtesy Evrim Icoz Photography

heaping platefuls of food that guarantees everyone stays fed, or are they more interested in the experience and presentation?

“Corporate catering is a whole different scene when compared to social events,” says Sanchez. “It’s not just about the food; it’s about what the event is set to achieve. Whether it’s showcasing company culture, thanking the team, launching a product, or just a bit of brand flaunting, every corporate event has a clear target.”

This is where staying abreast of business trends can be an asset. By staying attuned to the economic health and trends within specific industries, caterers will have a stronger leg to stand on when delivering their proposals.

“It’s about more than just understanding food,” says Sanchez, “it’s about comprehending the business environments our clients operate in and how those environments influence their needs, preferences, and budgetary constraints. Keeping a finger on the pulse of not just the catering industry but also the sectors we cater to is crucial.”

This new world of corporate catering isn’t without its challenges, though. For example, corporate clients’ planning timelines are getting shorter and shorter. Whereas previously caterers had months to plan and execute a corporate event, today they are being tasked to turnaround in mere weeks, and in some extreme cases even days.

“With less runway from an initial inquiry to booking and execution, it is more difficult to forecast corporate catering revenues,” says Sogge.

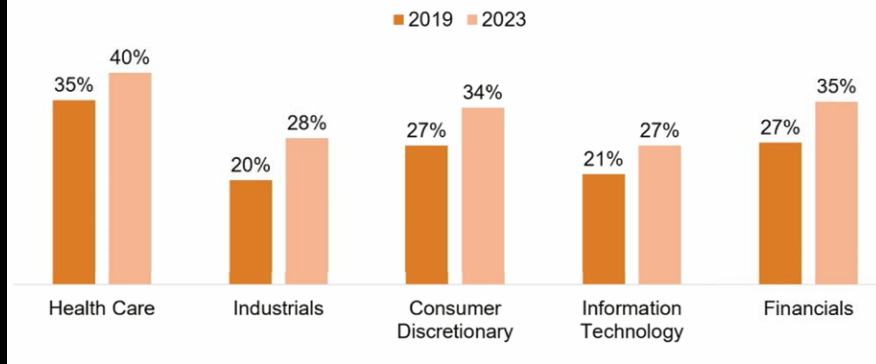
This means embracing digital solutions for quicker proposal turnaround, implementing tech-driven systems for more efficient event management, and continually seeking ways to enhance the client and your staff’s experience through innovation.

“We have to be creative and show that we can produce a flawless event in a limited amount of time,” said Michael Cerbelli (Cerbelli Creative) during Catersource + The Special Event 2024.

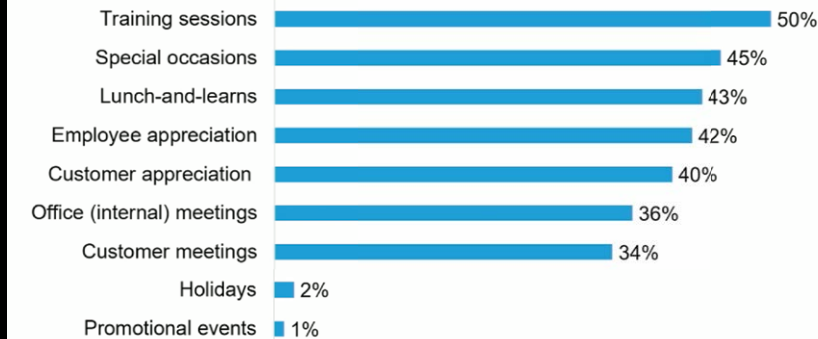
(This page) For this ACE-winning corporate event, Proof of the Pudding took guests on a culinary trip through time as a way to not only honor the Atlanta Airport District Convention and Visitors Bureau’s achievements but to also take a glimpse into the exciting future of the community. Top: The team created a Coke Float station with bourbon caramel ice cream, Coca-Cola® pearls, and carbonated sugar. To add to the visual effect, the coke floats were served emerging from a cloud of dry ice; Middle: Peach & Tomato Bruschetta; Right: The Back to the Summertime Citrus Salad featured citrus segments and candied Georgia pecans over local arugula and frisée with a basil vinaigrette. Photos courtesy Amanda Mazonkey



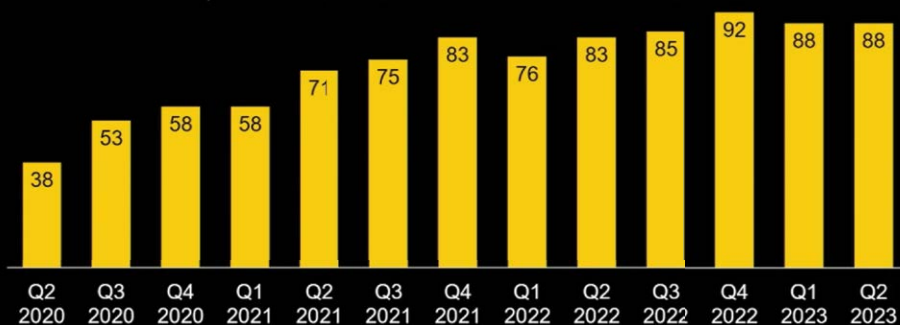
CATERING'S SHARE OF BUSINESS DINING DOLLARS BY INDUSTRY



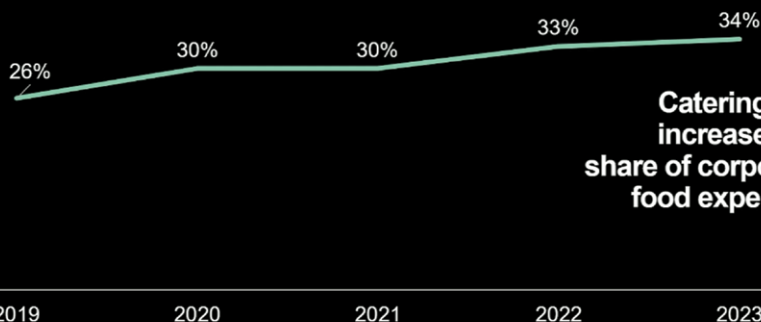
BUSINESS CATERING OCCASIONS
% OF BUYERS ORDERING IN PAST YEAR



BUSINESS DINING GROWTH
(DINOVA BUSINESS DINING INDEX)
100 = \$ SALES COMPARED TO EQUIVALENT QUARTER IN 2019



SHARE OF BUSINESS DINING DOLLARS USED FOR CATERING ORDERS



Catering has increased its share of corporate food expenses

Talking trends

The days of standard sandwich platters and generic salads are waning, giving rise to a demand for diverse and culturally rich culinary experiences. Corporate caterers are now incorporating global flavors, dietary accommodations, and unique cuisines to cater to the diverse tastes of modern workforces. This shift reflects the importance of food in fostering a vibrant and inclusive corporate culture.

“Mindsets have evolved over the past couple years,” says Wexler, “so the question becomes how can we loop food and beverage into that?”

“The rapid pace of trend dissemination through social media and other platforms means that being on the cutting edge is not just preferred—it's expected,” adds Sanchez.

Sustainability takes center stage

In an era where environmental consciousness is at its peak, corporate catering is embracing sustainability with open arms. From sourcing locally grown produce to implementing zero-waste practices, companies are increasingly seeking catering partners who share their commitment to eco-friendly initiatives (turn to page 42 for a deeper dive on sustainability).

A recent study by Eventbrite found that 84% of event planners are taking steps to make their events more sustainable.

Consider this example: During the WasteExpo tradeshow (held at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans) attendees enjoyed a gourmet zero-waste lunch, prepared by the convention center's food and beverage partner Sodexo Live!, that utilized leftover ingredients.

“Food waste is becoming a growing concern in the world of sustainability,

These graphics were compiled by Technomic, which delivers industry research and insights.

so this was an amazing way to bring a different look to 'food waste,'" says Phonecia Jackson (Sodexo Live!). "It opens the mind of someone who might see an item as waste/garbage to think of new and exciting ways to treat that product."

This isn't the only way to approach food waste from a sustainability perspective either. The JW Marriott Marco Island has created a consistent food waste reduction program to prevent waste with such measures as serving small plates totaling four to five ounces to avoid buffet overserve, and a new Orca food aerobic digester system helps to eliminate food waste headed for landfills. Before the end of last year alone, the Orca system helped to divert 135,280 pounds of food. Chefs also take care to source local food whenever possible from farms and producers, and an oil recycling program helps to collect used cooking oils and transform them into biodiesel.

By adopting sustainable practices during their corporate events, such as conserving water, reducing waste (turn to page 76 for another food waste reduction technique, fermentation), and offsetting carbon emissions, caterers can significantly reduce their environmental footprint.

It's all about the local event experience

Corporate events are seeing a shift toward more localized experiences; with the rise of remote work and virtual events, attendees are seeking out authentic local experiences when they do attend in-person events. For businesses hosting corporate events, this means incorporating elements of the local culture into their event design, whether it's through food and beverage options or showcasing local performers.

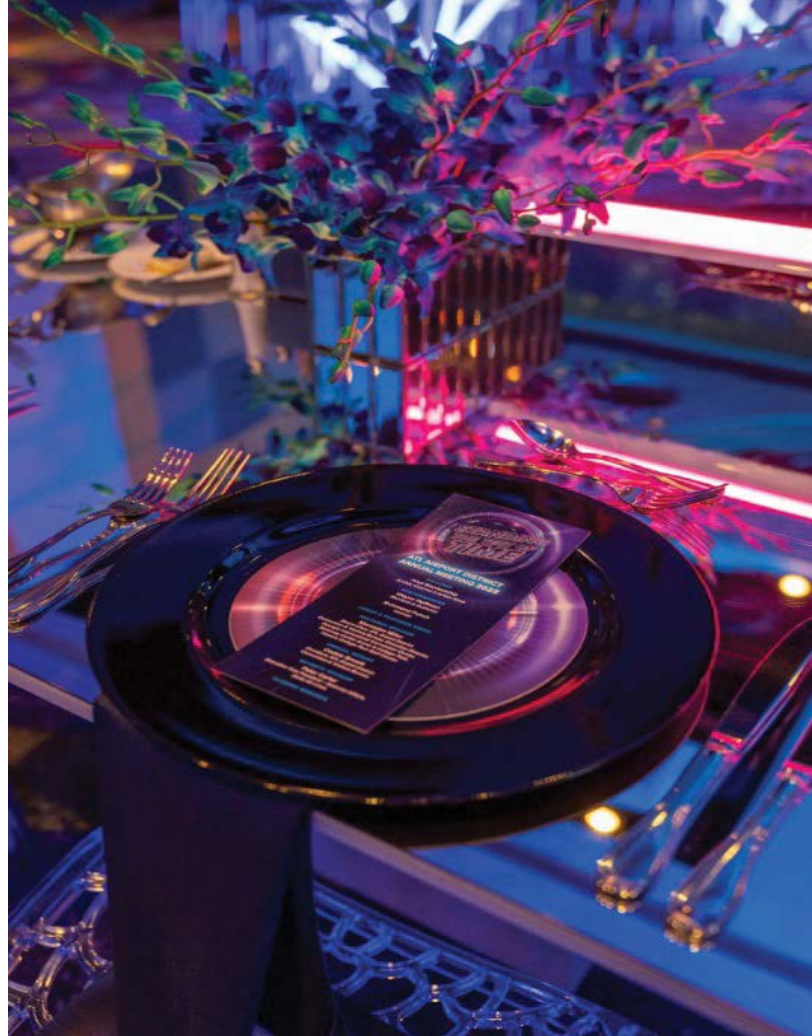
"What we've tried to lean into is personalization and localization," says Wexler, "by getting to know the person behind the food, the person behind the bar."

Be well, and stay well

Corporate catering is not just about feeding employees; it's about nourishing their well-being.

As companies prioritize employee health and well-being, there is a growing demand for nutritious and wellness-focused options. This trend has given rise

(This page) This ACE-winning event by Vibrant Table & Catering & Events involved a reception followed by a sit-down lunch with an ambitious stage program. The overall menu concept was to feature dishes which had "stood the test of time," by rejuvenating some former favorites from the conference center and adding a modern twist. Top: Place setting and menu; Right: The pre-set salads were presented on white rectangular plates, which augmented the colorful tables with their centerpieces of orchids and illuminated cubes, while the bright flavors cleansed the palate. Photos courtesy Amanda Mazonkey





to healthier, plant-based options and customizable catering menus that cater to diverse dietary needs. As we move through 2024, caterers are delving deeper into wellness-oriented menus, integrating nutritional expertise into their offerings to align with the growing emphasis on employee health and vitality. Think menu items such as superfoods and plant-based choices, as well as wellness programs, reflecting a broader societal shift towards healthier lifestyles.

On the beverage side of things, many corporate events are trading in cocktail hours in favor of **non-alcoholic options** such as gourmet coffees and teas, non-alcoholic beer and wine, and of course spirit-free cocktails. Attendees enjoy them, and the drinks don't interfere with their ability to remain professional or focus on the information being shared.

Over at the JW Marriott Marco Island, the resort has developed menus that are specifically crafted to boost energy, gut health, and brain power/focus. Additionally, the resort offers "mocktail" mixology classes as well as cooking demonstrations to encourage healthy eating long after the event is complete.

Emerging trends

Additional trends currently on the horizon include:

- Food carts for specialty items like gelato carts, ice cream carts, and boozy popsicle carts add an interactive and fun element to events.
- While lunch is top of mind for most businesses when thinking about workplace catering, **breakfast** is having a moment. A recent survey from ezCater showed that 42% of workers don't have enough time to eat breakfast in the morning—a testament to the demand for breakfast catering—and 67% of workers believe that skipping breakfast negatively affects their productivity. People are looking for innovative ways to engage and connect, and the breakfast setting provides a relaxed and casual atmosphere that encourages networking and socializing.
- Are you looking for more customization in terms of shape, structure, and flavor profile for your next corporate event? Then 3D-printed food may be



(This page) Top: Seravezza Events at The Franklin Institute is the hospitality partner of The Franklin Institute in Philadelphia. Photo courtesy Levy Cultural Attractions; Left: An intimate dinner under the stars at Fels Planetarium at The Franklin Institute, where guests were enchanted by mirrored table and astronomical presentations. The awe-inspiring 60-foot dome provided the ultimate screen for cosmic exploration alongside a curated menu. Photo courtesy Thomas Whelan

the way to go. This innovative technology allows caterers to create intricate and visually stunning edible designs, from personalized chocolate sculptures to intricate pastry decorations. Not only does 3D food printing delight guests with its creativity, but it also opens possibilities for branding opportunities.

“Food has the power to transform any gathering into an experience that resonates on a deeper level,” says Sanchez. “It’s about offering something incredible that sparks conversations, fosters connections, and enriches the overall event experience,” says Sanchez.

A need for networking

One of the biggest draws of corporate events for attendees is the chance to network, which is perhaps why today’s events are gravitating more towards intimate, smaller gatherings.

2024 is a year for meaningful connections. While large conferences have their place, the trend in 2024 leans toward smaller, more intimate gatherings. These events offer greater opportunities for networking, learning, and engagement. Think smaller and more intimate events with the focus on high-end dining experiences for smaller groups such as a six-course tasting dinner with beverage pairings, or a variety of interactive chef stations (turn to page 112 for some action station inspiration). Intimate gatherings like immersive dinners, retreats, and workshops can offer unique experiences that can help build communities and deepen relationships in crucial ways. These events create the perfect setting for quality time between attendees, executives, and sales teams—allowing for in-depth discussions, bonding experiences, and ideally, a better understanding of the audience’s needs and feedback.

According to [American Express’s 2024 Global Meetings & Events Forecast](#), small events and meetings are more important than ever as distributed workforces become the norm.

Many companies are also looking to stay closer to home with localized events, which not only resolves the travel budget barrier, but can also foster a sense of community and belonging among attendees.

(This page) Top: Seravezza Events Executive Chef Zachary Conover serves hand-carved Peking Duck on live-action prepared scallion pancakes, topped with hoisin ginger sauce and fresh sliced scallions, at a Welcome Reception at The Franklin Institute. Photo courtesy Morby Photography; Middle: Hand Carved Steak Au Poivre, creamy Dauphinoise potato stack, rich creamed spinach, savory chicken fricassee, and sautéed green beans; Right: Seravezza Events at The Franklin Institute’s Chef’s Table featuring Raclette Cheese Gratinée and accompanied by a French Olive Bar with roasted peppers and baby green tip carrots. Photos courtesy Windborne Co.





Small is also the name of the game in terms of plate size as well; smaller plates are portable, thus allowing employees to network and still shake hands when they need to. Think miniature food items (sliders and desserts in shot glasses) and individual cheese and charcuterie boards.

Interactive and immersive experiences are also becoming increasingly in demand, since they deliver a shared experience among attendees, thus strengthening connection among attendees. From live chef interactions to personalized cooking classes, from floating appetizers to champagne walls and take-and-explore appetizers—the demand for dynamic and engaging food presentations is on the rise.

“People are looking for opportunities to be interactive from start to finish,” says Sogge. “This brings everyone together and fosters camaraderie.”

Finding lifelong clients

Working with corporate clients is a completely different playground for caterers when compared to social clients. While social clients may be “one and done,” the same cannot be said for the corporate side of things. These are clients that not only host multiple events over the course of a year, but these same events occur year after year, so getting your foot in the corporate world will guarantee to set your company up for long-term success.

“It’s a game plan; not just for an event, but for the company, for your career,” said Cerbelli.

“Social gatherings are great, but with corporate clients, the game changes,” adds Sanchez.

“They’re not just hosting one-off events; they’re looking at a series of engagements throughout the year, from regular in-office lunches to drop-off catering and even personal social events. This continuous interaction requires us to be in tune with their needs, ensuring we’re more than just caterers—we’re their go-to for every occasion, big or small.”



(This page) Top: Guests attending a corporate dinner were treated to dinner and a show, including glow-in-the-dark hula dancers; Left: Vibrant Table Catering & Events assembled 30 feet of seasonal salads in real time during a corporate reception, inviting guests to interact with the chefs and the food. Photos courtesy Evrim Icoz Photo

In the competitive world of corporate catering, standing out requires both creative outreach and solid networking. Start by tapping into your local network and associations. Become an active member of your local chamber of commerce, connect with your convention and visitor bureau, and build relationships with Destination Management Companies (DMCs) in your area (check out this year's DMCs spotlight in the adjoining *Special Events* magazine) to open doors to a plethora of new client opportunities. These connections not only help expand your reach, but they can also help embed your brand within the local business ecosystem.

"It's about more than just expanding your client base, it's about evolving your services and enhancing your resilience in an ever-changing market," says Sanchez. "It's not enough to be responsive; success in corporate catering demands anticipation of trends and readiness to pivot strategies at a moment's notice."

Even if it's a small corporate meeting and may not necessarily be the type of event you want, it'll still get your foot in the door. The key to corporate events is making that first touchpoint.

"I'm not too big in the britches to say we're not doing scones and coffee," said Jeffrey Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events) during Catersource + The Special Event 2024.

Once you've made the connection, it's time to develop the relationship. Be consistent, be exceptional, stay adaptable, be responsive to client needs, be innovative, know what you do well and revel in it, be excited for every event, and most of all, be a visionary.

"It's about building a deeper relationship and not just getting the client," said Cerbelli. "It's about building a friendship."

The industry is evolving to meet the dynamic needs of modern businesses, recognizing that catering is not just about providing sustenance but also contributing to a positive corporate culture.

(This page) Top: This Coconut Bar from Blue Plate Catering during the Annual User Conference Closing Reception included hollowed out fresh coconuts where guests could choose their non-alcoholic drink (Coconut Water, tropical punch, or cucumber lemonade); Middle: Tropical grilled shrimp skewer with fresh mango, avocado, and lime cilantro vinaigrette; Right: Blue Plate Catering worked with tech company Relativity to produce their Annual User Conference Closing Reception at the Field Museum of Chicago. The theme of the event was "It's a Jungle Out There." Photos courtesy Lacour Images





VW branded cupcakes from Schaffer for a product launch event. Photo courtesy Schaffer

So, are you ready to start your climb up the corporate catering ladder?

“It’s a thrilling time to be in catering,” says Sanchez, “as we continue to explore new horizons and redefine what’s possible in our industry.”

“Venturing into the corporate catering space can be a transformative move for caterers looking to diversify and strengthen their businesses. The pandemic taught us the crucial lesson of not putting all our eggs in one basket; relying solely on one segment can limit growth and increase vulnerability to market fluctuations.” **CS**



(Top left) Schaffer helped to stage the Volkswagen Beach Party as the launch event for the new ID.BUZZ, the modern successor to the brand’s iconic VW Bus. For the event, the team designed a surf-culture menu and immersed attendees in VW logos and iconography at literally every service point: from acai bowls in VW-branded coconuts to SoCal Breakfast Grain Bowls, tacos, and custom pastries; (Left) Cold brew coffee station. Photos courtesy Schaffer

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**SPECIAL
EVENTS**

Discover the Pasta-bilities

Pasta has found its place on catering menus thanks to its affordability, availability, versatility, and popularity.

Pasta is not just a dish. It's a universal language of flavor and comfort. From Italian classics to global pasta delights, each dish tells a unique story and offers a distinct gastronomic experience.

"Pasta is a vessel for anything," says Chef Robert "BJ" Beisler (Santé and The Farmer's Dinner). "Almost anything can be served alongside pasta with enough thought and proper execution."

Simply put, pasta offers a blank canvas for creativity.

"Everybody loves pasta; they know it, it's comfortable," says Chef Latisha Rodgers (Comfortable Gourmet). "My job as the chef is to give you a flavor adventure, so I can use pasta as that stepping stone to give people something new and different."

Let's take a look at why pasta has remained a timeless classic among consumers and caterers alike.

Pasta served directly out of a parmesan cheese wheel. Photo courtesy The JDK Group



This pasta salad from Felicetti features farfalle pasta, red pepper, bacon, olive oil, Romaine lettuce, and pesto. Photo courtesy Felicetti

“Pasta is a vessel for anything. Almost anything can be served alongside pasta with enough thought and proper execution.” —Chef Robert “BJ” Beisler

PANCETTA FARFALLE PASTA SALAD

Recipe courtesy Felicetti

INGREDIENTS FOR THE SALAD

- 1 bag Felicetti Organic Farfalle
- 1 ea. red pepper
- 4 oz pancetta or bacon
- Olive oil
- Salt
- 1 ea. leaf of Romaine lettuce

INGREDIENTS FOR LIGHT PESTO

- 5 ea. leaves of Romaine lettuce
- 1 T almonds (peeled)
- 2 T Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, grated
- 1 ea. clove garlic
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 pinch freshly grounded pepper
- ½ cup olive oil

METHOD

1. Bring a pot of water to a boil. Add salt and drop the farfalle pasta in the water and cook as directed on the bag. When done, drain and put under cold running water and let cool to room temp.
2. While the pasta is cooling you can cook the pancetta (or bacon) and make the pesto. Add the pancetta or bacon slices in a medium hot non-stick pan and let cook until crunchy. When crunchy let them drain on a paper towel.
3. Light Pesto: Put all the ingredients in the food processor (or blender) and run it until everything is puréed. If the pesto is too thick, add a spoonful of fresh water.
4. Prepare the Salad: Put the pasta in a large bowl. Add the Light Pesto and mix gently. Prepare the red pepper. Cut it into four pieces, remove white parts and seeds. Cut it into narrow strips and add to bowl. Chop the Romaine lettuce leaf into strips and add. Then crumble the pancetta or bacon in small pieces and drop over the salad and mix to combine all the ingredients.
5. Before serving, drizzle some of your favorite balsamic vinaigrette to add some color!



APPLE CINNAMON CHEESECAKE LASAGNA

Recipe courtesy Chef Shannon Sisson for Barilla

Photo courtesy Barilla America

INGREDIENTS FOR APPLE PIE LAYER

- 10 ea. cans sliced apples, chopped into smaller pieces
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cinnamon
- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour
- 1 cup melted butter or margarine

INGREDIENTS FOR CHEESECAKE LAYER

- 32 oz cream cheese
- 4 cups powdered sugar
- 6 eggs
- 4 T vanilla extract

INGREDIENTS FOR STREUSEL TOPPING

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup brown sugar
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour
- 2 tsp cinnamon

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 300° F.
2. Mix the following together all ingredients for the Apple Pie Layer and reserve.
3. Mix the Cheesecake Layer ingredients with a mixer until well blended.
4. Blend all ingredients for the Streusel Topping with a mixer. Keep all layers in separate bowls.
5. Build lasagna starting with a small amount of apple slices in the bottom of the pan.
6. Place one lasagna noodle and add about 2-2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of Apple Pie mixture for the first layer, then add a noodle, and then cheesecake layer using about $\frac{1}{2}$ of cheesecake mixture.
7. Repeat layers with the cheesecake layer on top.
8. Bake at 300° F uncovered for 45 minutes, add streusel topping and bake until cheesecake is firm in the middle and pasta is tender.

A penne for your thoughts

Since the pandemic, pasta has experienced a rebirth. It has found its place now that consumers are looking to return to the basics and are searching for comfort and familiarity in an increasingly chaotic world, and nothing says “comfort food” like a hearty bowl of pasta.

According to a [Grain Foods Foundation survey](#), approximately one-third of U.S. consumers named pasta (36%) and bread (29%) as foods that are comforting during a stressful time.

“I love all things pasta,” says Beisler. “It really brings people together.”

Pasta’s popularity doesn’t just stem from consumer’s love for comforting classics, however; it also checks a lot of different boxes for consumer preferences, including sustainability and health consciousness. Let’s dive into some of the current trends bringing pasta to the spotlight.



Whole grain penne rigate with parsley pesto, stracciatella di bufala, and green beans. Photo courtesy Academia Barilla

Spaghetti junction

Pasta is often considered the intersection between indulgence and wellness. With the continued popularity of the Mediterranean Diet (key components of the diet include fruits, vegetables, seafood, lean meat, nuts and legumes, beans, and whole wheat), pasta has proven to be a natural fit.

Not only is pasta an ideal vehicle for adding healthful and plant-based foods as well as high protein items like lean meat and poultry into a diet, but pasta is no longer confined to traditional wheat-based formulations either. Innovative producers are experimenting with alternative ingredients such as chickpea flour, lentil flour, and quinoa to create unique



Linguini with truffle pearl and mushroom sauce twirled on a fork and finished with porcini powder from Sugar Beach Events. Photo courtesy MeewMeew Studios

and nutritious pasta options. These alternatives not only diversify the market but also cater to the growing demand for gluten-free and protein-rich products.

Sustainability success

Sustainability is a key driver in the modern food industry, and the pasta market is no exception. From eco-friendly packaging to sourcing ingredients responsibly, many pasta producers are adopting sustainable practices. Consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that prioritize environmental consciousness, contributing to a positive impact on both the planet and their plate.

Pasta tends to be paired with garden vegetables, and more traditional recipes, such as ragù and carbonara, may be reinterpreted in plant-based, organic, and low-waste ways for the benefit of health and the environment.

This is where the idea of seasonality comes into play. Think pasta salads in the spring and summer that utilize fresh ingredients, or for more autumnal dishes, perhaps parsnip

GLOBAL VIEWS ON PASTA

By celebrating pasta around the world, we open ourselves up to a rich mosaic of diverse cultures and culinary traditions.

Italy

Italy offers an incredible variety of shapes, sauces, and dishes. Some popular Italian pasta dishes include spaghetti Bolognese (with meat sauce), fettuccine Alfredo (with a creamy sauce), lasagna (layered with meat, cheese, and tomato sauce), and pesto pasta (with a basil, garlic, and pine nut sauce). Italians typically eat pasta as a first course (primo) before the main course (secondo).

United States

Americans have embraced pasta and adapted it to their tastes. Some popular American pasta dishes include macaroni and cheese (elbow pasta with a creamy cheese sauce), spaghetti and meatballs (spaghetti with large, Italian-American-style meatballs), and pasta salad (cold pasta mixed with vegetables and a dressing, often served as a side dish).

Greece

Pastitsio is a popular Greek pasta dish made with tubular pasta, ground meat, tomato sauce, and béchamel sauce, layered and baked in the oven. Another well-known Greek pasta dish is yovetsi, which combines pasta, meat (usually lamb or beef), and tomato sauce.

Hungary

In Hungarian cuisine, pasta is often combined with meat, vegetables, and spices. One popular dish is csusza, which is made with pasta, sour cream, bacon, and sometimes cheese.

Mexico

Mexican cuisine incorporates pasta in dishes like sopa de fideo, a soup made with tomato, onion, garlic, and chicken broth. Fideo seco is a similar dish but served without the broth.

Germany

Germans aren't particularly known for their pasta, but käsespätzle from the region of Swabia in southwestern Germany is a delicious dish, which is also enjoyed in Austria. Käsespätzle is served with roasted onions, fresh parsley, and most importantly, generous amounts of cream and cheese.

Spain

Known more for its tasty rice dishes than pasta recipes, locals in Catalonia enjoy the relatively new yet popular Catalan Cannelloni. The dish is said to be especially tasty with a generous splash of mellow Spanish wine and some nutmeg. The cannelloni also contain meat, varying from pork to beef, or even innards such as lamb's brains and chicken liver. If that doesn't take your fancy, perhaps you should give Fideuà a try. The seafood dish originates from the coast of Valencia, but has become popular nationwide—think the pasta version of paella, with short pasta instead of rice.



SHRIMP, ARTICHOKE, PEAS & LEMON ORECCHIETTE

YIELD: 200

Recipe courtesy Charlie Schaffer, Schaffer

INGREDIENTS

- 5 cups olive oil
- 10 cups artichoke hearts, canned, chopped small
- 10 cups English peas, frozen and defrosted
- 2½ lbs shrimp, small
- 10 cups leeks, small diced & washed
- 5 lbs orecchiette
- 10 cups dry white wine
- To taste salt to taste pepper
- 5 T chili flake
- 20 cups water (veggie stock, shrimp stock)
- 20 T butter, cubed
- 5 cups parmesan, grated
- 1 cup lemon zest, microplaned (or lemon oil)
- 5 cups Italian parsley, chopped
- 2½ cups tarragon, chopped

METHOD

1. In a 14" sauté pan, cook artichokes with ¼ cup of the olive oil to heat up and lightly caramelize. Add peas to warm, remove all from pan and reserve.
2. In the same pan heat another ¼ cup of the olive oil to high heat, add shrimp and cook until nearly done, remove from heat and reserve.
3. In an eight quart pot, sweat leeks on medium heat with ¼ cup of the olive oil until soft.
4. Add pasta to the pot, stir into leeks and toast the pasta one minute.
5. Add white wine, chili flake, salt, and pepper, and stir the pasta as wine evaporates for one minute.
6. Add broth to nearly cover the pasta, bring to a simmer and stir as broth evaporates so the pasta cooks evenly for about eight minutes. The broth should evaporate by about two-thirds leaving a slightly creamy sauce.
7. When pasta is very al dente, add the artichokes, peas, and shrimp. Continue to stir to incorporate.
8. Remove the pasta from heat, and slowly pour in the remaining ½ cup olive oil. Once olive oil is fully incorporated, add the butter and continue stirring. Once butter is fully mounted into the pasta sauce, add the parmesan cheese, lemon zest, and chopped herbs. Continue to stir until the cheese is melted and the pasta has a loose and creamy consistency that will gently spread out on a plate.

pasta, pumpkin, and even creamy potato filling?

"I love it as a carrier for local ingredients," says Thomas Horner (Misty Clover Farm).

Additionally, since chefs often cook more pasta than they actually need, there is great opportunity to give pasta a new life. There are many traditional Italian recipes that use [leftover pasta](#) to create completely new dishes, thus reducing food waste.

Supporting stars

The magic of pasta lies in its ability to pair seamlessly with myriad sauces. Caterers can experiment with a range of sauces, from rich and creamy Alfredo to zesty marinara, ensuring that every palate is satisfied. Customization is key; offering a selection of sauces allows guests to tailor their dining experience, making your catering service stand out.

"There is a true art to pairing pastas and sauce," says Beisler. "Each unique shape has a certain purpose."

We also know that cheese is a key ingredient in most pasta dishes, and as always, ricotta, mascarpone,



Chef David Rivillo has garnered social media fame for his colorful, striped pasta design. Photo courtesy David Rivillo

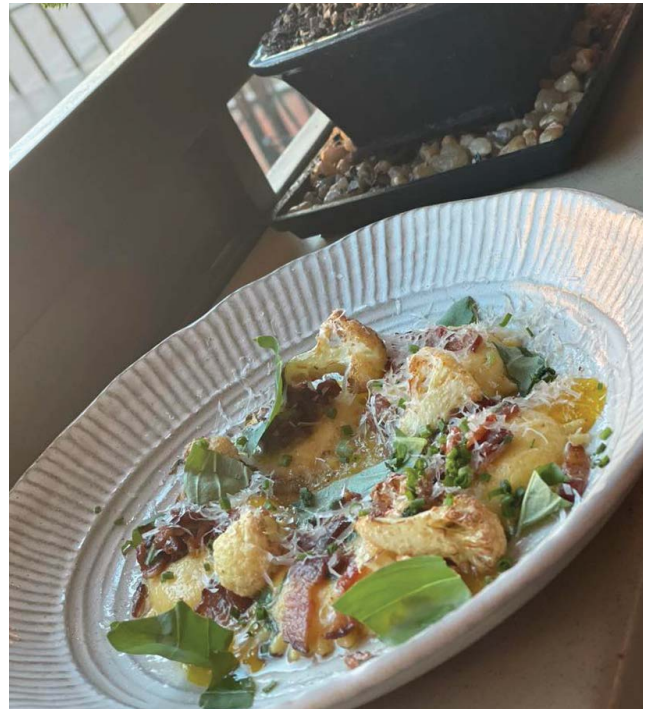
pecorino, and parmesan are ever-popular choices, as well as a bit of gorgonzola. But a few other Italian classics are making their way into dishes, like stracciatella and smoked scamorza.

Vegetables are also now playing a larger role as pasta partners. When it comes to using vegetables in pasta, zucchini, broccoli, and butternut squash are all solid choices and help to bring color into what can be a very beige dish. But don't stop there: think roasted leeks, split peas, kale pesto, and asparagus to brighten things up.

It's time to innovate

Today's consumers are looking for "comfort food with a twist," which is why pasta recipes are constantly evolving as a way to break out of the mold.

First up, layered pasta (such as lasagna) offers the opportunity to innovate within each layer. Modern interpretations include flavored béchamel, burrata dollops, cheese creams, demi-glace infusions, enhanced pasta sheets, and thinly stacked extra layers of pasta



FLOODING RAVIOLI FILLING

Recipe courtesy Chef Robert "BJ" Beisler

INGREDIENTS

1 cup cream
2 sheets of gelatin
4 ea. cloves of garlic
3 ea. shallots
3 egg yolks
Black pepper
Salt
2 cups of parmesan
Oil
Thyme
Bay leaves
White wine

METHOD

1. Start by slicing garlic and shallots and start to sweat in a pan with a small amount of oil. Once translucent and fragrant deglaze with white wine and reduce until almost all wine is gone, add cream, thyme, peppercorns and bay leaves. Simmer for 10-15 minutes.
2. While simmering, beat egg yolks until ribbons form and bloom. Once cream is simmered, strain and temper egg yolks and then add mixture to pan and cook until slightly thickened. Add cheese and gelatin and mix thoroughly. Once mixed, strain into a pan and cover and refrigerate until set.
3. Once set, put the mixture into piping bags to fill pastas. Once the filling is heated thoroughly it becomes liquid again.

ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

Pasta comes in all shapes and sizes.

"There are so many different shapes and sizes, and they all have a very important use," says Chef Robert "BJ" Beisler. (Santé and the Farmer's Dinner). "Each one serves its purpose and there's a time and place for everything."

Here's a look:

Long/Ribbon Cut

Long, ribbon-cut pastas are often lumped into the "spaghetti" category, but there are actually many variations.

- **SPAGHETTI:** The standard (and most popular) long noodle with a medium density.
- **CAPELLINI:** With ultra-thin strands that measure between 0.85 and 0.92 millimeters, this pasta is delicate and falls apart if overcooked. It's often labeled as "angel hair" pasta.
- **LINGUINE:** Strands of pasta with rounded edges that are wider than spaghetti.
- **TAGLIATELLE:** Often made of egg-enriched dough, this medium-wide and toothsome noodle can stand up to meaty sauces.



- **FETTUCCINE:** Flat, thick pasta with a name meaning "little ribbons" in Italian.
- **PAPPARDELLE:** Large, broad, flat pasta wider than fettuccine. Often made with egg added to the dough.
- **BUCATINI:** Rounded strands that look like spaghetti; however, unlike

spaghetti, bucatini has a long hole running through its center. May also be called perciatelli.

- **LASAGNA:** Sheets of pasta rolled out to medium thickness. Usually layered with sauce, cheese, veggies, and/or meats, while baked into a classic Italian American casserole (or simmered in soup).

Short

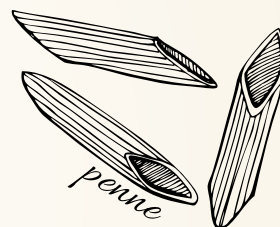
Smaller pasta shapes, interchangeably called "macaroni," fall within the one- to two-inch range. They're best served with thick, chunky sauces or baked into creamy casseroles. Their sturdy shapes also hold up well in pasta salads, though the smallest of the small are best in soups.



- **FARFALLE:** Bowtie-shaped pieces named after the Italian word for "butterfly," farfalla.
- **ORECCHIETTE:** Concave, somewhat flattened little shells. Originated in Southern Italy with a name meaning "small ear."
- **ROTINI:** Tight corkscrews that are especially good at holding onto thick sauces. You may also see them labeled as "fusilli."
- **ORZO:** Small pasta shaped like grains of rice. These are often added to garden salads, pasta salads, and soups.
- **DITALINI:** Small tube-like shapes, commonly used in pasta e fagioli. The name means "small thimbles" in Italian.

Tube-Shaped

Tube-shaped pastas are also called "extruded pasta," as they are made by forcing dough through a die to form various shapes. In artisan pasta-making traditions, bronze dies are used to create a coarser texture.



- **PENNE:** Cylinder-shaped pieces that come to a small point on both ends. The name is derived from the Italian word penna, which means "pen."
- **RIGATONI:** Slightly curved, tubed-shaped pastas, usually larger than penne. The name is derived from the Italian word rigato, which means "ridged" or "lined."
- **MACARONI:** Technically, "macaroni" is a general word to categorize small and medium dried-pasta shapes. In America, it has become somewhat synonymous with elbow macaroni, the small, curved tubes traditionally used in mac and cheese and pasta salads.
- **CANNELLONI:** Smooth tubes, most often covered in sauce and baked after stuffing.
- **MANICOTTI:** Large tubes like cannelloni but with ridges. This

(Continued on page 70)

and/or vegetables. Raw, pickled, grilled, roasted, or fried vegetable medleys add intrigue while heartier versions see layering of ingredients like Bolognese blends, roasted leg of lamb, or pulled chunks of Barolo-braised beef short rib for soul-soothing flavors.

Another exciting trend that has been making waves is the creation of striped pasta. This visually stunning technique involves layering different colored doughs (dyed with the help of powders, juices, and squid ink) to create striking patterns within the pasta itself. From vibrant rainbow stripes to elegant two-tone designs, striped pasta adds a whimsical and artistic flair to any dish. If striped pasta is a little bit beyond your skill level, you can still add a little color to your pasta by cooking it in red wine, coffee, beet juice, and other colored liquids.

Pasta is also breaking free of its traditional home on menus as a side or main course and instead is tapping into appetizers, desserts (see accompanying recipe on page 64), and even soups and salads (see accompanying recipe on page 63).

Brunch is also proving to be an ideal occasion to infuse bold, bright playfulness into hot and cold pasta creations, in dishes like spaghetti fritter appetizers or breakfast carbonara.

From rotini to rigatoni

Perhaps due to its global roots, the love for pasta transcends borders and the global demand for this versatile dish continues to soar. From the iconic Italian varieties like spaghetti and penne to other global dishes (see accompanying sidebar for a crash course on pasta from around the world), the pasta market is witnessing an unprecedented surge in popularity. Factors such as convenience, versatility, and the increasing



Wood oven baked lasagna carbonara with guanciale, pecorino, and salted pepperberries (Barilla). Photo courtesy *Catersource* staff



Lasagnas Around the World. Photo courtesy Barilla America



Spicy Rigatoni Alla Vodka. Photo courtesy Barilla America

ALL SHAPES AND SIZES *(Continued)*

shape originated in Italian American cuisine and is also baked after stuffing.

- **ZITI:** Hollow, straw-shaped pasta that is smaller and narrower than rigatoni and frequently baked into saucy, cheesy casseroles.

Stuffed

Some pastas are shaped specifically to hold other ingredients like cheese, meat, and vegetables. These types of pastas are best served in butter, cream, or tomato sauces to allow the flavorful filling to shine.



Ravioli

- **RAVIOLI:** Two flat sheets of pasta that form a dumpling-like structure for filling (most commonly cheese).
- **TORTELLINI:** Little rings filled with cheese, meat, or other ingredients. Tortelloni is like tortellini but is about two times larger.
- **CAPPELETTI:** Small, filled pasta, folded diagonally so they resemble the shape of a hat.
- **AGNOLOTTI:** Small, crimped pillows, with fillings similar to ravioli.
- **FAGOTTINI:** Little bundles of pasta, usually filled with vegetables like carrots, onions, and green beans, as well as ricotta cheese.
- **MEZZELUNE:** Crimped semicircles stuffed with cheese and sometimes veggies or meat.

Dumplings

Dumplings are small wavy pasta cuts that are best in soup, entrées, side

dishes, or oven-bakes. Dumplings are great with cream or cheese sauces, gravy, light tomato sauce, or simple butter (or olive oil) tosses.

- **GNOCCHI:** These Italian dumplings are shaped from a mixture of egg, potato, and all-purpose flour; they are served with butter, cheese, or other sauces.
- **HALUŠKY:** A traditional variety of cooked dumplings in Central and Eastern Europe, they are made with a batter of flour and egg or potatoes (such as bryndzové halušky, which are from Slovakia).
- **KARTOFFELKNÖDEL:** Knödel is the German word for boiled dumplings, and kartoffelknödel is a version made with potatoes and/or semolina flour to accompany meat dishes. You can also try semmelknödel, made with bread and eggs, and the Jewish matzah balls made from matzo meal.
- **SHLISHKES:** Small boiled potato dumplings made from potato dough and rolled in bread crumbs; they are popular in Hungary.

Couscous

Despite popular belief that couscous is a type of whole grain (it has a rice-like appearance), it is a pasta made of semolina and wheat flour that is moistened and tossed together until it forms little balls. Since couscous is a popular food in many cultures, there are many varieties.

- **MOROCCAN COUSCOUS** is the smallest couscous, with each grain only a little larger than semolina. Because of its small size, it cooks in just a few minutes.
- **ISRAELI COUSCOUS**, also called pearl couscous, is much larger than Moroccan couscous and closely resembles little orbs of pasta. It has

more of a nutty flavor and a chewier texture than smaller varieties and takes about 10 minutes to cook.

- **LEBANESE COUSCOUS**, which is also known as moghrabieh couscous, is the largest of the three types and takes the longest to cook.

Noodles

The best way to think about noodles in general is by separating them into three main categories based on what the noodles are made of: wheat noodles, rice noodles, and noodles made from other starches.

- **CHOW MEIN:** Possibly the most well-known Chinese noodle, chow mein means “pan-fried noodle.” They are sold dried and parboiled, ready for stir-fry.
- **LO MEIN:** Lo mein, which means “mixed or tossed noodle” in Cantonese, is a soft yellow noodle in refrigerated, fresh, or dried forms. The thick round noodles are soft and dense when cooked. They are usually about a foot long and look like fat spaghetti noodles, but they are chewier and yellow from the alkaline (not egg) added to the noodle.
- **UDON:** Popular in Japanese cuisine, udon noodles come in a variety of sizes but are known for their thickness and chewy bite. They’re sold dried, fresh, or frozen.
- **SOBA:** Popular in Japanese cuisine, soba noodles are known for their extra protein and earthy flavor. They are usually greyish brown in color and traditionally made from buckwheat or a buckwheat and wheat flour blend. They are earthy and nutty and sold in packaged bundles.

Information above courtesy the Pasta Glossary

influence of global cuisines contribute to this growing demand.

As global travel becomes more accessible, consumers are eager to explore diverse flavors and culinary traditions. The pasta market reflects this trend with an influx of regional and international pasta varieties. The market embraces a rich tapestry of flavors that caters to the adventurous palate of the modern consumer.

Additionally, when it comes to spicing up your pasta, you don't have to stick to one continent either. Try adding a sprinkle of Indian dried fenugreek leaves or five-spice to your next tomato-based pasta sauce.

One of the hottest styles of mashup cuisine (turn to page 100 for a deeper look at mashup cuisine as it relates to multicultural weddings) is wafu, a fusion of Japanese and Italian; think Italian pastas with umami-laden Japanese ingredients, like a spaghetti with spicy "mentaiko" cod roe, or a miso-inflected cacio e pepe. A splash of soy, hoisin, or oyster sauce in your next ragu will give it an instant umami boost.

Mexican and Italian mashups are also growing in popularity; dishes like sopa seca traditionally use cut spaghetti or fideo pasta, but what about a baked campanelle with poblano cream and guajillo-glazed shrimp?

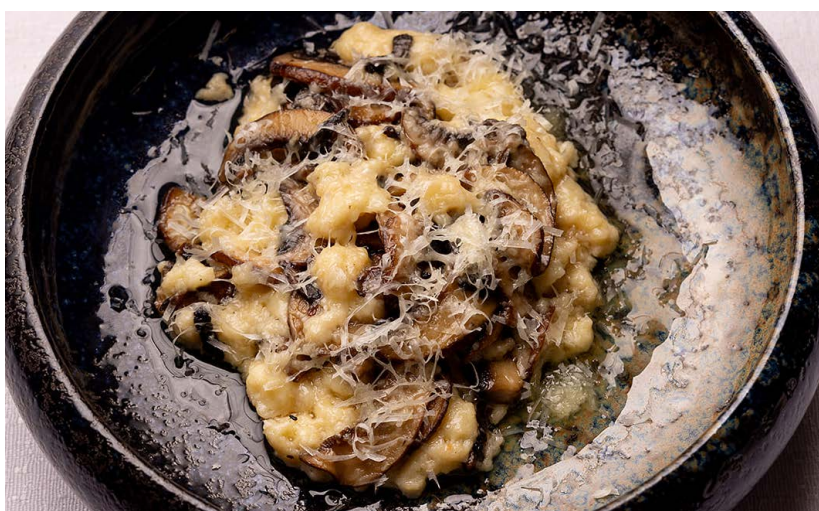
Whatever your clients crave, pasta can satisfy.

Use your noodle

Pasta is a mainstay for caterers everywhere; not only does it look elegant and tastes delicious, but it's also filling. There's nothing worse than attending an event and having a growling stomach an hour after the meal is served. With pasta, you know your guests will stave off hunger long after they finish their last bite.



Chef Robert "BJ" Beisler prepared a stuffed tortellini for sampling during Art of Catering Food. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.



Chef Robert "BJ" Beisler demonstrated how to prepare Parisian gnocchi during Art of Catering Food. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.



Cornelius Pasta Bites: a stunning striped ravioli filled with camembert cheese and cranberry in a lemon butter sauce from Chowgirls Catering. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz

“Pasta is great for catering larger parties because it’s easy and it stretches—a lot of people get fed when pasta’s on the menu,” says Rodgers.

There are very few dishes that can grab the attention of guests while

also being efficient in the back of the house, but pasta is one of them. It’s also affordable.

“Ultimately pasta is just so versatile. It works on an action station and does great on a buffet. Everyone knows what it is, and almost

everyone likes it,” says Horner, “but there’s also a value in pasta that cuts both ways—clients recognize it as an affordable option that will deliver on satisfaction and taste, and operators like me know it can help my numbers work, too.”

Perfecting your pasta

When preparing pasta for your events, there are different approaches, as well as several tips and tricks to perfect it.

“While making pasta is one thing, preparing it for service is another,” says Beisler.

On the one hand, there’s nothing wrong with the traditional preparation of packaged pasta (par cook it in advance, then shock it in cold water to stop the cooking before draining and refrigerating before finishing it onsite in your sauce), this method doesn’t always translate to perfect pasta. Holding pasta for service can sometimes lead to a sticky consistency, and that’s not even accounting for human error when pasta is accidentally overcooked.

“It takes some extra planning when trying to prepare pasta for events. That and trying to plate as close to the dish walking to the table as possible,” says Beisler.

This is where a few tricks of the trade come in handy.

“When you become the greatest pasta cook you can be,” said Chef Michel Cassadei Massari (Lucciola and Felicetti) during Art of Catering Food 2024, “you can keep your creativity where you need it the most—with your clients.”

One tip is to cook dry pasta in a style similar to risotto (see accompanying orecchiette recipe), meaning you can toast the dry pasta lightly and slowly add liquid (whether broth or water) in order to



The Chilled Summer Idaho® Potato "Lasagna" features summer vegetables and cubes of Crispy Potato Confit between russet potatoes. Photo courtesy Idaho Potato Commission



Duck Confit Gnocchi. Photo courtesy Idaho Potato Commission

hydrate the pasta, thus activating the natural starches.

"I think all of our clients and all of our customers want to see pasta on the menu and I think this is a really good solution," said Charlie Schaffer (Schaffer) during a session as part of Art of Catering Food 2023. "It holds up well for service, especially in chafing dishes for your buffets and also for plated dishes as well."

Want to avoid the headache of overcooked pasta all together? The answer lies in fresh, homemade pasta, which is more forgiving than dry.

"Dry pasta serves its purpose, but dry pasta never has this epitome of love to it," says Beisler. "With fresh pasta you can feel the difference as soon as you're biting through it."

Additionally, fresh pasta has a more appealing look.

"While everyone can appreciate perfection, pasta is everything but," says Beisler. "Sometimes the imperfections make it unique."

Making fresh pasta obviously won't be feasible in all catering scenarios, so tread lightly when going this route.

"It does take a lot longer and it takes a lot of know how. While some caterers have access to the equipment necessary to make and serve pasta, doing off-site catered events where there are so many variables, it can be hard to ensure a quality product," says Beisler. "Honestly, working with pasta comes down to two things: time working with dough and feel. Working with your dough and perfecting it takes many failures.

"Being the pasta playboy that I am, I'm quite biased, but there is a time and place for everything. It can be very difficult making fresh pasta for certain events, but when clients are paying top dollar for an event, you really want to make a homemade pasta; it can be done with a little



Linguine Aglio Olio (linguine with garlic, oil, chili pepper, and aromatic herbs).
Photo courtesy Academia Barilla

extra care and planning and the guest will absolutely love it."

Serve it up

The sky's the limit for service when it comes to pasta.

For plated service, contemporary approaches to plate presentations are converting classic nest styles in favor of eye-catching freestyle constructions.

"Plated events are my favorite to showcase pasta as there is more time and space to take the necessary time and care to ensure a quality product," says Beisler.

On the other hand, family style meals can create a sense of warmth and camaraderie among guests, thus harkening back to Italian family dinners of the past.

Obviously, pasta is right at home on a buffet, whether as a prime focus or supporting player.

"Oftentimes on our buffets, we have other dishes that have their own sauces and we really just want the starch to kind of be there and support those dishes," said Schaffer.

Pasta is also prime territory for interactive and engaging experiences, such as live pasta

stations or build-your-own macaroni and cheese bars. Or you can even get your guests in on the fun by having them roll out their own pastas (such as gnocchi) before sitting down to dinner.

"I probably find the best success with pasta as an action station," says Horner. "It's a quick pick up, and guests can customize it—it hits all the senses."

Caterers can also get creative with presentation by serving pasta in restaurant-inspired to-go boxes or offering pasta salads and appetizers in walk-around style cones or cans.

The pasta market is a dynamic and ever-evolving space, where tradition and innovation coexist harmoniously. From healthy alternatives to sustainable practices and global flavors, the pasta market continues to redefine itself, offering a culinary journey that knows no bounds.

By incorporating this timeless and crowd-pleasing addition to your catering repertoire, you can tap into this universally beloved comfort food that allows for endless creativity.

Bon Appetit! 

Effective Negotiation Strategies to Close Sales

Effective negotiation strategies are integral to successfully closing sales. Closing a sale is often the culmination of a series of negotiations, and mastering these strategies can significantly enhance your ability to reach mutually beneficial agreements. Here's how you can apply negotiation strategies specifically in the context of booking more events:

1. Understand customer needs

Before closing a sale, ensure a deep understanding of the customer's needs and priorities. Use this understanding to align your product or service with their specific requirements during the negotiation process.

2. Active listening

During negotiations, actively listen to the customer's concerns, objections, and preferences. This not only builds rapport but also provides insights into what matters most to them.

3. Build rapport and trust

Successful sales often hinge on strong relationships. Establishing trust through effective communication and genuine connection is a continuous negotiation strategy that culminates in the closing stage.

4. Create value

Clearly articulate the value your product or service brings to the customer. Emphasize how it addresses their pain points and offers unique advantages. This strengthens your negotiating position during the closing stage.

5. Flexibility and adaptability

Be flexible in tailoring your offering to meet the customer's needs. Adapt your negotiation strategy based on their feedback and any changes in their requirements.

6. Overcome objections

Effectively address customer objections during negotiations. Instead of viewing objections as roadblocks, treat them as opportunities to provide additional information and address concerns, ultimately moving closer to a successful close.

7. Use closing techniques

Throughout the negotiation process, use trial closes to gauge the customer's readiness to commit. For example, ask questions like, "If we can address this concern, would you be ready to move forward?"

9. Negotiate in stages

If the sale involves multiple steps, negotiate and gain commitments in stages. Each small commitment builds momentum toward the final close.

10. BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement)


Know your BATNA and the customer's BATNA. Understanding the alternatives provides a realistic perspective on the negotiation and closing process.

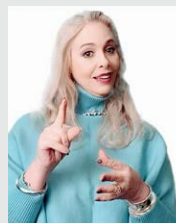
11. Leverage time effectively

When appropriate, introduce a sense of urgency or highlight the scarcity of the offer. Limited-time promotions or exclusive deals can motivate customers to close the sale.

12. Follow-up

After reaching an agreement, ensure effective follow-up. This includes confirming details, addressing any remaining concerns, and providing assurances. A smooth post-negotiation process contributes to long-term customer satisfaction.

Remember, the goal is not just to close the sale but to do so in a way that fosters a positive and lasting relationship with the customer. Continuously refine and adapt your negotiation strategies based on feedback and outcomes, aiming for win-win solutions that benefit both you and the customer. 



With 30 years of experience owning event planning, high-end catering, and design and décor companies, Meryl Snow is on a mission to help businesses get on their own path to success. As a Senior Consultant for [Certified Catering Consultants](#) and a Senior Consultant & Sales Trainer for [SnowStorm Solutions](#), Meryl travels throughout North America training clients in the areas of sales, marketing, design, and branding. As a valued industry speaker, she speaks with groups from the heart with warmth and knowledge and covers the funny side of life and business.



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A high-angle photograph of a meal. On the left, a white bowl is filled with kimchi, showing thick, pale cabbage slices coated in a vibrant red sauce. Above the bowl, a head of fresh, light-green lettuce is partially visible. In the bottom right corner, a dark-colored plate holds a pile of golden-brown, crispy fried food, likely Korean fried chicken, garnished with a few bright green chili peppers. The entire scene is set against a dark, textured background.

FE

PRO TIP
MAKE SURE YOU USE FRESH
VEGETABLES WITHOUT WAX
OR OTHER COATINGS.

tran



THE FERMENTATION EQUATION

Caterers are getting funky in the kitchen as they transform their menus with the help of fermentation

BY AMBER KISPERT

In recent years, the culinary world has witnessed a renaissance in traditional food preparation methods, and one technique that has emerged as a star player is fermentation.

Fermentation, an age-old culinary practice, involves the transformation of food through the action of microorganisms like bacteria, yeast, and molds. Although fermented foods have remained important parts of modern diets around the world, within the United States, they haven't quite solidified themselves on menus yet.

Texas Pete® Zesty Pickled Tempura with Spiked Tonkatsu Sauce. Photo courtesy Carlos Garcia via Flavor & the Menu

PRO TIP

Plan to ferment your vegetables for two to six weeks, depending on your palate. You should ferment for at least seven days to allow for enough lactic acid to build up and kill any bacteria, such as E. coli.



Emmer & Rye's famous Cacio e Pepe features fermented tomato water to help balance the dish. Photo courtesy Emmer & Rye



Korean braised beef brisket with housemade kimchi, pickled jalapeños, natural jus, and buttery leek risotto. Photo courtesy Toque Catering

**“The addition of a sour or sweet
a dish can create a complexity
has rarely been reached**

“Fermentation is nothing new; it has been occurring since before man walked the earth,” says Chef Alfred Francese ([Emmer & Rye](#)). “Trends come and go but we are not creating something unnatural. The most common bacteria found in fermented products are already present in our environment and on our food before we even harvest it.”

Sure, several fermented foods—pickles, olives, vinegar, yogurt, sour cream, sauerkraut—have long been standard American fare. But whether most consumers realize these items are fermented or know what fermentation means is debatable.

“[Global diners] have been eating fermented foods every day forever,” says Keith Lord ([Stratej Fourteen](#)), “but [Americans] don’t have a staple that we eat every day.”

Times have changed. In recent years, there has been an explosion of awareness, interest, and demand for fermented foods and beverages—and not just for familiar favorites. These days, consumers are clamoring for kimchi, kefir, and natto. They’re testing out tempeh, miso, and koji.

The [market for fermented ingredients](#) is expected to expand at a value based CAGR of 6% and show an increase in revenue from \$10.2 billion to around \$18.4 billion by 2033.

But why has fermentation suddenly become the darling of the culinary community? Perhaps it has something to do with its triple threat of benefits: complex flavors, sustainability, and health.

“You’re able to build a culture within your kitchen that allows the cooks to have the freedom to look at that

product and be inventive or creative,” says Chef Greg Shapiro ([Tastebuds Custom Catering](#)). “We’re not just doing it for the end result or to fulfill a job, we’re doing it for the betterment of everything.”

The whey to wellness

You know what they say: you are what you eat, and as consumers are prioritizing nutrition as the center of a balanced life, fermentation is proving to be an excellent solution to many health and wellness goals. There is substantial and growing evidence supporting the idea of fermented products as health foods.

Fermented milk products like yogurt, for example, have been shown



us,

**sweet/sour fermented item to
add complexity and balance of flavor that
has rarely been reached before.” — Chef Paul Buchanan**

to reduce health risks associated with type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and decreased brain activity. Many fermented foods enhance the availability of nutrients, thus promoting gut health, and can even contribute to a more balanced and diverse microbiome.

In conjunction with a healthy diet, the live microbes in fermented foods are also thought to help regulate glucose and blood pressure, reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

“It’s healthy, it’s something that we need in our diets,” says Lord.

Other health benefits of consuming fermented foods include:

- Improved digestion and absorption
- Rich in probiotics
- Immune system support

- Detoxification benefits
- Positive effects on mental health
- Reduced risk of chronic diseases
- Great source of probiotic bacteria
- Aid in weight management, reducing fat accumulation and high blood sugar levels
- Fight fatigue as digestive enzymes amylase and protease break down carbohydrates and convert them into energy
- Rich in vitamin B1, vitamin B2 and vitamin B6

“Fermented foods are full of bacteria and that is what keeps our guts healthy,” says Chef Paul Buchanan (Primal Alchemy). “I believe more people have become educated about the positive benefits of fermentation. Of course, we may like beer and wine,

but fermentation of vegetables adds a whole new dimension to our American diet that has become rather bland and semi nutritional.”

Striking a sour note

Beyond the good-for-you perks of fermented foods and beverages, there is also the flavor aspect. The fermentation process introduces a depth of flavors and versatile textures that can transform ordinary dishes into extraordinary, craveable culinary experiences. Incorporating fermented elements like pickles, relishes, or fermented sauces can add a sour, tangy, umami-rich dimension to your dishes, creating a mouth-watering menu.

“The addition of a sour or sweet/sour fermented item to a dish can create a complexity and balance of flavor that has rarely been reached before,” says Buchanan.

Simply put, according to [Sandor Katz](#), James Beard-award winning author of *The Art of Fermentation*, fermented foods are “the flavorful space between fresh and rotten.”

From seasonings to rubs to marinades to sauces, from pickles to brines, salt and acid are needed in every recipe and fermented products can bring different levels of both.

“Fermentation completely transforms something into a different product,” says Shapiro. “For example, I make a strawberry kosho (strawberries, chilis, and salt) and the strawberries become dynamic. It allows the essence of the strawberry to come through but not that sweetness that you’re so familiar with, it becomes this spicy condiment that has strawberry in it, which is almost confusing in a sense because it’s just not what you anticipate it to be.”

This transformation opens a world of possibilities for chefs who can take a single ingredient and use it in myriad ways.

Starter Cultures

Almost all fermented vegetable recipes, including homemade sauerkraut and sour pickles, don't need or derive much benefit from the addition of a starter culture, and most are traditionally prepared without a starter culture. Instead of adding a starter to your fermented foods, you simply salt them, pack them into fermentation crocks or jars with an airlocked lid, and allow their native bacteria the time to do their work, turning those fresh vegetables marvelously sour and preserving them for long-term storage.

Fermented foods that don't need a starter

- All fermented vegetable dishes including sauerkraut, sour pickles, sauerruben, kimchi

- Preserved lemons and limes
- Bonny clabber, also known as clabbered raw milk

Some fermented foods require a starter culture to either ensure that they're safe to eat and drink, to ensure consistent results with regard to flavor and texture or both.

Fermented foods that need a starter

- Kombucha and jun tea
- Water kefir
- Yogurt
- Milk kefir
- Sourdough bread

Fermented foods that benefit from a starter, but don't require one

- Condiments and pastes that are difficult to keep submerged under brine
- High-sugar fruits

Starter cultures to try

- Whey from straining yogurt, kefir, or clabbered raw milk (sweet whey, powdered whey, and whey from cheesemaking will not work)
- Brine from fermented vegetables such as sauerkraut juice or sour pickle brine
- Kombucha or jun tea
- Water kefir
- A good-quality probiotic supplement
- Packaged commercial starter culture
- Koji
- Sourdough starter
- Juice from fermented vegetables

Information above courtesy the following sources:

- <https://nourishedkitchen.com/fermentation-starters-whey/>
- <https://microbeonline.com/starter-culture-types-examples-and-uses/>

PRO TIP

Avoid exposing your vegetables to any bacteria. Wash your hands, vegetables, knife, containers, plastic bags, etc., and dry everything thoroughly.



Lettuce wraps utilizing Motif FoodWorks' meat alternative HEMAMI™ ingredient, which is comprised of a heme protein derived from cow muscle tissue (bovine myoglobin) which they make animal-free using precision fermentation. It provides the same umami, meaty flavor, and aroma of the real thing, but without the animal. Photo courtesy Motif FoodWorks

“Chefs find it very intriguing to do it that way because it allows them to have that essence of that different ingredient that just takes the dish to the next level,” says Shapiro.

The ability to transform ordinary vegetables and other foods into something much more exciting is a great benefit to caterers since it gives them the chance to add more complex and unique dishes to their menus without the added cost of purchasing new ingredients.

“We have to reuse a lot of these products in different dishes, so we need to be sure they’re not redundant on our menu—each thing has to be widely different and lively and delicious in its own right,” said [Francesca](#). “With fermentation we now have a broader spectrum of flavors to pull from.

“Your palate expands. Vinegar is no longer red wine, white, and apple cider vinegar; and citrus is no longer just lemon and lime. You have this broad array of acids you can use now, and this broad array of umami flavors and all these things. It’s a switch that goes off in people’s brains when they start to reach for these products and use them in a way that is impactful for the menu.”

Waste not

So far, we’ve touched on fermentation’s health benefits and the impact it has on transforming flavors. Now let’s look at the final aspect of this three-legged stool: sustainability.

First, fermentation is a great medium for reducing food waste—it lets us create new and exciting flavors out of things that are normally seen as scrap or waste.

“We are constantly trying to create different flavors, celebrate the abundance of foods and reduce what is commonly wasted,” says Francesca, “and our pantry gives us the ability to do that.”



(Top) Chopped Cheese Hoagie from Motif FoodWorks; (Above) Kofta Kebab from Motif FoodWorks. Photos courtesy Motif FoodWorks



Lasagna cupcakes from Motif FoodWorks. Photos courtesy Motif FoodWorks

For instance, fish bones can become an umami-rich sauce by fermenting with koji, or imperfect cherries can be fermented into a demi-glace and served over duck. A little imagination can create a luxury experience that you can call your own.

“It is fantastic to have the knowledge of how to use fermentation and other food preservation techniques to utilize the harvest to its fullest,” says Buchanan.

Even typically discarded foodstuff, such as spent grains, fruit peels, and other production leftovers, can be fermented and repurposed into new foods and beverages that are innovative, nutritious, and downright delicious; the cut-off tops of chili peppers can be fermented with honey to create a delicious drizzle for breads and cheeses, leftover Swiss chard and kale stems can be pickled and served on a charcuterie board, or fermented carrot peels can be part of a salad with walnuts, golden raisins, dates, and mint. Even leftover wine can get a new lease on life by being transformed into vinegar.

“It’s this idea of what else can you do with all those bits and pieces,” says Lord. “In a catering kitchen scenario, that Sunday morning when all the weekend’s events are done, take a look at what you have leftover that you can get more out of.”

Beyond reducing food waste, fermentation also helps to extend the shelf life of peak produce long past its growing season, thus allowing you to put out-of-season produce on your menus.

Think: fermented Luxardo-style cherries (with koji and bitters) served over butler-passed scallops, fermented Brussels sprouts served on a Caesar salad, or pickled red onions for use in tacos or on salads.

“This way you’re able to have a year-round menu item,” says Lord. “You’ve added so much complexity to it and made it so versatile and usable.”

Don't find yourself in a pickle

While fermentation offers numerous culinary benefits, it's crucial for caterers to implement strict safety protocols when conducting in-house fermentation to ensure the quality and safety of the final products.

"Especially in a catering scenario, you are dealing with bacteria," says Lord. "You can make a batch of kimchi that is quite explosive if you haven't done your leg work and understand time and temperature accordingly; you don't want to create a bomb, you don't want to make something that's a health risk."

Some of the key safety considerations to be aware of include:

- **Sanitation:** Maintain a clean and sanitized environment in all fermentation areas to prevent contamination by harmful bacteria. Regularly clean equipment, utensils, and surfaces used in the fermentation process.
- **Temperature control:** Monitor and control fermentation temperatures to ensure optimal conditions for the growth of beneficial microorganisms while inhibiting the growth of harmful pathogens. Invest in temperature-controlled fermentation chambers or rooms to maintain consistency.
- **pH monitoring:** Regularly monitor the pH levels of fermenting foods to ensure acidity levels are within safe ranges. Acidity inhibits the growth of harmful bacteria and pathogens, contributing to the safety and stability of fermented products. Foods that "appear" to be safe can still contain harmful pathogens. It is recommended to use a digital pH meter or pH test strips that can measure to at least one decimal point. Test strips are less accurate

Continued on page 86



(Top) Birria tacos from Motif FoodWorks. Photo courtesy Motif FoodWorks; (Above) New Culture uses precision fermentation to create dairy-free cheese. Photo courtesy New Culture

A Focus on Fermentation

There are so many different styles of fermentation that it's difficult to explore all of them. However, fermentation processes typically fall under two very broad categories: wild fermentation and inoculation. Both processes require manipulating the environment and giving microbes the ideal environment to metabolize a substrate to create a byproduct. Wild fermentation is utilizing microbes already present in our environment, while inoculation is creating the environment then adding microbes to the environment with intention.

Here's a look at a few of the most common types of fermentation.

Lactic Acid Fermentation

Lacto-Fermentation is arguably one of the most common types found in food. How it works is that foods are submerged in a salty brine in a fermentation crock. Salt kills bacteria that cause food spoilage, but doesn't harm lactobacillus bacteria, which are present pretty much everywhere. So, after a while of soaking in this salty brine, the lactobacillus go to work converting the carbohydrates in the vegetables into lactic acid, which in turn aids in preservation while also imparting a tangy flavor.

Products:

- Dairy products (yogurt, cheese, kefir)
- Fermented vegetables (sauerkraut, pickles, kimchi)
- Tofu
- Miso
- Soy sauce
- Ketchup
- Pepperoni
- Hot sauce

Ethyl Alcohol Fermentation

Ethyl alcohol fermentation is what gives us beer, wine, and sprits as well as bread. Note that sourdough bread uses

a combination of ethyl alcohol and lactic acid fermentation. The yeast gives the bread its rise while the lactobacillus gives it its sour flavor.

Beer and wine typically undergo two stages of fermentation, known as primary and secondary fermentation. The primary stage triggers a rapid production of alcohol, while the secondary stage is slower and helps to develop more complex flavors.

Products:

- Beer
- Wine
- Spirits
- Sourdough bread

Acetic Acid Fermentation

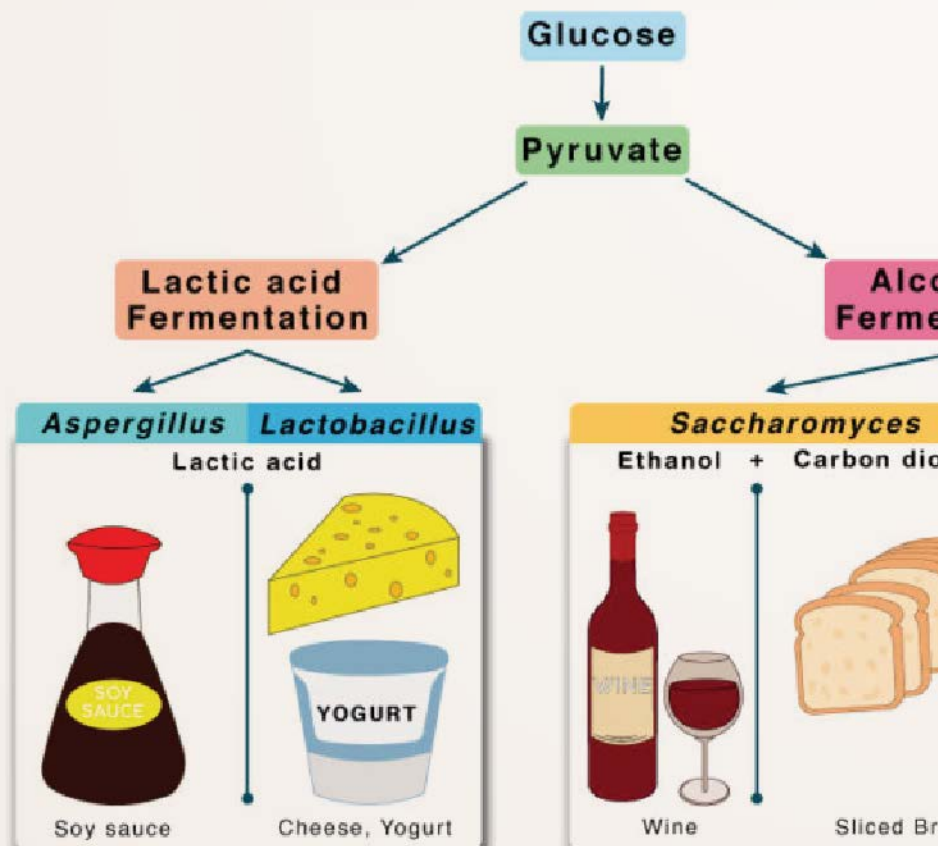
Some people regard acetic acid fermentation as a third type of fermentation, although it is arguably a

version of ethyl alcohol fermentation. It's the process that turns wine to vinegar, so if you were wanting to make wine, it's not good, but if your goal is vinegar, then it's great.

How it works is that certain bacteria, known as acetic acid bacteria, oxidize alcohol and sugar to form acetic acid, which, when highly diluted, is simply ordinary vinegar. In addition to vinegar, this process is also a secondary fermentation stage in making kombucha, following the initial stage of ethyl alcohol fermentation.

Products:

- Kombucha
- Vinegar
- Water kefir
- Lambic
- Cocoa



Beyond the three core types of fermentation, there are also several emerging fermentation techniques including:

Alkaline Fermentation

Alkaline-fermented foods constitute a group of lesser-known food products that are widely consumed in Southeast Asian and African countries. In alkaline-fermented foods, the protein of the raw materials is broken down into amino acids and peptides; ammonia is released during the fermentation, raising the pH of the final products and giving the food a strong ammoniacal smell.

Products:

- Natto
- African fermented legumes and eggs
- Korean doenjang

Precision Fermentation

With precision fermentation, bioengineering techniques are used to program microorganisms by giving them a specific genetic code to produce a compound of interest when fermented under precise conditions. The genetic code is the exact copy of the DNA sequence found in a digitized database on animal or plant DNA sequence; however, it requires no animal or plant involvement. The result is a molecularly identical ingredient produced by microorganisms. Precision fermentation provides more opportunities for plant-based meat and dairy manufacturers to deliver a meat/dairy-like experience. Seizing the opportunities that the progress of digitalization is offering would boost the production of high-value ingredients such as enzymes, fats, proteins, and vitamins.

Products:

- Dairy-free cheese
- Meat alternatives

Butyric Acid Fermentation

This type of fermentation is characteristic of obligate anaerobic bacteria of genus clostridium. This occurs in retting of jute fiber, rancid butter, tobacco processing, and tanning of leather. Butyric acid is produced in the human colon as a product of dietary fiber fermentation. It is an important source of energy for colorectal epithelium. Sugar is first oxidized to pyruvate by the process of glycolysis and then pyruvate is further oxidized to form acetyl-CoA by the oxidoreductase enzyme system with the production of H₂ and CO₂. Acetyl-CoA is further reduced to form butyric acid. This type of fermentation leads to a relatively higher yield of energy. Three molecules of ATP are formed.

Products:

- Flavoring agent in butter, cheese, beer, and wine.

Biomass fermentation

A new technique used to turn mycelium, the root structure of mushrooms, into a bacon substitute.

Products:

- Meat alternatives

Propionic Acid Fermentation

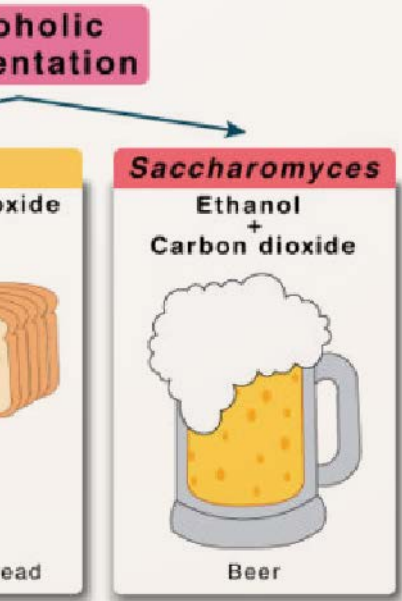
This process, carried out by propionibacteria, converts lactic acid into propionic acid, acetic acid, carbon dioxide, and water. It is important in the production of Swiss cheese, where it contributes to the development of the characteristic holes and flavor.

Products:

- Swiss cheese

Information on this spread courtesy of the following sources:

- <https://byjus.com/neet/types-of-fermentation/>
- <https://culturesforhealth.com/blogs/news/3-types-of-fermentation>
- <https://www.thespruceeats.com/what-is-fermentation-5220493>
- <https://www.realsimple.com/types-of-fermentation-6831073>
- <https://microbenotes.com/butyric-acid-fermentation/>
- <https://www.arla.com/articles/what-is-lactic-acid-fermentation-and-how-does-it-work/>





(Top) Roasted eggplant with miso and sesame seeds from Real Simple. Photo courtesy Antonis Achilleos; (Above) Strawberry-Chia Breakfast Pudding from Real Simple. Photo courtesy Greg DuPree

as the color of the food can alter the result and many test strips don't test to the accuracy of at least one decimal point.

- **Hygiene practices:** Implement strict hygiene practices for personnel involved in the fermentation process. Require employees to wash their hands thoroughly and wear clean attire to minimize the risk of contamination.
- **Training and education:** Provide comprehensive training to staff members involved in fermentation processes, emphasizing the importance of food safety protocols and proper handling techniques. Stay updated on industry best practices and regulatory requirements.

By adhering to these rigorous safety protocols, caterers can harness the culinary potential of fermentation while ensuring the quality and safety of their offerings.

“Make sure you have a plan in place because it's really easy to follow at that point,” says Shapiro.

Let's get funky

The versatility of fermented ingredients opens a world of possibilities for creative culinary applications. From fermented beverages like kombucha-based cocktails to innovative ferment-infused desserts, catering menus can showcase the diversity and flexibility that fermentation brings to the table.

Consider such things as pastas or pastries made from sourdough, using koji to marinate chicken or on steak to mimic dry-aging, pour kefir over cereal instead of milk or add it to fruit smoothies, try swapping meat for tempeh, such as tempeh tacos or in an Asian stir-fry with veggies, or bring seemingly opposite flavors together in something like a kimchi barbecue sauce.

“The difference between a lot of the fermented foods you're working with is that they have a number of different

components within the fermented ingredient,” says Shapiro. “It’s a balancing act in the sense that you’re not just squeezing lemon on something where you’re looking to get acid and a little citrus flavor; now you’re taking something like preserved lemon and utilizing it in a whole different fashion. You’re getting a large amount of the essence of the lemon and the oils, but you’re also getting a lot more salt out of that now too.

“You have to take into consideration all the different elements within that singular ingredient; it’s understanding the ingredient and what you’re producing at the end in order to really know where you’re going to implement it in the end.”

There are other benefits of fermented products, too: they can help bind, thicken, and emulsify products, and they can aid in caramelization and Maillard reaction when applying heat. Fermented food products can also create unique textures uncommon to their native cuisine.

You can also capitalize on the interactive and engaging nature of fermentation by incorporating live fermentation stations into your catering events. Allow guests to witness the magic of fermentation firsthand, fostering a connection between the culinary process and the dining experience.

Food science

The process of fermentation can be as simple or as elaborate as the chef desires it to be. Some types of fermentation require specialized equipment, and a good deal of know-how, but you can ferment many vegetables with nothing more than salt, water, and a little bit of time. This makes fermentation a very easy and approachable method of processing ingredients.

“You can really go as rudimentary as just salting and curing,” says Shapiro.



(Top) Sourdough banana bread from Real Simple. Photo courtesy Getty Images; (Above) Kimchi Cabbage Cakes from Real Simple. Photo courtesy Victor Protasio

Continued on page 90

Examples of Fermented Foods

Fermented Vegetables

Lactic acid bacterial or lacto-based crock ferments of vegetables, for e.g., cucumbers or pickles are reviewed, then contrasted with vinegar-based preservation.

Sauerkraut

Sauerkraut is fermented cabbage. Although the name sauerkraut is German for “sour cabbage,” it’s believed to have come from China almost 2,000 years ago. A little salty and a touch sour, this crunchy condiment may be a good option for people who are new to fermented foods. You can eat it on sandwiches, with meat, or on its own.

Kimchi

Kimchi is a fermented vegetable mixture of spices and vegetables like cabbage, radishes, leeks, cucumbers, or sweet potatoes. Originating in Korea almost 1,000 years ago, this traditional Korean food is now popular across East Asia and all over the world. Although typically a salty and sour mixture, kimchi comes in a variety of flavors depending on the spices, seasonings, and vegetables used. Some kimchi can also include meat, such as beef, pork, or seafood. Kimchi is often a side dish, but you can also mix it into other dishes, like dumplings, stew, or rice.

Dosa and Idli

A traditional South and West Indian dish made of fermented cereals, rice, and black gram that are ground, then fermented with salt, wild yeast, and lactic acid bacteria. The dough is fried (dosa) or steamed (idli).

Fesikh

A traditional Egyptian fish dish that is dried before salting and goes through wild lactic acid bacteria fermentation.

Yogurt

Yogurt is made of pasteurized milk that is cultured with commercial lactic acid bacteria. The slightly sour taste allows yogurt to be used in a variety of ways, including as a marinade, in sauces or smoothies, or on its own. There are different types of yogurt available, but those with no added sugar are best. Add fruit, herbs, rolled oats, or a small drizzle of honey for added flavor.

Cheeses

Today, most cheeses undergo fermentation. Aged cheddar, parmesan, Swiss cheeses, and some cottage cheese contain probiotics. Plant-based cheese is a fermentation of ground nuts (e.g. cashews) or nut liquids (e.g., coconut milk) made with commercial lactic acid bacteria and added flavor ingredients.

Natto

Natto is a traditional Japanese fermentation of boiled soybeans with commercial *Bacillus subtilis* culture that makes the soybeans sticky and savory.

Koji

Koji fermented foods include traditional Asian foods such

as miso, soy sauce, and a sweet beverage called amazake made with rice and cereals, such as wheat or barley. Koji foods are fermented with commercial *Aspergillus oryzae* molds creating enzymes that break down carbohydrates into sweet (amazake) and savory (miso, soy sauce) flavors.



Tempeh

A traditional Indonesian soybean cake made from fermented soybeans that have been pressed into a compact cake. This high protein meat substitute is firm but chewy and can be baked, steamed, or sautéed before being added to dishes.



Kombucha and Jun

Kombucha and jun are fermented beverages of Asian and Russian origin made of black tea and sugar (kombucha) or green tea and honey (jun). Symbiotic cultures of bacteria and yeasts (i.e., SCOBYs) are reused to create these carbonated, vinegar-based flavored drinks.

Water and Milk Kefir

Fermented beverages of Russian origin created with milk or water, sugar, and tiny grains called kefir containing lactic acid bacteria, acetic-acid bacteria, and yeasts, called a combined fermentation. You can drink kefir on its own or use it in place of buttermilk, milk, or water in dishes for a nice sour flavor. Thick kefir is similar in consistency to yogurt. You can eat it in the same way, for example, as a breakfast or dessert. This tart, lightly carbonated drink is made by adding kefir grains to room temperature milk and allowing it to ferment for 10–24 hours.

Fermented Sausages

Charcuterie meats may be made from beef, pork, or poultry and are fermented with commercial lactic acid bacteria, nitrites, salt and other ingredients. Molds often grow on the surface during ripening. These ready-to-eat sausages may

be smoked hot (cooked) or cold (uncooked), and then dried. Examples include dry sausages such as pepperoni and semi-dry products such as summer sausage and cervelat salami.

Bonito Flakes or Katsuobushi

Dried, fermented, and smoked skipjack tuna that is shaved into thin flakes. They are commonly used to provide umami flavor to dashi stock, soups, stews, and sauces. They can be found in the Asian aisle of some supermarkets, in Asian groceries or online specialty stores.

Miso

Miso is thought to have originated in China before making its way over to Japan some time during the 7th Century. It's made by mixing soybeans, fermented rice, and salt before allowing it to ferment for several months. Miso has a rich, savory flavor and can be used in soups, sauces, and salad dressings, among other dishes.

Sourdough Bread

Sourdough bread is thought to have originated in ancient Egypt. The sourdough starter is made by fermenting a mixture of flour, water, and salt. A portion of this starter is then mixed with more flour and water to leaven the bread dough.

While sourdough starters do contain probiotics, they are killed by the heat in the baking process. However, the baked bread does contain prebiotics. Similar to other fermented foods, sourdough bread has a slightly sour and salty flavor and is a delicious way to add a little tang anywhere bread is featured.

Apple Cider Vinegar

The first record of vinegar dates back almost 7,000 years ago when the Babylonians used it for food preservation. In ancient Greece, Hippocrates used to prescribe apple cider vinegar for many ailments, like the common cold. Apple cider vinegar is made by adding yeast to apple juice and allowing it to ferment. It can be used in salad dressing, baking, pickling, soups, or any other dish needing a little tartness.

Information on this spread courtesy of the following sources:

- <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/fermented-foods>
- <https://zoe.com/learn/top-fermented-foods>



PRO TIP

In dry lacto-fermentation, calculate 2% salt. With wet lacto-fermentation (which has the addition of water) the salt ratio rises to 3%.



(Top) Sinigang Chicken Wings featuring pickled green chiles. Photo courtesy McCormick for Chefs; (Above) Tangy Broccoli Slaw featuring a tart kefir-based dressing from Real Simple. Photo courtesy Andrew Purcell

If you're interested in getting started with fermentation in your own kitchens, simple lacto-fermentation might be the best place to start. With this technique, essentially all you need is your produce, a tightly sealed vessel (such as vacuum seal bags or mason jars), salt, a room-temperature storage area, and time.

"Quick pickling, regardless of the medium or flavors," says Lord, "is an amazing way for me to ferment things that are conducive to the way I like to cook. Plus, you can line your tasting room shelves with your jars too and it's super cool."


But before you get started with fermentation in the kitchen, do some due diligence to educate yourself; read some books, take classes, and taste test different products to fully understand the world of fermentation, since it's a complex one.

"It's a different part of what we do," says Lord. "It's completely different than cutting an onion and sautéing which everyone knows how to do, but maybe cutting it and lacto-fermenting is even a sentence that people don't understand. You are dealing with other elements, not just heat."

After tasting your way through pickles and ferments, start experimenting with combinations of adding some fermented items to your favorite dishes to see how they work with the flavors. Once you have played with the fermented foods, you can better understand the products you would like to make yourself.

"Once you have a grasp on the science of it, everything can be fermented," says Shapiro. "It's like a toy box, it opens up everything for you."

With a little effort and advance planning, you can completely change the impact your ingredients have on a plate. By embracing the fermentation frontier, you can watch your catering offerings reach new heights of culinary excellence.



Chef Jenny Bast (Catering Creations) prepared a fermented tomato vinaigrette for audience sampling during Art of Catering Food 2024, which she served alongside scallops and panko. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

FERMENTED TOMATO VINAIGRETTE

Recipe courtesy Chef Jenny Bast, Catering Creations


INGREDIENTS

- ¾ cup fermented tomato juice
- 1½ T tomato paste
- ¼ yellow onion
- 1 T garlic, chopped
- ½ T dried oregano (or fresh)
- 2 tsp sugar
- 1-2 T water
- ¾-1 cup canola oil
- 1 T Dijon
- ½ T black pepper
- ½ T Shio koji, optional*

METHOD

1. Combine all ingredients in blender except the water and oil. Blend on low for 45 seconds and turn speed up to medium. Slowly drizzle in the canola oil. If it starts to tighten too much add in a bit of the water. Due to the salt content and acidity of the fermented tomato juice, no salt nor vinegar is required in this vinaigrette.
2. Place in an airtight jar and leave to ferment for at least one week.

*Koji is an inoculated rice or grain with *Aspergillus oryzae*, another amazing microorganism when it comes to food. Shio koji is made by combining koji, salt, and water.

"You can create a pantry of delicious items," says Francese. "The expected flavors are often not what result from the input of fermentation. Having a selection of items to use will help you stay creative and innovative." 



Love is in the Air

**The 2024 ACE award recipient for Catered
Social Event of the Year, Marcia Selden
Catering & Events' Love Party, celebrated
industry partners**



By Amber Kispert



Custom painted Love Party cookies.



The servers for the evening donned custom Love Boat-themed uniforms.

Every year, Marcia Selden Catering & Events hosts a social event for their many industry partners and friends to celebrate them and all they have meant to the company over the years. Essentially, they want to show their love, which is why this annual event is named the Love Party. This year's event really carried the message of love home by theming the event around the classic television show *The Love Boat*.

Hanging above the custom velvet bar were life preservers, adding to the nautical theme of the event.

Marcia Selden Catering & Events and their guests (including the 20 industry partners who helped execute the event) set sail for a romantic voyage like no other when they stepped aboard a lavish, specially designed cruise ship-inspired venue, surrounded by oceanic decor, twinkling lights, and starry skies, all in celebration of the theme of love.

This year's event not only shared the love, but showed Marcia Selden Catering & Events love too, after being named this year's ACE award recipient for Catered Social Event of the Year. Congratulations to all of this year's recipients! Check out the full list [here](#).

"The Love Party is not just an event, it's an opportunity to create unforgettable memories," states their awards submission.

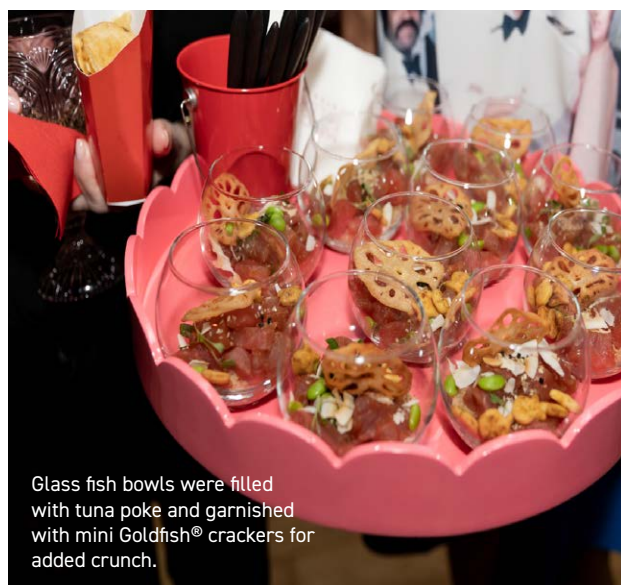
Marcia Selden Catering & Events meticulously crafted every aspect of the event, from Love Boat-themed decor to custom-designed scents (everything from



Mini Margherita Pizza Profiteroles (a culinary mashup of the French puff filled with Italian Margherita pizza flavors) were served in Valentine's Day candy boxes.



At the entrance, guests were greeted by a vintage telephone where they could record a message for the audio guestbook.



Glass fish bowls were filled with tuna poke and garnished with mini Goldfish® crackers for added crunch.



The massive branded 12-foot Love Party ice sculpted raw bar (from Okamoto Studios) was overflowing with giant prawns the size of a hand, king crab, and lobster.



Baked Alaska Ice Cream Lolibons, an ode to the cruise ship favorite dessert.



The venue was specially designed to mimic the main dining room of a cruise ship.

oceanic breezes to exotic flowers) to personalized welcome greetings and even custom-designed Love Boat themed attire. Guests were even greeted at the entrance by a vintage telephone where they could leave a message on the audio guestbook.

For the event, the culinary and mixology teams created over-the-top themed food and beverage offerings, which mimicked the logo and aesthetics of the iconic television show; everything from custom painted cookies to custom branded napkins to a massive branded 12-foot square Love Party ice sculpted raw bar overflowing with giant prawns, king crab, and lobster.


The menu included such cruise favorites as cans of New England clam chowder, glass fish bowls filled with tuna poke with mini Goldfish®

crackers for added crunch, caviar potato chips with French onion cream and chives served in custom McDonalds-style French fry containers, mini branded pizza boxes housing chicken parmesan pizzas (where the chicken was the actual crust to the pizza), and short rib grilled cheese sandwiches with pickled red onions.

The event also featured hors d'oeuvres that were all custom-designed just for the event, and each one was served on a custom serving tray: mini vegan "crab cakes" with vegan caper aioli served on actual wooden ship wheels, garden crudité tarts on a custom-made light-up tray that said "LOVE," and tiny watermelon hearts with herbed goat cheese, balsamic glaze, and candied pecans served on custom-designed Lucite trays with colorful hearts, just to name a few.

"It was so exciting to design this menu as it was an awesome opportunity to show our playful personalities and creativity," they noted in their awards submission.

In terms of entertainment, Marcia Selden Catering & Events had everything from immersive body painted performers, a 20-piece band, and even a captivating opera singer that serenaded the guests with a classic love aria, enhancing the romantic atmosphere. There was also a graceful aerialist that performed stunning routines overhead, and an expert mixologist that crafted unique, aphrodisiac-infused cocktails, each with a romantic twist.

"We made sure every moment was a cherished memory waiting to happen." 



The event's entertainment dressed the part of the cruise crew, even sporting Marcia Selden Catering & Events' signature red lips.



Daring and creatively adorned body-painted performers interacted with guests throughout the event by applying custom branded Love Party tattoos as they cruised through the crowds, adding an unexpected element of surprise and visual delight.



Birch Event Design (a longtime collaborator of Marcia Selden Catering & Events) supplied the design and decor for the evening.



A graceful aerialist performed stunning routines overhead while hanging from a giant seashell, adding a touch of acrobatic elegance to the evening.



Flair bartenders from The Cup Bearer dazzled guests by juggling bottles, setting cocktails aflame, and performing breathtaking tricks, adding a dynamic element and extra layer of excitement to the evening.



Food Network star and sweet genius himself, Ron Ben-Israel, crafted some of his custom cake samples in mini gift boxes for guests to take home.



Marcia Selden Catering & Event's Love Party brings together 500 industry partners and friends for an evening of celebration.

Submissions *Now Open*

It's once again time to celebrate the best of the best! Submissions are now being accepted for the **Catersource 2025 Achievement in Catered Events awards (ACE)**! We invite you to submit your best work from the past year. Join in the excitement and the spirit of our industry as we celebrate the hard work and exceptional accomplishments of our peers.

THE CATEGORIES FOR 2025 ARE:

- National Caterer of the Year
- International Caterer of the Year
- Catered Social Event of the Year
- Catered Fundraising Event of the Year
- Catered Wedding of the Year
- Catered Micro Event of the Year
- Product or Technological Innovation of the Year
- Sustainability in Catering
- Best Off-Premise Catering
- Best On-Premise Catering

To submit an entry to this year's ACE awards, please visit our awards portal at <https://ace-gala.awardsplatform.com/>

IMPORTANT DATES

- September 1, 2023-August 31, 2024 | Eligibility Period for Entries
- Sunday, September 15, 2024 | Regular submission deadline (\$125 fee)
- Tuesday, September 30, 2024 | Late Bird submission deadline (\$175 fee)

If you are interested in entering in the Gala awards instead, you can enter the *Special Events* 2025 Gala awards in the same **online portal** as the ACE awards. Catersource + The Special Event will run February 24-27 in Fort Lauderdale, FL. Both the ACE and Gala awards will be presented during the conference at a to-be-determined location in Fort Lauderdale.



The color scheme for the evening tapped into both Marcia Selden Catering & Events' signature red hue as well as pops of color found in the 1970s television show.



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CATERING TO DIVERSITY

BY AMBER KISPERT





The set table for an intercultural wedding from Events by Ayesha.
Photo courtesy Forever Photography

Something Old, Something New, & Something Borrowed

Multicultural weddings offer an opportunity to create harmony on the plate

In a world where love knows no boundaries, multicultural weddings have become a beautiful celebration of diversity by merging traditions, customs, and cuisines from different corners of the globe. As caterers, navigating this rich mosaic of cultures can be both a challenge and an opportunity to showcase culinary prowess.

“This growing demand for multicultural fusion wedding menus presents an exciting opportunity for chefs to showcase their creativity and expertise in blending and complementing the many different food traditions,” says Chef Kieron Hales (Zingerman’s Cornman Farms®). “Gone are the days when a wedding menu consisted solely of traditional dishes specific to one culture or region. Now, couples are embracing the richness of culinary diversity, seeking to celebrate their love with a feast that resonates with both their heritage and their personal preferences.”

Tradition on the menu

Multicultural weddings are more popular than ever as couples want to incorporate their heritage and traditions into their celebrations. Younger couples are taking a new approach to traditions, either updating them to fit their personal values and identity, or else tossing them out completely in favor of creating new rituals ([see the spring issue of Special Events magazine](#) for a deeper look at this). Couples are looking to curate an experience that speaks to their relationship.

One tradition that has stood the test of time (and continues to be top of mind for today’s couples) is food.

“Food is one of our deepest connections to our past generations and culture. It is our verbal history passed down to us from our families,” says Hales. “Food is a link to the past and a road to the future. Food is

deeply intertwined with our cultural identity. Traditions from our past are nearly always connected with food. These dishes serve as a tangible link to one's heritage, history, values, and often helps explain our customs."

Have you ever considered how the food we eat shapes our **cultural identity**? Many of us associate our favorite recipes with warm feelings and memories of home. During the holidays, our appreciation for and interest in food traditions peak as we gather with family and friends over meals. Cooking and eating together nourishes both body and spirit and is a tangible expression of the way we care for the people we love. Traditional recipes are carefully passed down from one generation to the next, and family recipes are cherished and kept secret.

"This has been a wonderful way to get my hands on well-loved, well-kept family recipes I would never have had access to in any other way," says Hales.

To understand the traditions and significance behind the foods we eat and why we make them is to gain a deeper appreciation of the role food plays in helping us relate to our cultural identities.

"So many of our traditions involve communal meals or gatherings centered around food," says Hales. "These shared culinary experiences create opportunities for people to come together, strengthen bonds, and foster a sense of unity and share our stories. Whether it's a family gathering, a religious celebration, or a cultural festival, food serves as a common thread that brings people closer. In essence, food transcends mere sustenance; it is a cornerstone of human culture and civilization and is our verbal history for many generations ago."

Consider this anecdote from Mark Ryan (Robert Ryan Catering & Design): "We have seen many different types of cultures coming

(Right) A traditional Korean wedding from Blend Catering. Photo courtesy Lauren Han Blend Catering

(Opposite page) Shawarma bar during a wedding by Blend Catering. Photo courtesy Sonum May



together to celebrate events over the decades and the one that most stands out is a Peruvian groom and an American bride. That menu was so much fun to create. The client gave us some names of dishes and then we did some research and sourcing of ingredients. This client gave us one of his mother's recipes for a braised chicken dish that used bone-in chicken thighs and drumsticks; the dish was prepared and served to the groom and his reaction was unbelievable. He started to cry and was speaking in Spanish to his fiancée, and what he said was that he hadn't had that dish in three years since his mom passed away and it reminded him of his mother's cooking."

Couples are also looking to tap into their own stories and histories by incorporating menus that resonate with them, whether it speaks to their travels and the global cuisine that

they've enjoyed, or it highlights their favorite neighborhood restaurant.

"For me the biggest evolution of menus has been the 'gap,'" says Hales. "For many couples over the last few years there has been a gap in the sharing of food stories and traditions from the previous generations, so this 'gap' has been somewhat filled with a new set of stories from travel. A lot of couples often share their favorite food traditions not from families but from travel. This has had the effect of bringing a greater mix of food and cultures to the table when it comes to their menu."

Food connects us

By embracing the cultural significance of food, today's couples are seeking to connect with their guests on a deeper level.



Mini ancho braised beef taco with white onions, cilantro, and queso fresco from Blend Catering. Photo courtesy Sara Lynn Hunt-Broka



Rack of lamb with dill rice, chickpeas, babaganoush, and date-Aleppo lamb jus from Blend Catering. Photo courtesy Sara Lynn Hunt-Broka

“Food reflects where we are from and how we are raised, so it is a deep reflection of home for us,” says Chef Karen O’Connor (Daniel et Daniel Catering & Events). “When we come together to celebrate, we want to share that with others. It lets us share who we are with others and invites them into our world.”

Food is more than just something to consume. Thousands of variations and dishes give people the ability to [express themselves through food](#).

The connection between culture and food lets us embrace each other’s heritage in a tasteful and respectful way. It’s natural to feel pride toward your family’s heritage, and many choose to share their traditional food as a way of doing that. Food acts as a portal into others’ lifestyles and experiences—you can take someone on a journey with each flavor and spice, giving them a taste of your own life. Some may have never experienced those unique flavors before, and it will allow them to reach common ground with a culture they’re unfamiliar with.

Food can serve as a bridge between different cultures, allowing people to learn about and appreciate other ways of life. Food can also help bring a wedding together. Eating together, especially foods that represent a couple, is an intimate experience and takes the experience a step further.

“It excites me because multicultural fusion wedding menus offer a way to break down barriers and foster inclusivity,” says Hales. “In a world that often feels divided, food has the power to bring people together, transcending differences and creating connections. By celebrating diversity on their wedding day, couples send a powerful message of unity and acceptance, inviting their guests to join them in embracing the beauty of cultural exchange. Sharing one’s roots with the menu makes for a magical moment where conversations and connections are made across the dinner table.

“Food transcends language and geography, communicating the heritage and traditions of culture through flavors, aromas, and textures. By thoughtfully curating multicultural menus, we can take significant steps towards creating more inclusive communities.”

A marriage of cuisines

Multicultural menus aren’t just about incorporating global food onto the menu; they’re about creating innovative dishes that pay homage to both sides of the family. Whereas weddings are a marriage of two individuals, multicultural menus are a marriage of two cuisines. Fusion cuisine allows caterers to blend elements from different cultures, creating a harmonious fusion that appeals to a diverse palate.

“We are blending global influences,” said Kristin Banta during Catersource + The Special Event 2024. “We’re talking unique combos that are blending different cultures and different flavors.”

Once you have an idea of what cultures and traditions the couple wants to incorporate into their wedding, start by experimenting with cross-cultural ingredients and cooking methods to craft a menu that seamlessly integrates diverse culinary traditions.

Reinvent classic dishes

Put a unique spin on traditional dishes by incorporating ingredients or techniques from diverse culinary traditions, such as adding Asian spices to classic American dishes or creating innovative sushi rolls with regional ingredients.

Strike a balance between traditional dishes that pay homage to the couple’s cultural heritage and contemporary interpretations that cater to modern tastes.





(Clockwise from far left) Ethiopian Key Wat from Daniel et Daniel Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Chef Karen O'Connor; Korean Loaded Kimchi Potatoes from Daniel et Daniel Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Chef Karen O'Connor; Asian-inspired cuisine from Blend Catering. Photo courtesy Ryan Ray; Japanese Carrot Nigiri from Daniel et Daniel Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.; Middle Eastern Za'atar Chicken from Daniel et Daniel Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Chef Karen O'Connor

Remember: even though you're writing your menus for the couple, your menus still need to be accessible for all guests. Think: simple crowd-pleasing options or deconstructed dishes that help to make them more approachable and simpler to understand.

Pair flavors

Experiment with flavor combinations that highlight the diverse taste profiles of different cuisines, like [marrying the spicy and aromatic flavors of Indian](#) cuisine with the fresh, vibrant notes of Mexican cuisine.

"We try to take flavors from the cuisine we are being asked to include and add them to recipes that might be more familiar to their guests," says O'Connor. "Rather than trying to be authentic, we try to bring the seasonings into foods that we normally make."

Consider courses

If fusing cuisines together into a single dish isn't within your wheelhouse, or you don't feel comfortable taking such liberties with traditional foods, opt for courses: you can put the focus on a primary cuisine without neglecting the secondary culture.

Consider having one cuisine for cocktail hour or appetizers, and the other for dinner. If spicy Thai food won't go down well with all your



“Gone are the days when a wedding menu consisted solely of traditional dishes specific to one culture or region. Now, couples are embracing the richness of culinary diversity, seeking to celebrate their love with a feast that resonates with both their heritage and their personal preferences.” —Chef Kieron Hales

guests, offering bite-sized nibbles gives everyone the chance to taste a new cuisine. Or consider serving desserts from around the world (think Greek baklava, French macarons, Italian cannoli, Indian gulab jamun, and Mexican churros).

Consider this example: a Chinese bride and Greek groom served a traditional multi-course Chinese banquet where guests feasted on Cantonese pork, hoisin duck, and seafood soup, as well as noodles and dumplings. However, following the meal guests were handed a shot of ouzo and a bottle of Greek olive oil to take home as a memento of this blended union of cultures.

Another way to bring in a secondary culture would be through the beverage offerings, whether it's traditional

cocktails from any given country, or imported beers and wines from a specific region.

If multicultural courses seem too complicated, consider family style service as well as buffet or station setups.

For example, if you were blending French and Chinese, one station could be steak frites and the other station could be dumplings.

“It allows you to take a chance or incorporate a riskier dish on the menu as family and friends can choose what they put on their plates,” says Hales.

Regardless of which service style you go with, make sure to have food labels to describe ingredients, spice level, and any food allergies or preferences.



Events by Ayesha delivered a intercultural wedding that resonated with the couple's elevated design sense while also reflecting two very different cultures: Hindu and Christian. (Far left) Cake by Lulu's Cakery; (Above) Cocktail hour passed hors d'oeuvres; (Above right) The main dining space; (Right) The sweetheart table. Photos courtesy Forever Photography



Be cautious of cultural sensitivities

Before embarking on menu planning, take the time to familiarize yourself with the cultural backgrounds of the couple and their families. Research traditional dishes, ingredients, cooking techniques, and dining customs

from each culture represented. Understanding the significance of certain foods in different traditions (such as Halal, [Kosher](#), or Hindu vegetarian diets) will guide your menu selection and help you create an authentic culinary journey.

This is where talking with the couple is paramount; ask questions to understand the nuances of their culture and traditions to safeguard against stereotyping.

“Usually, the couple is really forthcoming with what they need,” says Whitney Deri (Blend Catering). “Whether it’s something their grandmothers used to make or something else representing their heritage, we want to know and translate that into the wedding. It always starts with a conversation and really getting to know a couple, what is important to them, and being able to pull elements from those conversations and ideas that will add something special to the couple and their families. While we diligently research and strive to approach traditional methods, we prioritize transparency and avoid overpromising.”

Additionally, do your own research and refer to cookbooks.

“It becomes my job to help delve deeper into what a request or dish really means and see what we can bring to the table in another way or at another time during the meal,” says Hales. “Understanding the essence of each cuisine allows me to identify commonalities and potential points of fusion.”

Food hygiene and safety should also be a priority when preparing dishes from different cultures. It’s important to be aware of the specific requirements needed for each cuisine, such as temperature control or certain types of ingredients. Additionally, cross-contamination is a major issue when cooking multiple dishes at once—make sure that you use separate utensils and surfaces for each dish. This isn’t just about complying with hygiene and safety regulations, but also sticking to the tenets of a particular culture’s food prep requirements.

Also, consider hosting a [private tasting](#) with the couple to gauge if you met their expectations.

“This is usually a way to ensure authenticity and make sure I have not missed a cultural nuance,” says Hales,

Fusion Fare

Visualizing how seemingly opposite cuisines can be blended may be challenging for some, so here are some examples to get your creative juices flowing:

- **Indian meets Southern:** a trio of wedding entrées featuring a filet of turbot on a spinach, roasted shallot, and cardamom pillow, a tandoor spice-rubbed hanger steak with chimichurri in a French fry basket, and a garam masala infused couscous tower topped with spinach, fried catfish, and ginger-black garlic marinated shrimp with mango green chile salsa.
- **Jamaican meets Muslim:** a seven-course dinner inspired by the traditional 10-course Kashmiri wazwan (a celebratory meal served at festivities such as weddings in Muslim religion) that also incorporated Jamaican fare. Think: roasted tuna-collar escovitch, grilled jerk goat, and ackee masala.
- **Italian meets Indian:** Combine the comforting, creamy textures of Italian with the aromatic spices of Indian cuisine, such as turmeric, cardamom, and cumin. Example: a risotto with a

blend of vegetable broth and coconut milk and finished with a masala spice mix.

- **French meets Moroccan:** French cuisine is known for its technique, while Moroccan cuisine is celebrated for its vibrant spices and flavors. Think: French duck confit seasoned with ras el hanout, a Moroccan spice blend, and served with a side of couscous that incorporates dried fruits and nuts and finishes with a velvety smooth veloute sauce.

“Overall, creating a multicultural fusion menu for two very different cultures requires a delicate balance of reverence for tradition and bold creativity. By embracing the diversity of flavors and celebrating the shared love for good food, I work to craft a menu that honors the couple’s heritage while creating something uniquely memorable and delicious,” says Chef Kieron Hales (Zingerman’s Cornman Farms).

“and this is where all my pride and emotion must be removed.”

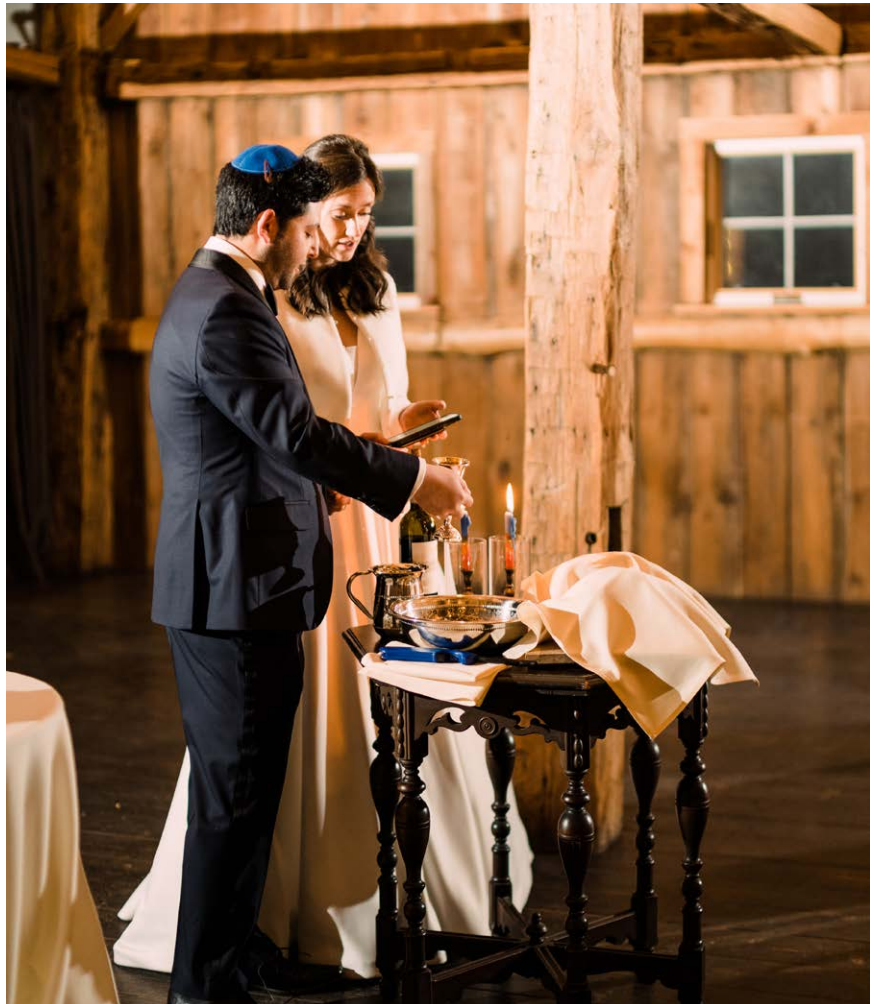
Be careful not to overpromise either. Make sure what they are looking for is in fact something that you can successfully replicate.

“I would say that we steer clear of using the word ‘traditional,’” says Deri. “We interpret and are inspired by different cultures, but never want to claim that we are traditional or authentic. We always want to do heritage recipes justice, and never want to insult.”

This is where partnering with an outside caterer or chef may come in handy.

“I want to be authentic, I don’t want to disrespect anyone’s customs,” says O’Connor. “I think it is very important to know what you can do and what the client expects. If someone is looking for an authentic expression of a cuisine, I usually try to find another caterer or restaurant who are experts in that cuisine to pair with and to bring the clients vision to life. I stress to the client that we can bring the flavor of that cuisine into their menu but that it might not be a strictly authentic version of that cuisine.”

Finally, don’t underestimate the value in your own teams. Tap into their cultural backgrounds and insights as well.



(Above right) A couple performs a Blessing of the Challah ceremony at Zingerman's Cornman Farms; (Right) A sparkling wine toast at Zingerman's Cornman Farms. Photos courtesy Lola Grace Photography



Ham Steaks from Zingerman's Cornman Farms.
Photo courtesy EE Berg Photo



Vegetable fritto misto from Zingerman's Cornman Farms.
Photo courtesy Lola Grace Photography



A family toast to the new couple during an elopement at Zingerman's Cornman Farms.
Photo courtesy Lola Grace Photography

A newly married couple at Zingerman's Cornman Farms.




ried couple smile together over their wedding cake at Zingerman's
rms. Photo courtesy Lola Grace Photography

“Whenever we get the chance to work on a menu from a team member’s home culture they often get really engaged in the process,” says O’Connor. “It becomes an opportunity for them to shine and contribute in new ways which is really beneficial for both the organization and the team member.”

Developing catering menus for multicultural weddings is a labor of love that requires a keen understanding of religious dietary restrictions, vegetarian or vegan preferences, and allergy considerations. Offering a diverse array of options that cater to different dietary needs ensures that every guest can partake in the celebration without compromising their cultural or personal values. It’s time to celebrate the beautiful tapestry of today’s multicultural weddings.

“The growing demand for multicultural fusion wedding menus represents a culinary evolution that reflects the changing landscape of our society,” says Hales. “As the chef, I am honored and excited to be a part of this, creating unforgettable dining experiences that celebrate love, diversity, and the universal joy of good food. From blending flavors to bridging cultures, multicultural fusion wedding menus are a testament to the power of food to unite hearts and create lasting memories.”

* Zingerman’s Cornman Farms is a proud member of the Leading Caterers of America, a consortium of the top catering and event planners throughout the United States and Canada. 



Lights, Camera, Action!

Catering isn't just about how food tastes anymore—it's also about the experience. While the open kitchen concept has proven itself valuable over the years, today's guests are seeking more than just a meal; they desire spectacle alongside their culinary journey. By using action stations, chefs and caterers not only put themselves in the spotlight and showcase their culinary prowess, but they can also tap into the rise of social media and guests' desires for shareable, engaging experiences. Check out these creative action stations for inspiration during your next event. —*Amber Kispert*



Rainforest Noodles chef
action station | Blue Plate
Catering | Photo courtesy
Lacour Images



Pork Bao station | Occasions Caterers | Photo



Flaming Donut station | Bite Catering Coutu



Photo courtesy Ronald Flores Photography



Photo courtesy Bite Catering Couture



Crepe station | Culinary Crafts | Photo courtesy Culinary Crafts



Cloud Cluster Bar station | Pinch Food Design | Photo courtesy Pinch Food Design



Hanging Brochette station | Footers Catering | Photo courtesy Footers Catering



Ice Cream station | LUX Catering & Events
Catering & Events



Mac n Cheese station | Eatertainment Events
Photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Cat



Photo courtesy LUX



Liquid Nitrogen Ice Cream station | Footers Catering | Photo courtesy Footers Catering



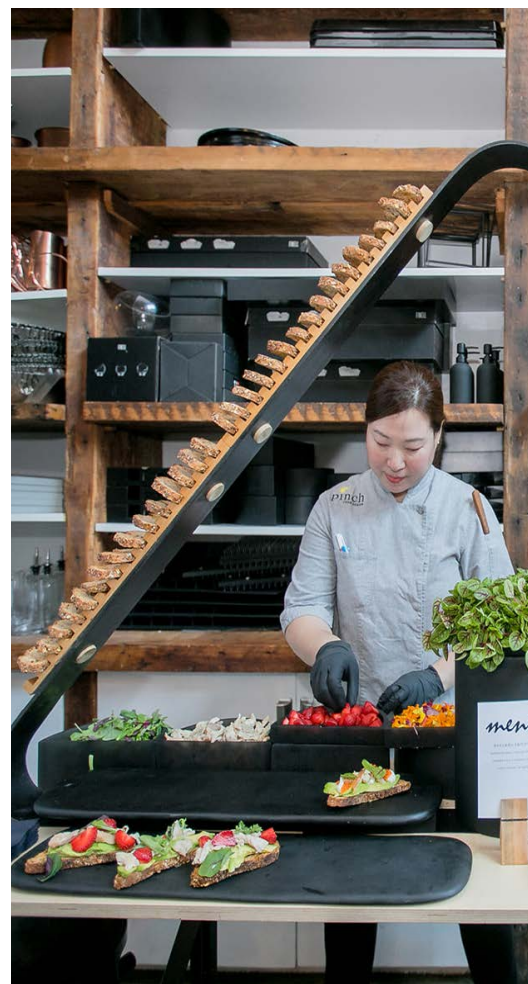
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Mad Scientist Nitro Ice Cream station | Meijer Gardens Culinary Arts & Events at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park | Photo courtesy Emily DeKoster



Pour Over Tea station | Occasions Caterers | Photo courtesy Ronald Flores Photography



The Wedge Interaction | Pinch Food Design | Photo courtesy Pinch Food Design



Fried Rice station | Culinary Crafts | Photo courtesy Culinary Crafts



sy Pinch Food Design



Wine Ballon station | Pinch Food Design | Photo courtesy Pinch Food Design



Brazilian Steakhouse station | SEARCH Foundation Signature Annual Event | Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.



Spinning Plate station | Pinch Food Design



"Foiellipop" station | Travail Kitchen and Amusements



S'mores station | Culinary Crafts | Photo courtesy of Culinary Crafts



Photo courtesy Pinch Food Design



Doughnut station | Culinary Crafts | Photo courtesy Culinary Crafts



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urtesy Culinary Crafts



Deep Blue Sea seafood station | Chowgirls Catering | Photo courtesy Chowgirls Catering



By Keith Sarasin



Editor's note: Keith Sarasin delivered an impactful session during Catersource + The Special Event 2024 on how chefs can leverage the power of social media.

The Heartfelt Journey of a Chef: Using Social Media to Serve & Inspire

Every chef has a deep-seated desire to create, nourish, and connect with others. This journey of culinary artistry becomes more than just cooking when viewed through the prism of social media; it becomes an emotional project to uplift and serve others.

Accepting the influence's power

We cooks have a significant impact that extends beyond the kitchen. Every meal we prepare and every tale we tell has the potential to move people's emotions, pique their curiosity, and bring about change. Social media serves as our canvas, allowing us to express our creativity and tell the world about our gastronomic adventures.

Advocating for meaningful change

In a world where food is abundant, we understand the responsibility

that goes along with our profession. We can raise awareness of important topics like social justice, sustainability, and food insecurity through social media. One meal at a time, we want to significantly improve the lives of others by spreading awareness and pushing for important change.

Celebrating diversity & inclusion

Our greatest strength in the complex tapestry of the culinary world is our diversity. We honor the various cuisines, ethnicities, and customs that contribute to the diversity of our


culinary world through our platforms. As proponents of inclusivity, we elevate the voices of underrepresented groups and cultivate an environment of tolerance and dignity in our sector.

Cultivating connections & community

Social media acts as a link between us and a worldwide community of food aficionados, food lovers, and fellow chefs, even when we are not in front of a screen. We create deep bonds via sincere interaction and common experiences that cross boundaries and bring our shared love of food to one another. We come together as a dynamic group of people united by our love of discovering new cuisines.

Inspiring hope & resilience

The kitchen turns into our haven during uncertain and trying times; it's where we find comfort, direction, and fortitude. We encourage others to embrace their own journey of self-discovery and empowerment by sharing our tales of victory and tenacity. We want to provide a glimmer of optimism and a reminder that light can be found even in the darkest of circumstances with every dish we serve.

A chef is a person of great significance in the grand scheme of things; they are a source of inspiration, empathy, and human connection. We set out on a journey of inspiration and service through the power of social media, using our craft to raise and nurture the souls of others. As a community, we embrace the transforming potential of food and pave the way for a more promising and inclusive future for everybody. 

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