

EXCLUSIVE: Scaling Back the Big Day (p.34)

SPECIAL EVENTS

FALL 2023

GOING IN
CIRCLES
(in a good way)

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LEISURE =
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EDITOR'S PAGE

THE CIRCLE

Here in Minnesota, the air has finally turned crisp: apples, corn, and pumpkins are appearing on farm stands, and Halloween decorations have popped up. The circle of the seasons is upon us. In life and living, the circle holds incredible power and meaning in its perfection, its unbroken line, its symmetry. It's no wonder it captures our attention so completely.

In this issue, we pay tribute to that beautiful orb, in myriad ways. Content editor Amanda Nicklaus has concentrated her efforts into focusing on circularity and all things circular including a comprehensive feature on limiting event waste via circularity, which works to limit waste at the front end of a production (beginning on page 14); she also offers ideas regarding how to incorporate circles into your next event design in our Steal This column, as well as provides information behind the psychology of the circular (starting on page 68). Finally, her drool-inducing piece on seasonality in catering is not to be missed in the Food for Fetes department. While it's great to read about delicious, seasonal food anytime, as a planner, choosing seasonality for your clients' menus is practical and has cost-savings as well. Find out more starting on page 42.

Adding to her ideas is our regular columnist, Christie Osborne, who discusses closed loop marketing strategies. Okay, a loop isn't quite a circle, but I'm going for it anyway! Learn key steps to start implementing closed loop marketing beginning on page 20.

Finally, another circle around the sun, another year, and another registration opening for Catersource + The Special Event. While both conferences have been around for over 30 years, each year feels like a fresh and exciting start! This year we will be in Austin, TX for the first time ever, a vibrant city with plenty to offer everyone who attends. Proposals to speak at the event reached an all-time high, and our planning meetings are stacked one atop the other each week as we dive into logistics for evening events, tradeshow floor activations, conference education, awards ceremonies, and other surprises and delights. [Click on this link](#) to be taken to our home page to learn more and register now for the best rates. Read more about our plans beginning on page 08.

Please take time to enjoy the season, wherever you may be. Enjoy this issue and I hope to see you soon in Austin!

Kathleen

Kathleen Stoehr
Director of Community & Content Strategy

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Marketing expert
Christie Osborne
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marketing strategies to
boost ROI



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Nora Sheils talks tech
solutions for team
longevity



Event sustainability pro
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at Environmental, Social,
& Governance (ESG)
sustainable practices for
the events industry



CEO and Creative
Director **David Merrell**
reflects on moving
forward after tragedy

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CONFERENCE NEWS

by Kathleen Stoehr

Catersource + The Special Event will be held at the Austin Convention Center from February 12-15, 2024. Photo courtesy Visit Austin



Conference updates

Get Ready! Registration for Catersource + The Special Event is Now Open

Was the Barbie movie a harbinger? Did I whisper something inspirational in Beyoncé's ear re: her Renaissance Tour costuming while assisting at her mother Tina's star-studded fundraiser? Are people just experiencing *Yellowstone* withdrawal?

catersource + **THE SPECIAL EVENT**

FEBRUARY 12-15, 2024 AUSTIN CONVENTION CENTER • AUSTIN, TX

What the heck is Kathleen talking about?

Boots, buckles, and all things cowboy, my friends. Web searches for the words "cowboy hat" are up 117% according to *Women's Wear Daily* and that's not all. The western theme is hot, hot, hot and there is no better place to experience all that and more than in Austin, TX this February when Catersource + The Special Event rides hard into town for an incredible week unlike any other.

Registration is now open

The time is now to [register](#) at the best rates available to experience three days of conference sessions coupled with two full days of tradeshow exhibitions, opening and closing general sessions, awards ceremony, happy

hour, and three evening events to keep you busy! All the major industry associations will be in attendance, conference sessions will allow attendees to keep their accreditations current, and “surprise and delight” installations are in the works to keep your social posts snappy.

Get your entries in!

In March 2023, we ushered in one of the most heartwarming and empowering awards galas ever. Tears were shed, beautiful crystal awards were held high with pride, and the energy was overwhelmingly positive. We expect nothing less in 2024, when we present ACE, Gala, and CATIE awards alongside some very deserving leadership and lifetime achievement awards. There is still about a month to enter your best work into our [ACE and Gala](#) portal, so head on over there now to get it done! We want to celebrate you!



Evening events at CS+TSE are great places to spot the latest trends and network with industry peers!



CS+TSE entertainment favorite The Company Men dazzled the crowd at the 2023 Closing Night Celebration.

All photos courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos unless noted otherwise



(From top) Joann Roth-Oseary presents the 2023 Richard Carbotti Volunteerism Award to Kate Patay (SEARCH Foundation).

Attendees at CS+TSE 2023 were met with boots, buckles, and all things cowboy at The Event Escape: Uncover Austin, TX Room.

Rolando Espinoza (Champagne Creative Group) during his session *Adventures In AR - Adding The WOW Factor With Smartphones*.



Watch this space

As the month of September ends and October begins to say 'hello', sessions will begin to populate the [conference schedule](#). What might you see first? Perhaps an Opening General Session keynote? Maybe a few key sessions to tantalize? While we generally do not release the entirety of the schedule until after the super early bird rate has passed, we don't want to leave you completely hanging. Every week brings something new!

Welcome to Austin, TX!

Of course, the city has more to offer than boots and buckles; it has an incredible music history as the Live Music Capital of the World, offers sumptuous food with barbecue as its backbone, and is the Texas state capital. Book your hotel room early [using this link](#) via Convention Housing Partners. Come early, stay late—enjoy your week at Catersource + The Special Event! ●



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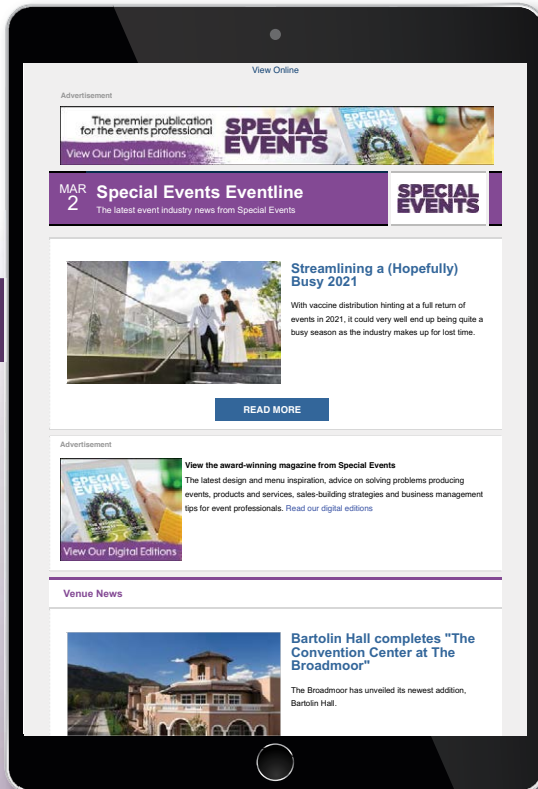
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It's All in the Numbers: Leading the Way with ESG Reporting



Data reporting is not necessarily in our lane as event professionals, but we will have to at least be conversational in the language spoken by the team of number crunchers doing the analysis. You're not in this alone.

By Suzanne Morrell

Seems like we have been hearing a lot lately about ESG, known in long-speak as Environmental, Social, and Governance. To translate, it's essentially the new version of the artist formerly known as CSR, or Corporate Social Responsibility. Call it what you will, it's about transparency and accountability. Now more than ever, the world is not only taking notice, but also putting its money to work in the ESG space.

To be clear, ESG may be most easily defined as a framework.

It's a set of criteria used by investors to quantitatively evaluate the sustainability and ethical impact of a company. Kiplinger's Ellen Kennedy writes that despite some resistance from states heavily invested in the fossil fuel industry, the ESG "investing strategy remains extremely popular, with 85% of investors interested in ESG products."

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

Nothing against the 'S' and 'G' part of the formula, but today I'd like to focus on the 'E', or Environmental reporting, which specifically considers factors such as a company's carbon emissions, resource usage, waste management, and efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

As event professionals and suppliers in the event industry, where does ESG reporting intersect with our work?

For starters, if you or your client does business in Europe, new reporting directives covering all EU and non-EU companies and subsidiaries will need to factor into how you approach planning future conferences and meetings. Here in the United States, though we do not yet have environmental disclosure rules, just last year, the Securities and Exchange Commission proposed its own climate risk disclosure reporting, requiring filers to provide climate-related information in their registration statements and annual reports.

I'm guessing that like me, you may still be asking, "What does this have to do with me since I'm not a publicly traded company, don't do business in Europe, and am never planning to file with the SEC?"

Answer: Maybe your next client is publicly traded or EU-based. If you want them to be a future client, you need to be aligned with their preferred disclosures and frameworks so you're in a position to provide data.

GETTING STARTED

Okay, I sense some of you reaching for the panic button at this point. Not to worry. Data reporting is not necessarily in our lane as event professionals, but we will have to at least be conversational in the language spoken by the team of number crunchers doing the analysis. You're not in this alone.

If your client is looking for data from a project you've been a part

We are always capable of taking active steps each day toward a collectively more sustainable business model, a more rewarding life, and healthier planet to share with all walks of life.

of, you will most likely have experts guiding you before, during, and after.

To that end, I recommend becoming familiar with the multiple ESG frameworks, standards and organizations, such as GRI (Global Reporting Initiative), SASB (Sustainability Accounting Standards Board), WEF (World Economic Forum), ISSB (International Standards Sustainability Board), and TCFD (Task Force on Climate-Related Disclosures), among others.

Beyond becoming familiar with the numerous frameworks, there are many actions we all can take now to not only learn about our climate impacts but also make the reporting process easier:

1. Learn and implement the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, a standardized GHG accounting methodology. It provides consistent, comparable, and reliable information to investors, enabling them to make informed judgments about the impact of climate-related risks on current and potential investments.
2. Even if you aren't a publicly traded company or do business in Europe, you may be a stakeholder along the supply chain of a major corporation that needs to be sure their vendors are utilizing best practices and avoiding attempts at greenwashing (attempts at false claims of positive climate action), which could be scrutinized.
3. Event industry professionals like templates. There is no one-size-fits-all checklist, but you can tell your story with data and demonstrate

commitments for accountability and transparency.

4. Set the standards for accountability and compliance and become more transparent in operations. By determining steps needed to have positive impact, we spur innovation, save money, and reduce risk.
5. Post your Sustainability Statements in a narrative communicating your climate commitments. New AI driven software can help organize the complex data and craft a narrative for stakeholders.

To be sure, our role in collecting data and reporting climate impact will vary based on individual business models, but the endpoint remains transparency, accountability, and delivery of commitments. By committing to these principles, we hold the power to add value and contribute to something greater than ourselves.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

I recently asked a convention center to provide the carbon accounting for a typical convention over several days. I was surprised that they had never compiled that information and had never been asked. Imagine if their innovative practices were available publicly. It could be a selling point. Sports arenas are even being named for having climate commitments.

I was reminded that there is so much left for us to discover and contribute as an industry.

There's no doubt that at times, it may feel impossible to communicate our climate-related risks and opportunities in a service-oriented industry that's driven by the wants and needs of our clients, but it's not. We are always capable of taking active steps each day toward a collectively more sustainable business model, a more rewarding life, and healthier planet to share with all walks of life. Every day is an important day, and it starts with our first step—and then the next, and the next. ●

*Award-winning event producer, **Suzanne Morrell, MBA, SEPC**, founder of Creating Environments, has been creating experiential events, globally and online, for over three decades. Notable projects include some of the world's most high-profile events and range from government meetings to destination events. Creating Environments leads by example by raising the bar for sustainability in events worldwide by not only focusing on resource and waste reduction, but also health and wellness of all who participate in the event experience. She has a deep knowledge of sustainability standards and the broader evolving landscape of climate change and how that intersects with event management. She is a member of the Board of Directors and Leadership Team of the Sustainable Event Alliance and a member of the Climate Reality Leadership Corps.*



Growing in Circles

(In a Good Way)

BY AMANDA NICKLAUS

Creating circular events to
limit waste from the start



The 2012 Summer Olympics held in London were the **first zero waste Olympics**, with efforts that included sustainable transportation, on-site waste-reduction systems, and using existing facilities when possible, among other actions. Information courtesy [Environmental and Energy Study Institute](#)

In our last issue, we discussed [attaining net zero carbon emissions](#) through several methods, including reducing waste. Let's take a deeper dive into limiting waste through a framework known as "circularity," which works to limit waste at the front end of any production, and factors in how to eliminate waste by plugging it back into the system.

We can only accomplish so much sustainability through a linear framework, because in this model, there will always be waste created by a consumer; the beginning is always the producer and the end is always the landfill. In a circular model, there is no beginning and no end, just a harmonious system that uses all energy and material for a purpose, where waste doesn't exist. This practice is called "closing the loop."

Sustainability experts at [Inchainge Knowledge Base](#) say that circular economies use three key factors to separate growth from negative side effects:

1. They design waste and pollution out of the system.
2. They keep products and materials in use.
3. They regenerate natural systems.

In other words, sustainability is the goal, and circularity is the practical method that can achieve this goal. An article titled *Circularity is the next frontier of sustainability. What is it?* for [Business of Home](#) says of circularity: "It means that a product is created with its own end-of-life taken into account. In a circular economy, once the user is finished

with the product, it goes back into the supply chain instead of the landfill. The motto of the circularity movement, in a nutshell: Waste not, want not."

Creating circular events

Circularity can be applied to events in the same way. In a circular economy, events are created with their own end-of-life taken into account. They are designed in such a way that once they have ended, the products and materials left over go back into the supply chain instead of the landfill.



Partnering with vendors who prioritize waste reduction makes your job easy. Weddings at Eisler Farms has created a **sustainable décor collection called the I Do Redo Collection** that is free for couples to use on their wedding day, and they can contribute to it if they wish by donating any additional décor or signage. Photo courtesy True North Photography

Besides reducing carbon emissions, moving from a linear approach to a circular approach prevents pollution by reducing the need for new materials to be harvested; saves energy and money; and limits waste, creating a healthier planet (which leads to healthier communities). Here are some ways to start redesigning your events to fit within a circular economy.

The five Rs

Everyone knows the phrase “reduce, reuse, recycle,” but the more accurate phrase is “refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, recycle.” Applying this framework to all the material used in your event will eliminate unnecessary product waste.

Refuse

The first step of examination is refusing to purchase and use unnecessary product packaging and material by making smarter purchasing decisions. If you avoid creating waste from the get-go, you’ll have less to deal with at the end of the event’s life cycle. For example, [Catersource + The Special Event](#) skips carpeting the tradeshow floor, meaning there’s no carpet to discard at the end of the event. This also looks like sending digital invitations instead of paper or using a water bottle refilling station.

Reduce

If you can’t avoid using a harmful, wasteful, or non-recyclable product, look for ways to minimize your dependency on it. This can look like printing double-sided itineraries and purchasing products that have minimal to no packaging.

Reuse

“Single-use plastics have created a ‘throw-away’ culture by normalizing consumer behavior of using materials once and then throwing them away,” notes [Roadrunner Waste Management](#). Events are notorious for single-use waste, so replacing throw-away items with reusable ones, like swapping plastic silverware for the reusable kind, is sustainable and more cost-effective long-term.

Repurpose

If an item doesn’t meet any of the above criteria, find ways to repurpose it. Also

known as upcycling, this will take some creativity but is worth the effort! Props, art, stage material, and other décor can easily be repurposed for different types of events or even different products, like converting food waste into bio-gas to fuel electricity production (as does [Viking Cruises](#)) or upcycling signage materials into attendee bags. If you can get one more life out of it, don't throw it out yet!

Recycle

Only drop something in the recycling if you can't find a way to keep it in the closed-loop life cycle of an event. Make sure your events have clearly labeled recycling receptacles and familiarize yourself with local recycling guidelines so you can ensure everything is processed properly and doesn't head to the landfill instead. The goal is to close the loop so well that hardly anything (or nothing at all) becomes actual waste!

Extra Rs

Depending on who you ask, there can be more than five Rs, each representing a different effort to avoid creating waste: repair, regenerate, refurbish, recover—all ways to examine your event materials and attempt to keep products in the supply chain.

Choose sustainable vendors

Part of shifting from a linear to a circular approach is understanding your place in the ecosystem. Instead of thinking of your event as the last stop before the landfill, zoom out and see who else and what else is involved in providing event components. If you zoom back far enough, you'll see that the line begins at the earth and passes through plenty of people before getting to you as a planner, before returning back to the earth.

You and your vendors have a symbiotic relationship—the action of one of you affects everyone. Lean into this relationship to create a harmonious

closed-loop circle that reduces waste at every phase of an event.

Catering

By working only with vendors who follow sustainability practices and source responsibly, you can reduce the damaging effects of your event and actually harness long term community. This certainly includes your caterer—where do they source their food from? What programs do they have to reduce waste? Do they compost? Where does the food come from—a corporate distributor who buys from mass-producing factories, or a local gardener? Check out [this Catersource blog](#) to learn how catering company M Culinary Concepts works in sustainable food systems.

Venue

Often, your venue will have a preferred caterer, and that's one more reason to partner with sustainable vendors. These venues will follow strict sustainability processes, or even have incentive programs. PAIKKA, an event space in St. Paul, MN, offers a 10% discount



Reusable silk flowers are a conscious choice that can be used over and over again, keeping material in the supply chain—and still look elegant. Florals courtesy Something Borrowed Blooms. Photo courtesy Chris J. Evans Photography



Joelle Parks Events Co. worked with Tied and Two Weddings to come up with beautiful signage that wasn't single-use. The table number, bar sign, and menu were all designed to be used from wedding to wedding! Photo courtesy Him & Her Photography



Instead of handing out useless swag that will inevitably find its way to a landfill, gift intentional items that can be useful long term, like sauces, candles, even locally crocheted reusable make up removal pads, all in reusable containers. Photo courtesy Explore Waterloo Region

off the total rent cost in exchange for following the venue's sustainability guidelines during an event. These guidelines include things like working with the venue's pre-approved sustainable vendor list, skipping printed programs, ditching single-use plastic, and working with a local florist, to name a few.

Rental

Working with rental companies is inherently sustainable, since many rentable items can be reused for decades instead of making their way to the landfill.

"Renting materials that can be reused rather than discarded eliminates unnecessary consumer waste even before an event is held," says James Auerbach, Vice President of the Event Segment of the American Rental Association. "Rather than finding ways to offset an event's carbon emissions, rental allows planners and their clients to limit waste before it occurs."

Go through your inventory of event materials to see what you can rent. "Items such as décor, lighting, and carpeting can be replaced with more sustainable rental options, including LED lighting, bamboo

flooring, and open-air tents that take advantage of natural light and reduce energy costs," Auerbach adds. Create a partnership with a rental company so that you can work together in reducing waste from your events.

Floral

Similar to catering, finding a floral designer who follows sustainable practices is key to ensuring your event won't create waste. By working with someone who sources flowers from local growers, you help to reduce transportation emissions. If flowers are organic, you're ensuring your event doesn't contribute to the use of chemicals in the soil as well as supporting growers who practice sustainable farming. A sustainable florist will also work with recyclable and reusable materials (meaning: no disposable foam).

Hotels

If your event requires guests to stay in lodging nearby, make sure to recommend hotels that also follow sustainable practices. An article from [Cvent](#) lays out ways hotels can make green changes, like having a water bottle refilling station, using energy efficiency techniques, offering an electric vehicle charging station, composting, and installing solar panels.

Working with vendors who share the same values as you and who put their money where their mouths are will create a sustainable system where you all work together to create events that minimize waste and put material back into the cycle. It also means you don't have to go it alone in the sustainability frontier—supporting each other makes the work easier for everyone!

A team effort

Circular events can benefit more than just the earth; an article from [MeetingsNet](#) shows that this approach improves human, social, financial, natural, intellectual, and manufactured capital.



Offering guests reusable bottles keeps material in the supply chain and eliminates waste immediately. Photo courtesy M Culinary Concepts



Dried herbs and other plants are a wonderful swap for sustainable confetti.

These plants can be chosen based on symbolic meaning, infusing the event with a deeper sentiment, and can go right back into the ground—a true closed loop. Photo courtesy Weirdo Weddings (Pink Light Images)

Shifting from a linear approach to a circular approach requires a shift in mindset. From the beginning planning stages to the final tear down, look at your event operation with new eyes. All change begins with awareness, so as you begin to shift from linear to circular, just start with nonjudgmental observation of all your processes and systems.

In her 2023 Catersource + The Special Event session *Talkin' Trash: A Candid Conversation About Zero Waste*, Primal Alchemy Catering co-owner Dana Buchanan said, "If you want to commit to this, and if you want to do this as a business, you really have to start with reviewing your operation and making a plan."

The shift will require your own desire to change, plenty of knowledge, trial-

and-error action, and perseverance. Lean on your team, even create buy-in for them: "If they come up with ideas to lessen trash and have less waste, do incentives for them," says Buchanan.

Creating a truly sustainable event industry, where waste doesn't exist and events contribute to a regenerative, closed-loop cycle, isn't something you can or should do alone. By working with your teams and vendors, you'll be able to start creating sustainable events.

If your team is all on board, they'll be able to sell your events as sustainable events as well, attracting clients who will work with you to create events that act in harmony with the planet and our own economy and society.

A paper for the 27th International Sustainable Development Research Society Conference titled *Circular Economy in the Event Sector* stated, "The events sector...has been one of the sectors that most of all suffered the consequences of the pandemic and



For this Brooklyn botanic garden wedding by Kathryn Cooper Weddings, the couple used their personal collection of glassware and antique books as the centerpieces for their wedding. They used just a few seasonal flowers to fill their colorful vases, ensured there was no single-use waste at the event, and took all decorations back to their home following their wedding, to be enjoyed for decades to come. Talk about reducing waste from the start! Photo courtesy Kathryn Cooper Weddings

now, it can be among the protagonists of the paradigm shift by implementing circular economy's principles in events' management strategies."

The events industry is a powerful industry that truly impacts the world. By contributing to the success of sustainably, we're also contributing to the success of our own industry.

What are you waiting for? Take some notes, talk to your teams, and see what you can do to close the loop and create circular events! ●

Is Something Missing in Your Marketing Strategy?



By Christie Osborne

Getting real results from your marketing efforts can feel like climbing a steep mountain.

The struggle is real. Many event pros find themselves stuck in a cycle of spending without seeing substantial returns.

When generating reliable, long-term success through marketing, the number one challenge is improving the return on investment (ROI) of the marketing approach. And as revenue declines, the ability to identify tactics that drive sales defines a business's rate of success.

If you don't know how to effectively measure and increase your marketing ROI, reaching the next level may seem impossible. Fortunately, there's no need to throw money at mediocre tactics any longer.

Enter closed-loop marketing systems.

Closing the loop between sales & marketing teams

It's no secret that sales and marketing teams often operate in isolation. When revenue declines, this lack of communication leads to heated debates and the inevitable blame game.

Marketing teams place fault on the sales team for low closing rates. Clearly, the salespeople don't know how to sell. Meanwhile, the sales team is busy pointing fingers at the marketing team. Clearly, all those inquiries were low-quality leads. But it doesn't matter who's right because revenue is still in the hole.

A better solution is to use a closed-loop marketing strategy, which creates a continuous feedback loop that uses mutually agreed-upon data and

analytics to drive conversations between marketers and salespeople. Instead of creating a divide, both sides work together toward a common goal. As a result, valuable insights are shared, and each team can refine their approaches based on continuous feedback and performance metrics that support revenue generation.

Shifting focus from inquiries to revenue

Many marketers within the event industry place a heavy focus on engagement. They claim you must post on social, learn TikTok, and jump on Threads early.

However, the best marketers know that inquiries and lead generation matter more than mere likes and comments. Instead of hopping on TikTok trends, they'll help you develop an airtight funnel to turn interest into inquiries. Excellent marketers understand how marketing efforts ladder up to sales, revenue, and business growth—which is the ultimate goal.

To better understand the connection between marketing and sales, start with the sale and work your way back up the funnel, determining key performance metrics (KPIs) that affect sales and revenue. With that data, sales and marketing teams can explore campaigns, tactics, and action items that will allow them to generate more sales and revenue.

From there, data-driven team members can set up measurement protocols to capture data that will help everyone stay on the same page and make better decisions for optimizing the customer journey from brand awareness to signing the contract.

A better solution is to use a closed-loop marketing strategy, which creates a continuous feedback loop that uses mutually agreed-upon data and analytics to drive conversations between marketers and salespeople. Instead of creating a divide, both sides work together toward a common goal.

Key steps to start with closed-loop marketing

Shifting to a closed-loop marketing strategy requires time, planning, commitment, and the right tools. But before buying the newest customer relationship management (CRM) or analytics platform, schedule a joint meeting to emphasize that these changes aren't just procedural; they are a new way of thinking about how you do business. In short, you are making cultural shifts that start with fostering a more data-driven culture. To do so, you'll need buy-in from both teams.

1. Foster a data-driven culture

Data is key to bridging the gap between marketing and sales teams. Your first meeting between marketing and sales should be an open conversation about what each team does, how they do it, and how they measure results. Encourage transparency and empathy as each group shares their experiences and explains how and why they measure success. Once everyone understands roles and responsibilities, it's time to discuss what kind of information will promote informed decision-making for everyone involved.

2. Commit to regular communication among departments

Effective closed-loop marketing requires seamless communication among departments. This ensures that data is shared, insights are exchanged, and strategies are aligned. Regular meetings, collaboration, and open lines of communication are essential for success. Determine reporting needs, including essential KPIs, campaign performance metrics, and other data needed to monitor campaign health and make data-driven decisions. You can also decide on reporting cadence (i.e., monthly, weekly, or real-time).

3. Measuring results with the right technology

You may need to invest in or re-evaluate your automation platforms, CRMs, analytics programs, and other software you use in marketing and sales. Each tool should feature adequate tracking capabilities that meet your needs for data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Once closed-loop marketing strategies are implemented, analyze the results in meaningful ways and at regular intervals. Each metric or KPI should demonstrate how campaign performance affects the bottom line.

Continuously optimizing and iterating

Closed-loop marketing is an iterative process, and by reframing KPIs as active questions, you'll naturally drive action with team members. For example, instead of "looking at" inquiry and close rates, you can ask: "Are salespeople better at closing warm leads or cold leads? Why?"

You're still looking at inquiry and close rates, but by framing the data with questions, marketing and sales teams can have more meaningful conversations about optimizing campaigns and solving challenges.

By evaluating KPIs throughout the sales cycle and into the business's bank account, marketers can refine campaigns and make informed decisions to maximize returns.

Importance of omnichannel measuring capabilities

Omnichannel measurement allows marketers to monitor customer interactions across all online and offline channels. This comprehensive perspective aids in deciphering how different touchpoints contribute to a consumer's conversion journey.

Prioritizing this aspect of technology can transform your approach to ROI

tracking and performance evaluation. An omnichannel analytics platform can be as simple as a spreadsheet that aggregates marketing insights (e.g., directory listings, social media efforts, website metrics, and email marketing performance) with sales data (e.g., number of sales follow-up emails sent, consults scheduled, and sales closed).

Even if you can't pinpoint an individual's journey from viewing a single Reel to signing a contract, following the customer journey through the entire marketing and sales cycle will reveal patterns and offer valuable insights for optimizing marketing efforts and sales tactics.

When thoughtfully connected, a little data can go a long way for small and mid-sized businesses.

Using closed-loop marketing to bridge gaps between sales and marketing teams can revolutionize your approach to marketing ROI. This integrative approach helps teams focus on data-driven decision-making, tying everyone's efforts directly to revenue generation instead of increasing brand exposure or drumming up inquiries. ●

Christie Osborne is the owner of [Mountainside Media](#), a company that helps event industry professionals brands develop scalable marketing strategies that bring in more inquiries and leads. Christie is a national educator with recent speaking engagements at NACE Experience, WIPA and the ABC Conference. Christie regularly shares industry insight in her *Special Events* column, as well as on *Wed Altered*, *Risingtide Society*, *WeddingIQ*, and NACE's industry blog.



ON TREND

BUSINESS +
LEISURE = *Ever*



Event Success

Take advantage of the bleisure trend to improve event engagement

By Amanda Nicklaus

Picture this: the invites for your corporate event go out, and as soon as people receive them, the wheels start turning. People immediately look at their PTO, their schedules, even their partner's schedule. They're looking to make a vacation out of the trip.

Maybe you find yourself doing the same: when you plan your trip for an upcoming event, you slide in a day or two to explore the area on your own. You look for ways to squeeze in personal time before or after you have to be on-site for your event.

This is the mindset of the modern business traveler, and as “bleisure” becomes the preferred method of travel, it is changing the way hospitality and events cater to travelers and attendees.

Here's all you need to know about this rising travel trend, which might be here to stay—including how to plan destination events in a way that attracts higher attendance and engagement.



ON TREND



(Top) The Historic Hotel Bethlehem in Bethlehem, PA, has seen an increase in bleisure travelers and its staff must act as experts on everything happening and everything to do in the area. Photo courtesy Historic Hotel Bethlehem

(Below) An enchanting evening in one of the natural wonders of popular destination Cancun, surrounded by stalactites. Photo courtesy Terramar DMC

All about bleisure

A combination of the words “business” and “leisure,” bleisure describes the intentional combination of business trips with leisure travel. The word was first used in 2009 by consulting group Future Laboratory, though we’ve experienced a spike in bleisure popularity as a response to the COVID pandemic travel restrictions (what some are calling “revenge travel”) and the increase in remote jobs. But bleisure is more than a spike in vacations or a lifestyle abroad; it is motivated mainly by already-occurring business trips, with work being the focus and leisure squeezed in. And why not? If you’re already traveling for work—a task which is known to be stressful, fast-paced, and intense, with little to no time for oneself—you may as well use the plane ticket to add a vacation and extra fun, should the circumstances allow.

Even before COVID, extended bleisure trips were on the rise. [Expedia Group](#) reported that in 2016, 37% of business travelers extended their trips for “leisure purposes.” In 2018, that number had grown to 60%. This upward trend picked up where it left off and continued rising after COVID. A [Forbes article](#) from 2022 noted that “bleisure was growing before the pandemic but has taken off recently. It’s poised to take over traditional business travel in 2022 and beyond. 89% of people plan to add personal vacation time to their business travel this year—many of whom will bring family and friends along.”

An article from [Skift Meetings](#) lays out the common components of bleisure trips:

- Extra days at, or near, a meeting or event location
- A travel companion (more than 54% reported this)
- Using frequent flyer or loyalty programs to defray the cost of the second traveler



- Research and apps to make the most of shortened time frames for travel, like seeing Manhattan in two days
- Relying on review sites for information
- Desire for cultural experience or enrichment

Conference goers and destination event attendees are prepared to milk their trips and pack in as many adventurous experiences as possible—the event is merely an excuse for exploring a new destination.

Who is bleisureing?

It should be no surprise that the younger generations are leading the way in bleisure travel. Forbes [reports](#) that 78% of millennials add personal time to the beginning or end of a business trip.

Travel management company Carlson Wagonlit reports that bleisure travel is most common among millennials age 25–34; though the second largest demographic of bleisure travelers is in the age range of 36–54 and has an average annual income of about \$80,000. Younger travelers also tend to choose different lodgings than those chosen for the business event.

The Skift article clarifies: “According to the Exploring the Generational Divide in Business Travel from American Express and the Global Business Travel Association, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers tend to stay at the



(Above and left) Los Cabos is a stunning destination, with opportunities for supper by the sea and lots of beach vibes. Event by and photo courtesy Terramar DMC



(Left) Surf's up! An Instworthy entrance at this Terramar DMC event at the Hilton Anaheim hyped up attendees from the get-go. Photo courtesy Terramar DMC

same hotel for business and leisure portions of their trips, while those under 35 and frequent travelers look for other options based on location, price, and convenience.”

If your event attendees tend to be aged 55 and under, you should expect a decent portion of them to be using the event as leverage for experiencing a destination on their own terms.

Bleisure is here to stay

There are myriad reasons why business travelers are choosing to turn their work

trip into a “workcation,” a prevalent one being wellness.

In an article for the [BBC](#), Jeanne Liu of the Global Business Travel Association said that “Travel wellbeing relates to job satisfaction, which means people stay productive and stay longer in their jobs.”

Flexibility in work situations can create better work-life balance, especially at work events that are historically known for being fast-paced, long, and somewhat tedious.

Kate Patay of Terramar, A DMC Network Company, says that planners and their teams can benefit from incorporating leisure into their



ON TREND

own event travel as well.

“Budgeting for team members to come in a day pre- or post-event is not only great for employee morale, but it helps to give the traveling businessperson some much-needed downtime to combat the stress of travel.”

As COVID “revenge travel” stays strong, combining work trips with leisure allows people to recharge and explore new places—and sometimes scout locations for returning work trips and other future destination events.

People are also keen on combining business and leisure because it allows them to minimize travel, reducing their carbon footprint as well as the cost of travel, since much of the trip is paid for by their employer.

How to plan for bleisure travelers

So, what can planners do to take advantage of the bleisure crowd?

The right destination

To start, it’s important to choose a destination that attracts bleisure travelers. They are more likely to come to an event that they know they can turn into a personal vacation, especially if it’s a popular place to visit.

Patay encourages looking at destinations that have unique activities and locations. “Warm weather and beach destinations like San Diego and Puerto Vallarta always see bleisure travel pickup, as well as food-and-wine specific destinations like Napa and Chicago (one of my personal favorite foodie cities),” she says. She also notes that there are plenty of popular



(Above) Los Cabos is more than beaches: a lush green backdrop at Flora Farm is sure to surprise and delight guests. Photo courtesy Terramar DMC

(Below) Del Dotto Winery in Napa is an excellent spot for bleisure events. Photo courtesy Terramar DMC

destinations for all types of price points. “If you were actively trying to give attendees this option, yet stay within a tighter budget, you can choose a city like Reno for the hotel block and the main group, and then have activities and excursions close by in Tahoe, which is only 45 minutes from Reno.” She adds, jokingly, “And it should basically be illegal to come to Reno and not visit Tahoe.”

An article from [TechTarget](#) notes that there are other factors to consider in a destination besides its bucket-list quality. To start, it should also be safe and affordable, as well as easily navigable, not only by walking but by subways, buses, ride shares, and car rentals. Travelers will go out and enjoy the location if lodgings, restaurants, and activities have several price

points. Destinations will also bring more bleisure travelers if they have a variety of activities to choose from, including museums, historical attractions, outdoor shopping, and other entertainment.

Kelly Ronalds of the Historic Hotel Bethlehem in Bethlehem, PA, believes the entire destination is the event space. “In the past, planners have always, in my opinion, been focused very much on meeting space size, what are the breakout rooms—the actual construction of the event itself, and I think they have to look beyond the four walls of the hotel [or venue].”

Patay agrees: “Hosting your meetings in popular tourist destinations and bringing the actual meetings

to life outside of the ballroom are great ways to increase attendance.”

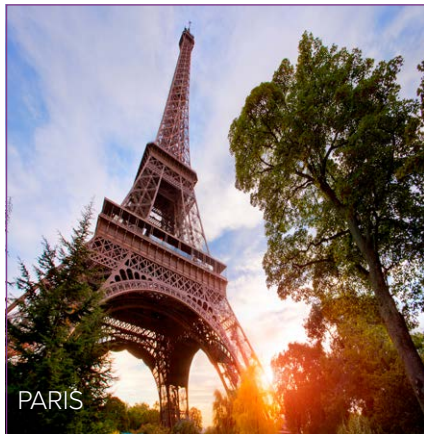
Programming

No longer is your event itinerary the sole itinerary of the trip. If there are must-visit restaurants, trendy tourist attractions, or even a popular concert in town, you can be sure your attendees will make time to go.

To keep travelers engaged, create an itinerary that accommodates extra activities while giving them a reason to attend the full event. If the days end too early, people might dip out to do their own thing, so make sure to create programming that your crowd doesn’t want to miss, especially with some sort of big bang on the last night. Offer pre- and post-event activities to keep your attendees engaged and to allow them to explore the destination together. You can even build in breaks that take place nearby—at a beloved local coffee shop, say, instead of in their hotel or a conference center lobby.

Another thing to keep in mind: many bleisure travelers are bringing

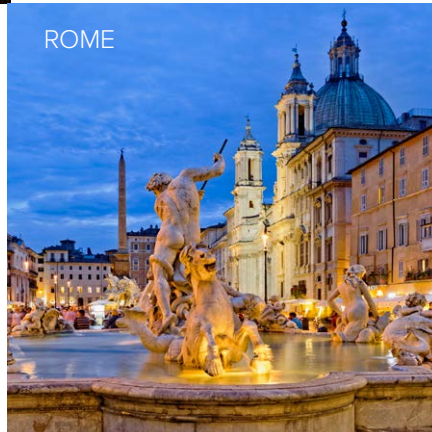
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15 BEST PLACES TO VISIT FOR 2023–2024



1. Paris
2. Bora Bora
3. Glacier National Park
4. Rome
5. Swiss Alps
6. Maui
7. London
8. Maldives
9. Turks & Caicos



10. Tokyo
11. Phuket
12. Costa Rica
13. South Island, New Zealand
14. Tahiti
15. Banff

Traveling for
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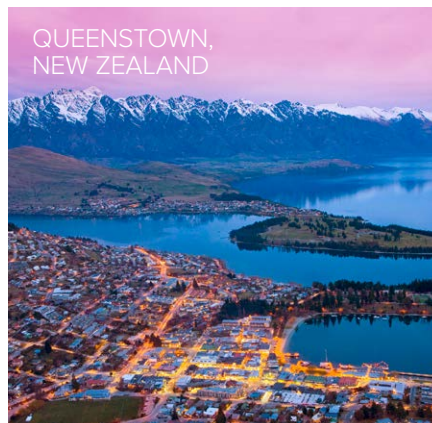
Information above courtesy [U.S. News & World Report](#)



TOP INCENTIVE TRAVEL DESTINATIONS 2024



1. Mallorca, Spain
2. Florence, Italy
3. Lisbon, Portugal
4. Guanacaste, Costa Rica
5. Cabo San Lucas, Mexico
6. Puerto Rico

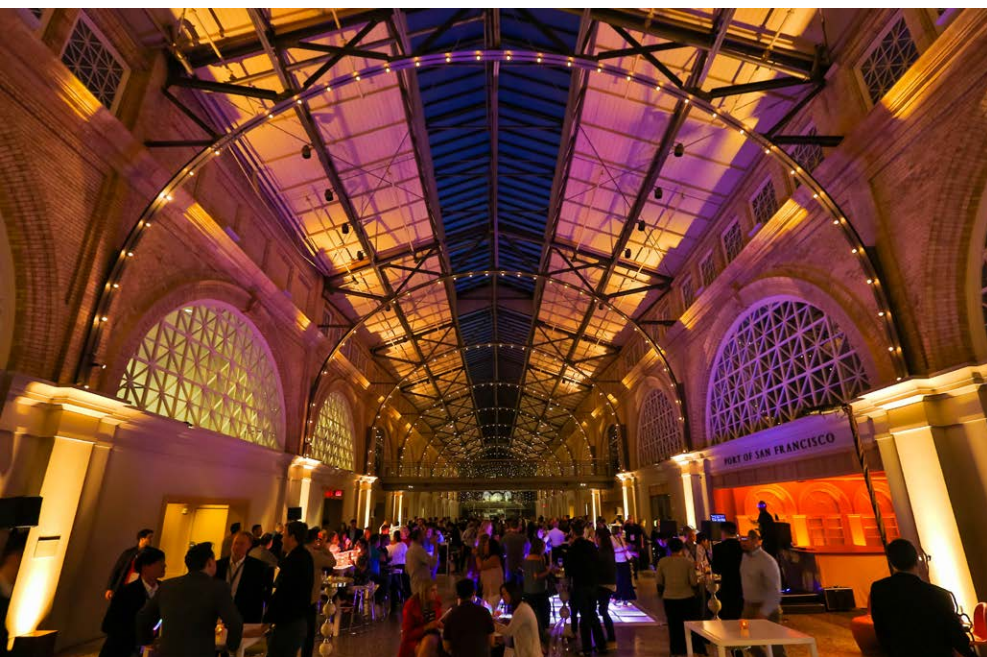


7. Bali
8. Queenstown, New Zealand
9. Bora Bora
10. Hawaii
11. Whistler, Canada
12. Wyoming

Information above courtesy [GoGather](#)



ON TREND



(Top) What's old is new when hosting an event in Panama. Photo courtesy Terramar DMC

(Below) Iconic landmarks, like the San Francisco Ferry Building, are sure to leave a lasting impression with your guests. Photo courtesy Terramar DMC

along partners, family, and friends, either for the entirety of the trip or for the extended portion after business ends. Create schedules that accommodate partners or plus ones, even accounting for them in your programming. Choose event locations and venues that are centrally located, so that partners can stay occupied nearby—or even join in for a cocktail hour here and there. If you really want to impress your attendees, make a resource guide for partners, family, and friends that have tagged along.

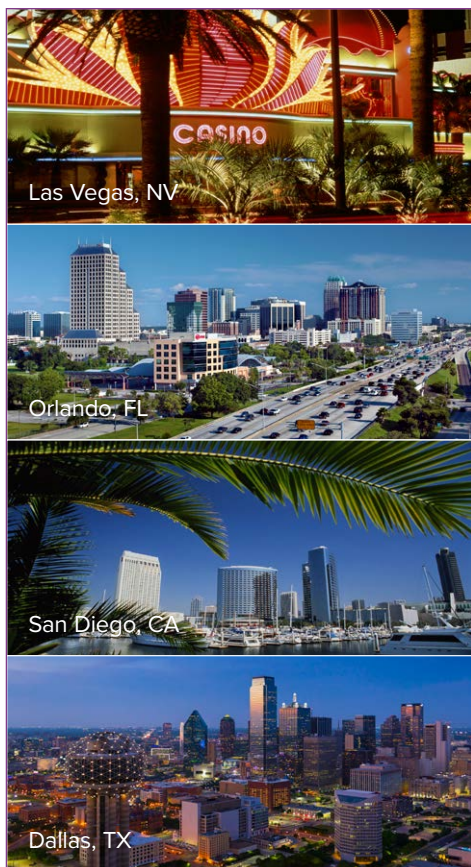
Especially with younger attendees, allow time for local exploration. Gone are the days of all work and no play; with wellness and work-life balance finding their way into business culture, bleisure travelers are looking to make the most of both their work and their personal time.

“I’m hyper aware of leaving plenty of time in the attendee schedule for leisure and time on their own so that they can opt to either stay caught up on emails and what’s happening in the office or go out and explore on their own,” says Patay. “When they come back into the meeting they tend to be refreshed and engaged, so it’s a win all around if you build in personal time to every agenda.”

Activities

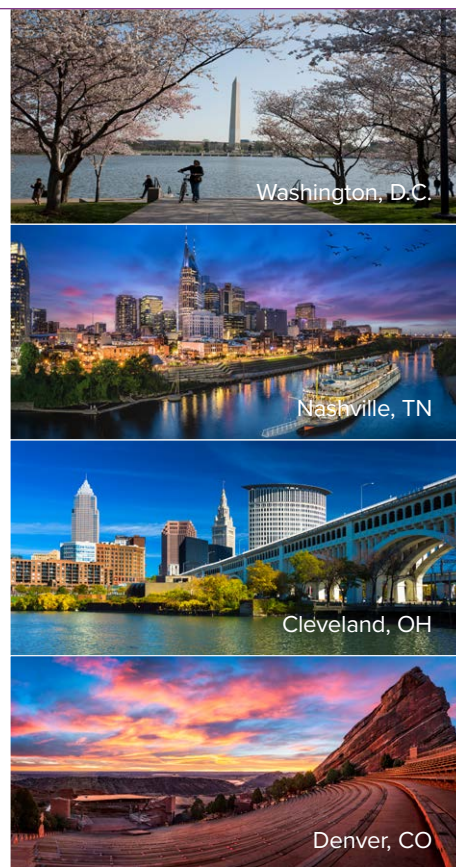
Ronalds observes that pre-COVID, people would come for business, dine in the hotel, and hole up in their rooms. “The business travelers were kind of disengaged, right? They came in, you know, they might have breakfast with you, and then they were gone all day; they came back, they went up to their rooms and then they worked,” says Ronalds. “Maybe they would order room service.”

Now, she observes people coming for business and using their free time to explore the destination, often scouting the place for future business-related events. “Now, it’s like, ‘What can I do besides that?’ They’re not cooping themselves up in their rooms, they’re down in open spaces... They’re



TOP U.S. CONFERENCE LOCATIONS 2024

1. Las Vegas, NV
2. Orlando, FL
3. San Diego, CA
4. Dallas, TX*
5. Washington, D.C.
6. Nashville, TN
7. Cleveland, OH
8. Denver, CO



** Editor's note: The Dallas Convention Center is poised to be torn down in 2024; Information above courtesy [GoGather](#)*

It's a win all around if you build in personal time to every agenda. —Kate Patay

coming to the desk and saying, ‘Where are the running trails, where are the walking trails?’”

Ronalds has noticed that travelers want to proactively engage with others. Often, she gets requests for guided walking tours, with people actually avoiding self-guided tours. “It’s, ‘Oh, Kelly, I saw the sign about history walking tours, where can we do that?’ I say, ‘Well you can do it on your own if you download—’” but she’ll get interrupted: “No, no, no, I want somebody to walk me around so I can ask questions.” In a post-pandemic world, bleisure travelers are looking for ways to connect with their coworkers as well as the location they’re staying in. “They want engagement.”

This can take many forms, from kayaking outings to escape rooms to workshops and classes with local businesses to volunteering for a local charity. It can look like entertainment, too—74% of frequent business travelers wish their corporate travel policy included a budget for entertainment, says tour booking software company [Regiondo](#).

Increasingly, this also looks like dine-arounds. A lot of companies have gone remote and hired new people in the span of a few years, Ronalds reminds us. There are seasoned employees working alongside new hires, and with no physical offices, employees are looking for organized play to get to know one another better. Everyone must eat, so

eating out with coworkers after the business portion of the day is a popular activity. This is also why destination employee retreats are gaining popularity, says Ronalds; they provide a work-leisure setting for coworkers to bond in-person instead of through a screen.

The main idea is to get creative in taking your event outside of a single venue. “Bleisure travelers like to experience a city outside of just a meeting and convention space, so think of a destination highlight that’s Insta-worthy,” Patay encourages, “like the famous arches in Cabo, or a foodie tour like Lip Smacking Foodie Tours in Las Vegas, where you get to sample the signature dish at multiple well-known restaurants.



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“Bonus points for taking a meeting offsite into a unique venue like a museum or a marine vessel—when it’s properly communicated and made accessible to all, the attendance is usually close to 100%.”

The best of both worlds

One way to really know what your bleisure attendees want is to practice it yourself.

“A great way to really experience a destination you are traveling to for business is to add a shoulder arrival or departure so you can take additional time to explore and see from a local’s perspective what it’s really like,” says Patay, a fan of bleisure.

“With the majority of my travel having at least one flight connection and taking a full day, I personally add time to each of my trips to arrive and explore the destination and have some much-needed quiet time before I jump straight into an event. This also is a great way to be the person everyone comes to during an event to ask for ideas and recommendations, because you’ve already gotten the lay of the land. It’s a great networking tool!”

Working with the bleisure crowd means that you get to play the role of both event producer and tour guide for your attendees, although you don’t necessarily have to become an actual expert. Utilize DMOs and CVBs as well as hotel concierge, because they are the actual destination experts

and can work with you to compile resources and ideas. You might even be able to work out some pricing discounts on hotels or other activities by partnering with local experts.

By mixing business and pleasure, you will attract the bleisure crowd, catering to their adventurous side while keeping them engaged in your event.

If there’s one thing that the event industry excels at, it’s gathering people together to create connections and memories. Lean into your creativity to make the average work event a chance for business and leisure, and your event will inevitably satisfy attendees who are looking to get a little more out of their travels. ●



San Diego is a great location for combining business and leisure.
Photo courtesy Terramar DMC

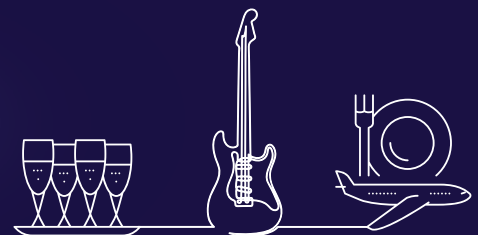
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Modern Tech Solutions for Team Longevity in the Event Space



By investing in the right software, you can help your team to feel empowered and confident in their roles.

By Nora Sheils

Building an effective and dependable team is a labor of love. The right people can help launch your business into new realms with increased revenue and better service. But your company culture plays a significant role in whether your team members stay—and neglecting your tech systems can lead to a high turnover rate.

After all, business technology is designed to support your employees. By investing in the right software, you can help them to feel empowered and confident in their roles. On the flip side, lacking tech solutions can leave them feeling overloaded and burnt out.

To achieve sustainable business success, you must prioritize team longevity by providing employees with the resources they need to thrive. Here are a few ways to leverage tech tools to keep your team—and your business—in top form.

STREAMLINING COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION

Effective collaboration is critical for successful event planning, and it starts (and ends) with your company's internal communication. From discussing client expectations to coordinating with fellow industry professionals, modern communication tools ensure everyone stays informed on the team's progress in each event.

Real-time messaging platforms, like Slack, Voxer, and Microsoft Teams, allow for quick check-ins, team huddles, and private messages between individuals. They can also serve as digital watercoolers, encouraging team bonding and better work-life balance.

Project management software is another useful tool for supporting collaboration within your team. Programs like Basecamp, Trello, and Asana provide a “home base” for project-related communications, task assignments, and important attachments.

ENHANCING WORKFLOW & TASK MANAGEMENT

Managing complex event workflows involves many moving pieces, demanding significant time and attention to keep a project on track. Even if your team shares responsibilities, it's easy for small details to slip through the cracks when every step requires manual oversight.

Fortunately, modern advancements in technology have paved the way for accessible and affordable automation solutions. Many popular business platforms offer native automation features, allowing technology to share your team's workload. A few examples include ClickUp, Monday, and AirTable. And when it comes to the client-facing booking process, Rock Paper Coin can be another easy

To achieve sustainable business success, you must prioritize team longevity by providing employees with the resources they need to thrive.

automation to make contracting and invoicing seamless.

Trigger-based workflows let your team step away from the minutiae and put their efforts into higher-level tasks that have a greater impact on your company's success. For instance, when software can automatically send invoice reminders on a set schedule, your team can focus on generating leads and closing more sales.

PROVIDING TRAINING & GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Job stagnation is one of the most common reasons people leave jobs, even if they're well-paid and otherwise content. Nobody wants to feel bored at work, especially when they know there is no room for growth. So if you want to increase team longevity, it's vital to provide your employees with opportunities for skill development.

Continuing education comes in many forms and at every price point, so look for cost-effective ways to invest in your team's future. For example, you can send them to industry conferences or niche workshops to learn from experienced professionals. If that doesn't fit your budget, take advantage of e-learning platforms, digital courses, and educational webinars for a low-cost alternative. Sharing relevant books and podcast episodes can also motivate your team to continue learning.

In addition to boosting job satisfaction, investing in your team's education also supports your business goals. When your employees learn new skills and improve in their roles, the results will ripple throughout the company, enhancing everything from project management to client experience.

PROMOTING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING & ENGAGEMENT

With the rise in remote work over the past few years, more companies have recognized the value of a hybrid work environment. Allowing employees to work from home (or while traveling) demonstrates trust and encourages autonomy. It also reduces life stress for your team, as they have more flexibility to schedule doctor's appointments, pick up children from school, and attend to other essential duties.

But remote work requires a digital workspace that promotes virtual collaboration, so you must start by building a robust foundation on technology. In addition to the tools mentioned previously, you'll need a reliable video communication platform. Zoom, Google Meet, Zoho, and GoToMeeting are all popular options.

You may also want to consider your team's specific needs. For example, if your company bills by the hour, you might need a time-tracking system like Toggl or Harvest. For finances

and payroll management, Quickbooks and Gusto are solid choices. Loom is another valuable tool for remote teamwork, as it allows one to screen-record and share with colleagues.

Adopting new technology can escalate your team's performance, but you don't need to overhaul your systems overnight. Too much change can leave your employees feeling overwhelmed instead of empowered. Instead, share ideas for tech updates with your team and see what they think will most impact their daily work experience. You'll feel confident in your investments, and your employees will appreciate the chance to share their input—another bonus for team longevity! ●

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 approach to contract, invoicing, and payment processing for the wedding and event industry. 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.

Scaling Back

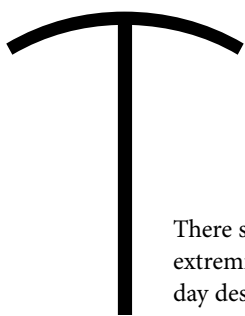


ck the Big Day

Why small-scale weddings
are rising in popularity

By Amanda Nicklaus

Elopements and pop-up weddings don't necessarily mean everyone stands around. There are still elements of luxury like this comfortable and trendy loveseat. Photo courtesy Cactus Collective Weddings



There seems to be a growing divide in wedding extremism. As always, over-the-top, lavish, multi-day destination weddings are popular as ever, with ceremonies being situated among a jam-packed itinerary of luxury activities and décor.

Conversely, a growing number of couples are at the opposite end of the spectrum, choosing minimalism as a way to let their special day speak for itself.

At the core, however, is the desire to celebrate exactly the way the couple wants, with no expectations and a YOLO sort of attitude—one that certainly sprang from the uncertainty, isolation, and restrictions of the pandemic. Also at their core: luxury (though the word luxury in small-scale weddings takes on a different form than that of extravagant destination weddings).

While it's easy to understand the mindset behind an all-out extravagant affair, it might take a moment to see why couples are choosing to downsize the pomp and circumstance of their big day. Let's take a closer look at these small-scale weddings and see what makes them shine.

Downsizing the big day

The three main types of scaled-back weddings are micro-weddings, elopements, and pop-up weddings.

It's a bit up to interpretation what makes a wedding "micro," but the defining element is that this wedding is much smaller than average. McKenzie Taylor, founder of the Las Vegas wedding coordinating company Cactus Collective Weddings, defines a micro-wedding as 50 guests or less. Basically, a micro-wedding has all the features of a traditional wedding but on a much smaller scale.

Anna Treimer, founder of Wildly Connected Photography, says that elopements are a bit harder to define, because many couples define them differently. Some couples invite up to 20 guests while others have none, making the day about them and their partner alone. While the mere mention of the word "elopement" may conjure up images of sneaking off and tying the knot in a glitzy Las Vegas chapel, these days, the stigma of elopements is fading away as this type of wedding becomes more elegant and intentional.

Finally, pop-up weddings get couples in and out of a brief ceremony that takes place in a temporary venue, set up and broken down by a single wedding coordinating team. This



allows multiple couples to get married at the same venue on a date that could otherwise be difficult to book due to limited availability. Pop-up weddings often have a theme, with décor set up, a bouquet and boutonniere provided, and an officiant, a photographer, and a coordinator on-site to take care of everything. The couple merely signs up for one of the slots and shows up for a stress-free, simple ceremony.

As for the festivities around the ceremony, these are often downsized as well. Couples often swap out receptions in favor of dining out or hiring a private chef to cook for them at a vacation rental. The simpler each aspect of the wedding, the better.

Why less is more

While there are many reasons now to minimize a wedding, the initial trend spiked because it was simply the only option. During COVID, couples had to make the difficult decision to either push off their wedding indefinitely, waiting months or even years to get married, or else scale completely back to

(Left) With small-scale weddings, couples can invite the people that matter the most, reducing the pressure of others' expectations. Photo courtesy Cactus Collective Weddings

(Right and below) Small-scale weddings can give couples more freedom than traditional weddings, like this Halloween-themed elopement that covered two locations. Photos courtesy Wildly Connected Photography



Planners are the key to creating a small wedding's aesthetic—furniture, florals, and décor will give the smallest of ceremonies an elevated feel. Photo courtesy Cactus Collective Weddings



Elopements are by no means glorified photo shoots, but they still make for incredible photos! Photo courtesy Cactus Collective Weddings





make the ceremony safe for all involved and satisfy capacity restrictions. Additionally, supply chain issues made it necessary to cut back on décor and supplies.

Based on these circumstances, Treimer says, couples began to realize the upside to inviting fewer guests and having less on their pre-wedding to-do lists. In a way, COVID normalized small-scale weddings.

These days, minimizing a wedding is a move of empowerment. Traditional weddings, Treimer points out, come with a lot of external pressures and expectations. “No matter what they [decide], someone in the family [will be] upset... [or the couple is] worried about keeping people entertained.... You shouldn’t have to worry about that on your wedding day.”

Some of Treimer’s couples now will get closer to the finish line, realize that their special day is becoming more stressful than enjoyable, and scrap the whole thing, opting for a minimal approach instead. “I just want to give them the biggest high-five!” she says. “People are realizing that doing things outside of a traditional wedding allows you to do what feels right for you. If first dances don’t feel good to you, or you have a strained relationship with your family, who wants to have a first dance with your parent in front of hundreds of people?” Small-scale weddings allow the freedom for a couple to express themselves as they are. “Having those smaller weddings opens up the door for you to basically do whatever you want.”

Another upside of small-scale weddings can be the cost, though not all small-scale weddings run on a tight budget. For those that do, ditching the excess and investing only in the essentials can save couples a decent amount of money that

(Above) Cactus Collective Weddings offers a cake and champagne add-on to their micro destination wedding package. Photo courtesy Cactus Collective Weddings

(Right) Outdoor ceremonies are perfect for small weddings—nature provides an excellent venue! (Just remember—you still need a permit, even if you’re in the middle of the desert.) Photo courtesy Cactus Collective Weddings





“Small scale weddings don’t always mean small budgets. Many couples today are planning smaller weddings because they want to make the event more intimate, more meaningful.” —*Dona Liston*

can be put toward a honeymoon or life together. Taylor says that given the current economy and inflation, with angst and anxiety around cost, she doesn’t see this scaling back going away anytime soon.

Plus, Taylor notes, “People are looking for quality over quantity,” pointing out that to-be-weds are craving great experiences, and those who can’t necessarily afford large-scale luxury usually end up sacrificing people or the budget to create a semi-luxurious feel. By starting off small, dollars aren’t necessarily stretched thin and instead can be invested in a few high-quality touches that make the day feel luxurious.

Sustainability also plays a role in smaller weddings: with less décor, less invitations—less of everything—small-scale weddings create less waste. Pop-ups are especially eco-friendly, reusing the same wedding set and props for multiple ceremonies.

Finally, in this age of quick turnarounds, small-scale weddings can allow for a sooner wedding date from the time of proposal, easing the stress of finding a venue and planning a ceremony and reception in a short amount of time. To wit, the [New York Times](#) published an article on “Flash Weddings”—weddings that “are usually planned within three months or less—sometimes within a week. They are typically less pricey since they are frequently held at no-cost locations like parks or beaches, with less formal decorations. They also involve fewer guests and can happen any day of the week.” With many couples working on short timelines, small-scale weddings are the realistic way to make a ceremony low-key yet memorable.

Tiny wedding plans

“An elopement planner probably sounds like an oxymoron—but it’s totally not,” says an article from [WeddingWire](#). As previously mentioned, elopements have shifted from spur-of-the-moment courthouse marriages to simple but intentional elegant minimalist ceremonies. Planners can still be of great value to a couple who is scaling back their wedding: they



Many small weddings take place outdoors, where the setting provides natural ambience and a gorgeous background for photos. Photos courtesy Wildly Connected Photography

help figure out the type of elopement, help coordinate the location, work within a couple's budget, connect couples to the right vendors, help with the design, cover legalities, create a timeline, and provide support.

The legal aspect itself is important, and one that couples might not be aware of. For example, outdoor elopements and ceremonies require permits, both for the ceremony and for the filming and photography, along with application fees. "Many people think of elopements as a glorified portrait session and that you can set up a table in the woods, who cares?" says Treimer. But you can get fined for skipping the permits, she warns. The legal requirements change depending on the state or location, so as a planner, you can relieve a couple's stress by knowing and handling the legal aspects of their ceremony.

Venue owner and former planner Dona Liston (Lamermont Events) offers small-scale weddings and agrees that planners are essential for their success.

"Small scale weddings don't always mean small budgets," she says. "Many couples today are planning smaller weddings because they want to make the event more intimate, more meaningful. These couples also want to enjoy their day and not be stressed out. This is where a planner is essential."

Liston encourages using impactful language in your marketing, making sure you don't minimize the offered

experience just because it's a smaller size. Use words like "intimate," "stress free," and "romantic" and stay away from "micro," "small," or "budget." Small weddings are equally as significant as large ones, so sell them with the same enthusiasm as your average and bigger weddings. They also can generate sizable profit, since they often take place during the week or on Sundays, meaning you can fill in days you wouldn't normally be able to book business.

The best way to approach small-scale wedding planning, says Liston, is to get to know why a small wedding is important to your client. She asks her clients three questions:

1. What is the dream wedding?
2. What is the budget?
3. What is your priority?

Then be prepared for any answer your client gives.

"Really listen and don't assume," encourages Liston. "Our job is to help our couples have that dream wedding within their budget, emphasizing their priorities. I tell our couples, 'If it's not important to you, don't do it.'" Work with your client to be creative and start new traditions if that's what they're looking for.

As small-scale weddings gain traction, you may decide it's time to add them to your offerings. By being creative and understanding why each couple is scaling back, you can make their small ceremony a big, memorable experience. ●

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FOOD FOR FÊTES

'Tis the Season

How to use a seasonal approach to create your event's menu

By Amanda Nicklaus

There's nothing more refreshing than a change in season, and the menu for your event is a great place to reflect those changes.

Seasonality is the concept of being dependent on the season or time of year. It's easy to think of a fall festival or winter wonderland-type event whose purpose is to celebrate the season, but any event can feature a little ode to the phases of nature.



This means featuring food that is harvested at its peak rather than prematurely, and it relies on sourcing in-season food from local farms and suppliers instead of transporting over long distances when out of season. For example, in the Midwest, tomatoes can only be grown and harvested from outdoor farms during mid to late summer. In the winter, Midwesterners can eat tomatoes, but these crops must be shipped in from places whose climates support tomato growth in the winter months, which often are picked prematurely, resulting in pale, flavorless tomatoes instead of the brightly colored, richly flavored fruit they can be.

As a planner, you can bring seasonality to any event by working with your clients and caterer to create a dining

experience grounded in the seasons, with ingredients, dishes, and beverages that complement the time of year.

Making the world go 'round

Seasonality isn't just a fun theme to try out or a trend to hop on. This practice is actually beneficial in a variety of ways.

For starters, working with the seasons is financially practical, because sourcing local ingredients is an investment into the local economy. **Seasonal ingredients are also less expensive**, since all the same items are harvested and sold

(Clockwise from top right) 🌿 Chowgirls Catering offers a **salad of spring greens and vegetables**. Photo courtesy Becca Dilley 🍷 This organic vegetable platter by Chowgirls Catering features **autumn and late summer vegetables**, like green beans, squash, and carrots. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz 🍹 A **watermelon-fennel shrub** is both a refreshing beverage and a great way to serve what's in season! Beverage by Chowgirls Catering. Photo courtesy Sage E Imagery 🍰 **Cranberry Chèvre Mini Cheesecakes** by Chowgirls Catering uses the flavors of the season. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



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Spiced butternut squash soup with pepita pesto, lime crema, and pomegranate in ceramic pumpkin bowls by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Alison Berner



When nurtured, the relationships between planners and caterers can lead to trust, communication, and smoother selling—a win-win situation! Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



Chowgirls Catering showcased their holiday menu at a tasting event that took place in early August, so they utilized summer produce where winter produce will eventually be. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz

during the same time window, creating a huge supply with decreased prices.

In an article on sustainability for [Catersource magazine](#), Clint Elkins (SB Value) quotes Matt Haggerty (DSquared Catering, Seattle) on the price of in-season items: “Typically, seasonal ingredients are more available so they can be cheaper or easier to find. We currently change our menus four times a year to reflect the season and allow for purchasing power.”

Sarah Kuhlberg (Colette's Catering & Events, Orange County, CA) agrees. “It is important to think about variety and innovation, as eating seasonally encourages diversity in menu options throughout the year,” she told *Special Events*. “This can be exciting for clients and their guests. Inform clients that each season offers its own set of ingredients, allowing for innovative and creative menu planning. Also, seasonal ingredients are usually more abundant and cost-effective. Inform clients that choosing seasonal items can help manage costs while still providing high-quality meals. Caterers can work within budget constraints more effectively this way as well.”

Seasonal items also mean higher quality, especially with produce. When plants can be harvested at their prime and utilized nearly immediately—versus harvesting early, transporting across long distances, and ripening artificially or in stores—they retain freshness and even more nutrients than their off-season counterparts. And on farms where animals



Chowgirls Caterings' Orange-Fennel Chicken Skewers (Larry Schultz organic chicken thigh with ras el hanout spice blend, grilled and tossed with orange-fennel glaze). Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



New York steak with romesco sauce, broccolini, heirloom fingerling potatoes, and chimichurri by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Peterson Design & Photography



A colorful plated brunch course of chive pâte à choux with smoked salmon, lemon crème fraîche, cucumber salad, and fried capers by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Lisette Gatliff

are fed fresh, high-nutrition plants that are in season, the [flavor of the meat](#) tastes better.

Working within the framework of the seasons also has social and environmental benefits, too. When you posit yourself within a network of people in the food system, it's easy to see how many people and places are involved in getting food from the earth to your clients. Instead of working with caterers who use mass-produced food products that remove the visibility of a food item's life cycle, you can form relationships with caterers and local growers and suppliers to create a community where you know exactly where every morsel your clients eat comes from.

"Skip the shipping and handling surcharges and take advantage of your local food scene, including butchers, farmers, beekeepers, brewers, and other specialists," says Elkins. (Read more about caterers who are removing the middleman and working directly with ingredients at their conception in our sister magazine, *Catersource*, at the back of this issue on page 72).

Seasonal, local ingredients also influence cuisine types that can play into personalizing your client's menu. "Highlighting local cuisine with seasonal menus often reflects regional specialties," says Kuhlberg. "Encourage your clients to explore local ingredients, which can add a unique and



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authentic touch to their event. Caterers can create menus that celebrate the area's culinary heritage.”

Finally, the environmentally sustainable benefits of seasonal menus can't be overlooked. Sourcing local food means cutting out long-distance transportation, which greatly reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Local food sourcing also means you can guarantee you're investing in food suppliers who participate in sustainable and regenerative practices.

“It's important to consider environmental responsibility, as eating seasonally aligns with sustainable practices,” says Kuhlberg. “Explain to clients that choosing seasonal foods reduces the carbon footprint and supports local farmers. Many clients value this eco-friendly approach.”

The secret ingredients

Many caterers already work within the seasons whether they advertise it or not, but if you aren't sure, ask your preferred catering partners about where they source food from. You can also partner with caterers who prioritize seasonal menus.

In another article for [Catersource magazine](#), Elkins notes that the key to seasonal is indeed sourcing local. “Embracing seasonality in your menu is best achieved through sourcing ingredients locally. By prioritizing local sourcing, you can ensure you're working with the freshest foods in your region. And since your location plays a significant role in determining what is ‘in season,’ it's essential to curate a menu with dishes that feature local produce and meats.”

A knowledgeable caterer will know exactly what ingredients are in season and create a menu around nature's offerings.

One example of this is Minneapolis-based Chowgirls Catering, who offers seasonal menus, upholding in-season items as the backbone of their catering approach.

Among one of the first “green” caterers in Minnesota, Chowgirls offers a menu for each season. “Many items on our menu are available year-round but feature different seasonal ingredients,” says Mandy Heathcote-Curry, an event specialist for Chowgirls. “For example, our Organic Vegetable Platter is on our menu in all seasons but it features different vegetables depending on the season.

“We do have a couple items that purposefully indicate ‘seasonal’ ingredients, such as our Crostini with Seasonal Toppings, which allows us to use ingredients we have in house and that helps us to avoid food waste,” Heathcote-Curry adds.

“Of course, sourcing locally means you'll need to familiarize yourself with seasonal availability in your region and plan your menus accordingly,” says Elkins. “It might mean your strawberry cobbler becomes a rhubarb cobbler in the [spring], but the benefits of seasonal menus are worth the flexibility.”

Chowgirls' menus do this by offering mini quiches all year round, with seasonal veggies and local cheese. Dishes like pies and galettes that can be filled with whatever is in season are easy ways to highlight seasonal ingredients, too (turn to page

30 in *Catersource* at the end of this issue for a deep dive into the versatility of pie).

The Chowgirls website also provides [a calendar of what is in season](#) at any given point in the year. You'll see things like asparagus, peas, and ramps in the spring versus beets, Brussels sprouts, and winter squash in fall. They also make note of what to avoid: summer squash and tomatoes in spring, for instance, and asparagus and corn on the cob in fall.

Meat and seafood can also be featured based on seasonality.

In an article for the *Huffington Post*, Terry Ragasa of Sutter Meats explains how the symbiosis of animals and plants is affected by the seasons. “Before refrigeration, people would slaughter hogs around fall because they were eating apples and acorns that would fall on the ground. They'd let them hang over the winter, hams would be ready by Easter. But now, pigs are pretty hearty, farmers have them in and out and they can be eaten anytime. But there is a different flavor in the meat depending on the season.”

Kuhlberg notes that seasonality looks a little different with meat than with produce. “While the concept of ‘seasonality’ might not apply to meats in the same way it does to fruits and vegetables, there are still some factors to consider when it comes to the availability and optimal times to serve different types of meat. At Colette's Catering & Events, we always look to local farms and purveyors when it comes to seasonality and availability.”

Robin Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events and Naked Fig Catering) says that meat's seasonality depends more on the type of meat and how it's prepared. “What we find is that during the warmer months, our clients like to eat lighter meals that don't include heavy meats. We also see that as the late fall and early winter approach, our clients are craving the heartier and heavier, saucier meats, like short ribs.”

Kuhlberg agrees. “While beef is available year-round, hearty and rich cuts like roasts and short ribs are often associated with the cooler months. Grilling cuts like steaks and burgers are typically popular during the warmer months.” The same goes for chicken.

Certain meats are most popular in spring. “Pork, including ham, doesn't have a distinct ‘season’; however, ham is often associated with spring,” she says. “Spring lamb is a term used to describe young lamb that is available in the spring months, usually March to May.” However, “lamb cuts can still be enjoyed year-round, with heartier preparations like stews being more common in the colder months.”

Seafood is more affected by seasonality than livestock, says Kuhlberg. “Seafood can be influenced by both seasonality and [sustainability](#). Certain types of seafood, like shellfish and certain fish species, have peak seasons when they are most abundant and flavorful. It's also crucial to consider sustainable seafood practices and make choices that support responsible fishing and aquaculture.”



Chowgirls Catering's whipped organic mashed potatoes loaded with Hope Creamery butter and local cream, topped with caviar and crème fraîche. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



Dolmades (vegan Greek-style stuffed grape leaves with rice, pine nuts, fresh mint, lemon zest, and golden raisins) from Chowgirls Catering. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



You don't have to sell your clients on ingredients alone. When you work with a quality caterer, you know your event will have great flavors regardless of the season. Spread by Chowgirls Catering. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



Chowgirls Catering offers Crostinis with Seasonal Toppings: at a tasting event in August, the topping was Saffron Tomato Jam & Chevre (whipped chèvre, saffron tomato jam, and sautéed organic spinach). Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



The Cornelius Pasta Bite from Chowgirls Catering is a stunning, delicious striped ravioli, hand-crafted locally by Cornelius Pasta Co. and filled with camembert cheese and cranberry in a lemon butter sauce. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



A Touch of Seasonal Décor

There are ways to use the seasons to your advantage in decorating as well—ways that don't necessarily have to be "season-themed."

One of the easiest ways to do this is to use florals that are in season (which comes down to whatever is in season in your event's location). By working with flowers and greenery that are at their peak, you can channel seasonal sentiment, work with local suppliers and cheaper prices, and create a sense of connection to nature. For example, use greens and bulb flowers like daffodils and tulips in spring, or evergreen branches and poinsettias in winter. Your event doesn't need to be fall-themed but can certainly use colorful leaves and asters to enliven the event space.

Use colors that are found out your window for menus, chargers, and linens. Even the stationery can replicate plants that are in season through the use of illustrations and dried florals.

Another way to embrace the seasons is to use scented candles or incense that reflects the time of year. Nature can be one of the best sources of inspiration for planners!

(Above) A winter-inspired tablescape by Chowgirls Catering, using evergreen and birch branches. Chowgirls' winter menu runs from November through March. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz

Flavors of the seasons

Seasonal menus also dial into the different associations and cravings of each time of year. While the seasons certainly differ depending on location, Kuhlberg and Selden share their favorites for each of nature's turns.

Spring

"In springtime, I suggest offering dishes that are light and fresh," says Kuhlberg. "Consider favorites like lemon herb chicken and salads that feature those crisp spring greens and juicy strawberries. Add a pop of seasonal joy with peas, radishes, and fragrant herbs."

Another green to include is asparagus, which is "just so perfect when in season and can be used in so many ways, from a decadent asparagus risotto or even just grilled to perfection," says Selden. "I also love to shave them into a salad."

As for spring beverages, think light, fruity, and floral: Selden recommends beverages like Aperol spritzes, mojitos, gin and elderflower or cucumber cocktails, lemonade, and iced tea.

"Consider serving up sparkling rosé, spa water infused with fresh fruit, and elegant floral cocktails like elderflower spritzers," suggests Kuhlberg.

Summer

"For summer, I feel like it goes without saying that anything grilled" is ideal for Selden. "Peaches, heirloom tomatoes, fresh corn, and watermelon in salads or straight up as dessert all remind me of a great summer meal." She also says of clients: "They tend to lean towards menus that often don't even include a starch, as the veggies are so delicious and fresh at that time of year that they don't miss the potatoes."

Kuhlberg agrees that the right seasonal choices help balance the season's heat. "When summer comes around, your menu can reflect that with cool choices like chilled tomato gazpacho, grilled seafood, and barbecue chicken."

The fruity floral beverages of spring work for summer, too. "Summertime refreshments like tropical iced teas and lemonades and fruity margaritas are total winners. You can also bring in the summer vibes with classic mojitos and sangrias," recommends Kuhlberg.

Fall

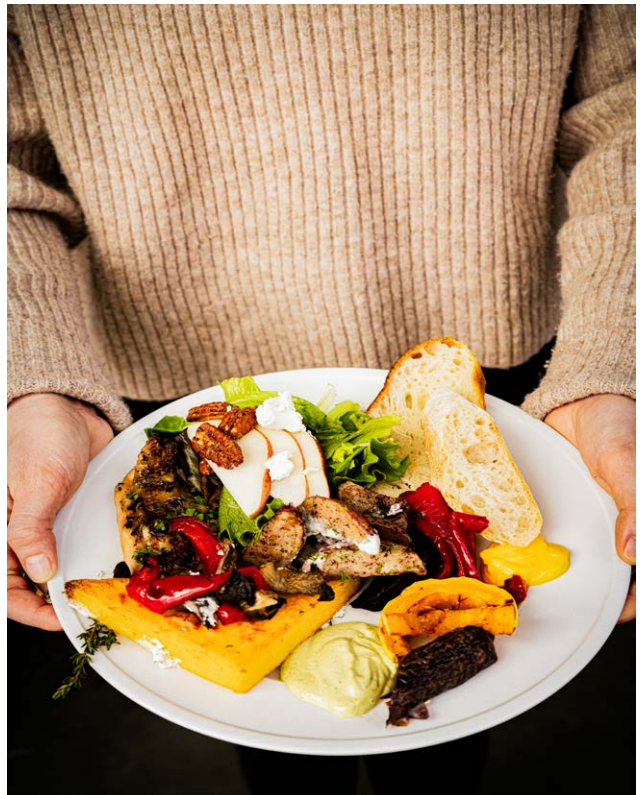
As the temperature cools off, cravings turn toward heavier meals and reflect the change in seasonal produce.

"Autumn is the time to celebrate the harvest season," Kuhlberg reminds us. "Think about comforting pasta ragu, herbed turkey roasted to perfection, sweet potato gnocchi, and apple-cinnamon desserts that capture the essence of fall."

Selden agrees. "I think of anything with apples, pumpkin, or butternut squash. I love our butternut squash crumble as a great hearty side dish for things like pork or turkey."



Nothing says summer like this field greens and fruit salad from Chowgirls Catering. Photo courtesy Andy Berndt



From mid-November to March in Minnesota, Chowgirls Catering pulls from in-season produce to make this winter family-style dinner. Photo courtesy Amy Diep



In the spirit of spring, Chowgirls Catering makes a green gazpacho, offered April through June. Photo courtesy Becca Dilley

Beverages this time of year become things of comfort as well. “Again, in the fall—especially in the Northeast—I’d go back to the apples and say apple cider or mulled apple cider as it gets colder,” says Selden, “as well as mulled wine, which is so delish!”

Kuhlberg adds spiced chai to the list of comforting drinks. She adds: “Embrace the rich flavors of fall with apple brandy sidecars and Old Fashioned cocktails.”

Winter

Winter is the time for the heartiest, warmest nostalgic flavors.

“As the weather in the Northeast gets cooler, I often turn to hearty soups or chili, as it is so comforting,” says Selden. “Our clients love braised, slow-roasted comfort foods in the fall and winter season, too.”

Kuhlberg recommends warming, grounding foods as well. “When the chill sets in for winter, think about hearty options like beef stew, winter squash soup that warms the soul, and those roasted meats that everyone loves. Don’t forget those comforting sides like roasted root veggies, mashed potatoes, and rich, flavorful au jus.”

Winter beverages are also all about warming and heartiness. “When it’s frosty outside, warm everyone up with classics like mulled wine, hot cocoa stations, and pomegranate martinis,” suggests Kuhlberg.



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Watermelon salad with arugula, cucumber, heirloom tomato, red onion, marinated feta, and red wine and oregano vinaigrette by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Catherine Chuang



A medley of signature spring cocktails that includes a Tuscan Spritz, a Grapefruit Tonic, and a Blood Orange Martini, by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Kate Noelle



Summer fruit and cheese platter by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Lisette Gatliff

Don't forget about holiday traditions, either. "Winter screams eggnog, especially around the holidays," says Selden. "Anything with bourbon like a killer Old Fashioned always is a popular choice."

An act of collaboration

Working with your caterer to create a menu that's in season is beneficial not only to our world but to your brand—you can utilize this community and your place as a planner to portray yourself as an expert on the menu and as a high-quality event producer.

Using fresher, local food ingredients that are at their peak in nutrients and flavor will only reflect your ability to provide a quality dining experience for your clients and to keep up with the demand for local, sustainable dining. "Advise your clients that incorporating these ingredients enhances the overall dining experience. They can expect vibrant colors, better taste, and a connection to the time of year," recommends Kuhlberg.

As a planner, you can use your network with knowledgeable caterers to portray yourself as an industry expert who is in touch with the nuances of the food system and as a provider of first-rate event production.

"When event planners collaborate with caterers on menu planning, understanding the principles of eating seasonally and creating seasonal menus can lead to effective communication with clients and a smoother planning process," Kuhlberg continues.

Finding an educated caterer makes the selling process easier as well. "We work with several vendors that know Chowgirls well and they sell their clients on our expertise in events, quality, presentation, hospitality, and our respect for the planet," says Heathcote-Curry. "If there are planners we haven't had the opportunity to work with yet, we gladly educate them and their clients on our seasonal menus and sustainable practices!"

You don't have to subject your clients (or yourself) to a college course's worth of knowledge, however. In some ways, building the right relationships means your clients trust you and the caterer to create the best food for their event, regardless of how much they know about the seasons. In fact, Chowgirls makes sure to nurture relationships by hosting tasting events throughout the year, where they educate event planners and vendor partners on seasonality and showcase new menus.

Since these tastings often embrace different seasons than when they take place, they focus more on showcasing the flavor profiles and composition of the menu items rather than specific ingredients themselves. *Special Events* attended their most recent tasting, a winter holiday menu reveal that took place in August. While some dishes contained

summer produce, the catering company used the event to introduce new menu offerings and build relationships while demonstrating the quality of the food, regardless of the seasonal produce featured.

“Our menus are very transparent, highlighting the ingredients that are available in that season,” says Heathcote-Curry. “We find when we give examples of what this menu item has featured in that season, most clients don’t mind not knowing the exact ingredients! We love that our clients trust us in our quality and presentation, and the majority love learning about our efforts as a sustainable company. We always ask clients if there are any food allergies or dietary preferences so we make sure to avoid sending them a seasonal ingredient they don’t like or can’t eat.”

Whether you are working with your favorite caterers or with a venue that has a preferred caterer, begin by asking questions and having a conversation to learn how they source their ingredients and whether they stick with what is in season or if they transport out-of-season food items from different climates. Once you know how they work, you can begin either learning more about their sourcing and work with them to better sell in-season menus to clients, or if they don’t already practice this seasonality, discern whether they are open to learning, or else seek out caterers who value this approach.

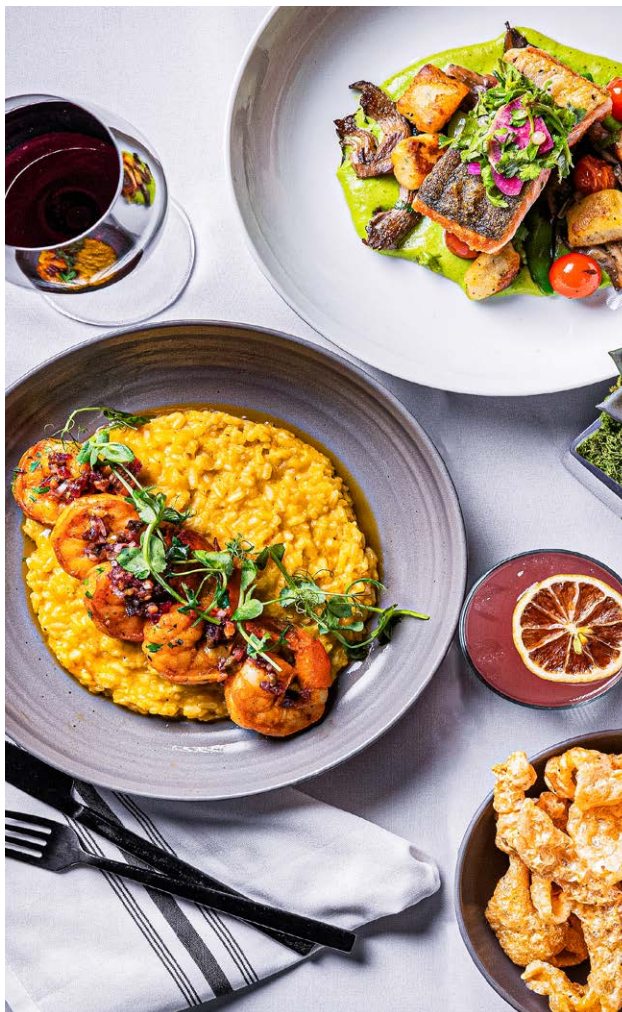
“My best piece of advice is to bring the catering partner in for the conversations regarding the menu,” says Selden. “Even go as far to let them lead that conversation and really take the time to get to know the client, understand what they love, the restaurants that they enjoy, the places that they travel, get to know their favorite (and least favorite) foods so that when they provide a proposal, they are able to customize the menu to suit the client and also to represent their brand well.”

This is where collaboration is key: as planner, you have a lot of information that can assist in these conversations. In her keynote speech at Catersource + The Special Event this past March, event pro Marcy Blum (Marcy Blum Associates) told the crowd, “We are the gatekeepers. We are able to give [the caterer] clues and tricks and insight they wouldn’t get otherwise; I can upsell things so much easier to a client because I’ve basically been living with them.” When both you and your catering team are on the same page and understand the client well, the menu will come together smoothly.

“By familiarizing themselves with the benefits and considerations of seasonal menus, event planners can effectively communicate the advantages to their clients,” Kuhlberg emphasizes. “Collaborating closely with caterers ensures that the culinary aspect of the event is aligned with the overall vision, resulting in a memorable and satisfying experience for all involved.” ●



Fresh summery raspberry gelée and white chocolate panna cotta by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Peterson Design & Photography



A lovely spread of crispy skin salmon, shrimp risotto, and chicharrones for dinner by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Sarah King Photography

CONFETTI

Events Worth *Exalting*

A look at the 2023 Gala Award finalists and the inspiring award ceremony

by Amanda Nicklaus

Each year, *Special Events* magazine receives entries from event designers and producers across the globe, detailing their most spectacular events of the year in hopes of being bestowed a coveted Gala Award.

The Gala awards honor events in a variety of categories such as “Best Entertainment,” “Best Fundraising or Nonprofit Event,” and “Designer of the Year.” This year’s

award ceremony was celebrated in March as part of Catersource + The Special Event, in conjunction with Catersource’s ACE awards and ICA’s CATIE awards. The evening began with a cocktail reception for nominees and was kicked off by a spectacular performance by Metropolis Productions.

Veteran planner Michael Cerbelli (president & CEO, Cerbelli Creative) opened the affair with a short keynote speech, and then: the moment everyone was waiting for—the naming of the 2023 award recipients.

Let’s take a look at these inspirational event designs.



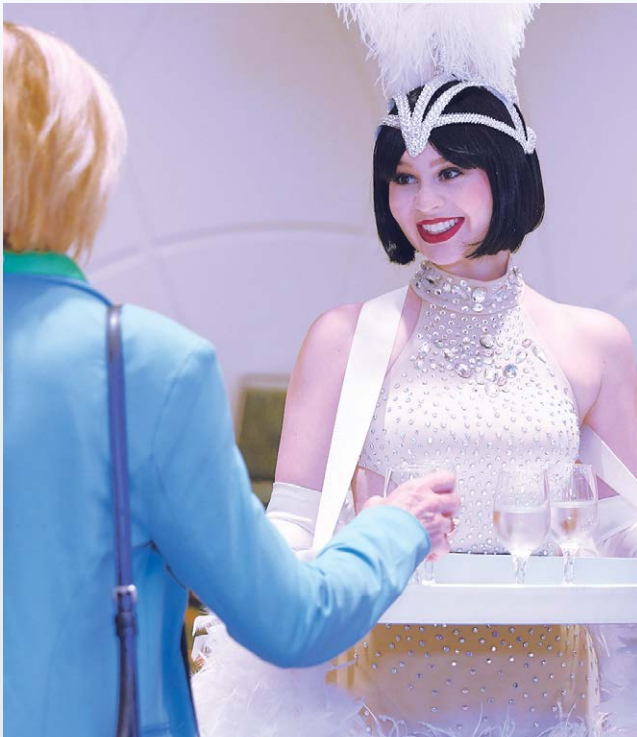
Scott Frankel (Animatic Media) poses with **Ashleigh Morriss** and **Joelle Paleologou** (Peace Arch Hospital Foundation) as they receive the **Gala Award for Best Fundraising or Non-Profit Event** for their event, "La Dolce Vita." Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Robin Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events) gives **Kristin Banta** (Kristin Banta Events) the **Gala Award for Designer of the Year**. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Industry veteran and 2023 Special Events Lifetime Achievement Award recipient **Michael Cerbelli** (Cerbelli Creative) kicked off the event with a keynote address. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Award nominees mingled at a cocktail reception before the ceremony. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



2023 Awards ceremony attendees were treated to pre-ceremony live entertainment like this tap dancer. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Metropolis Productions put on a dazzling opening act to hype up the crowd at this year's ACE, Gala, and CATIE award ceremony in Orlando. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

BEST ENTERTAINMENT: insglück, “Unlimited Space”

Insglück dazzled the audience at the Kazakhstan exhibit at the World Expo 2022 by making an automotive robot interact with a human counterpart in real time. They made sure there was precise synchronization and a seamless connection to the media, programming a robotic hand to an interface. In a 270-degree immersive simulation, the audience joined this imaginary science fiction world and watched as the robot and human danced together, exploring the theme of human and AI collaboration.



The Main Show at the Kazakhstan Pavilion Expo 2020, called “Unlimited Space,” communicated a message of hope about the future of humans and technology. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller



The Main Show performance consisted of a high-tech show and an acrobatic interaction with a KUKA KR 240, showing the synergy between a human and a robot. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller

BEST EVENT FOR A PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL: Star Trax Events, “Take Over The Night”

How do you come up with a new, unusual, and exciting Mitzvah, when clients attend the same celebrations throughout the year for their friends and family? Star Trax Events did just that by incorporating the Bar Mitzvah boy into the custom content throughout the evening: a green screen video shoot honoring him, a kid’s soda bar with custom Jones soda bottles, highlighted initials with different sayings and neon signage, a custom 3-D photo backdrop, and custom menus.



Many aspects of the “Take Over The Night” Bar Mitzvah were customized to create a theme around the honoree, like these soda bottles featuring his photo. Photo courtesy Justin Munter Photography



An electric blue color scheme was elevated using custom glassware and blue florals. Photo courtesy Justin Munter Photography

BEST EVENT PRODUCED FOR A CORPORATION OR ASSOCIATION:
Lenny Talarico Events and Cerbelli Creative, “The INTREPID Celebration”

Hosting a reception for 2,200 employees on a museum/event venue WW2 aircraft carrier in New York comes with its fair share of challenges, but that didn’t stop Lenny Talarico Events and Cerbelli Creative from planning a spectacular event. The two teams

(who met at The Special Event years ago!) collaborated to create the Spanish insurance company MAPFRE’s 50th annual incentive event on the historic Intrepid landmark, using a “100 Years of New York” theme to celebrate the decades.



The venue for “The INTREPID Celebration” is part of the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, located in a WW2 aircraft carrier. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra



A “100 Years of New York” theme was executed through atmosphere talent dressed in costume from the decades, like this 80s room which also featured music from the time. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra



The celebrated decades went back to the 1920s, where atmosphere talent dressed as flappers and bootleggers greeted guests. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra

BEST FUNDRAISING OR NON-PROFIT EVENT: Peace Arch Hospital Foundation, “La Dolce Vita”

Known for their well-produced themes, this year’s fundraiser was themed “La Dolce Vita” and mimicked the cozy atmosphere of a small Italian village to create a sense of connection and warmth among attendees. This was created through details including: a 14-foot sprawling tree above the dining tables to emulate an Italian garden; a “House of Gucci”

activation where a fashion illustrator drew custom sketches for attendees; a café with an espresso bar and gelato; a three-wheeled Piaggio Ape Van imported from Italy that acted as a mobile wine-and-bubbles bar; a 24-foot charcuterie table; living Renaissance-style statues; and a wine raffle. Peace Arch Hospital Foundation raised well over \$900,000—a success for all!



Attendees of “La Dolce Vita” were greeted by a chef station serving risotto from a giant parmesan wheel. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy



Peace Arch Hospital Foundation partnered with local business Paintertainment to create multiple living statues, including this one which resembled a water fountain whose tablescapes attached to her dress, where she offered signature Negronis for attendees to enjoy. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy



The Cara Mia Caffe featured an espresso bar and a gelato station for attendees to enjoy, making them feel like they had stepped into an Italian village. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy

BEST MULTIPLE-DAY EVENT PROGRAM FOR A CORPORATION OR ASSOCIATION:
Steve Levine Entertainment, “Chandler Chamber Ostrich Festival 2022”

Steve Levine Entertainment (SLE) expanded this annual festival to be two weekends instead of one, allowing for a jam-packed entertainment lineup with well-loved artists. SLE also made the transition to using radio-frequency identification (RFID) wristbands to create a fully integrated cashless event for the first time. The

new tech came with its fair share of issues, but SLE managed to troubleshoot successfully, and the implementation of the RFID wristbands resulted in an increase in sales and in-depth attendee demographics. After cancelling the 2020 event, the festival came back stronger than ever in 2022.



The fairgrounds were crowded with people excited to come back after the pandemic pause, making it the largest-scale event that the Steve Levine Entertainment team has ever produced. Photo courtesy @oakimagery



The Ostrich Festival featured several carnival attractions, like duck racing, a Ferris wheel, and fishing for prizes (shown here). Photo courtesy @oakimagery



This year's festival had a killer entertainment lineup, with big stars like Flo Rida (shown here), The Beach Boys, the Four Tops, The Temptations, Nelly, Walker Hayes, Uncle Kracker, The Band Perry, and more. Photo courtesy @oakimagery



The Ostrich Festival is based on the history of ostrich ranching in Chandler, AZ. Ostriches roam the festival freely (in a designated area) and are celebrated by all! Photo courtesy @oakimagery

MOST OUTSTANDING SPECTACLE, FAIR, OR FESTIVAL: insglück, “Gateway to Tomorrow”

The Kazakhstan Pavilion: Gateway to Tomorrow, built using lightweight construction and the use of composite building materials and nearly 100% recyclable steel, took World Expo guests through a tour of Kazakhstan’s past, present, and future, each

featured on a different level. This included the “Great Steppe” grasslands of the past, mixed media presentations of modern-day Kazakhstan, and a spaceship-like future area featuring a robotics main show (which received the above Gala Award for Best Entertainment).



Visitors could view a mixed media presentation of the present-day Nur-Sultan city that brought the essence of Eurasia to life. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller



The Kazakhstan Pavilion was designed with Kazakhstan’s traditional architecture and cultural heritage. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller



The lower main area represented Kazakhstan’s past and featured a multi-sensory installation showcasing the country’s rich natural environments, biodiversity, and cultural heritage. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller



In the “Future Now” area, visitors got to see an impressive interactive table informing them about the country’s future initiatives and challenges. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller

BEST WEDDING: Jaclyn Watson Events, “Green Envy”

The Jaclyn Watson Events (JWE) team created a beautiful wedding whose color scheme mirrored the Vermont landscape where it took place. Various shades and textures, along with accents of gold and light purple, blended with the property’s deep greens and stone greys. Florals were a focus for this look, with soft white chiffon draping and unique white

branch chandeliers adorning the dreamy tent ceiling. The tabletop setting included matte grey plates and gold flatware, green carousel glassware, and custom sage green menus tucked in light linen napkins. JWE worked with as many local vendors as possible, including a local honey maker (in place of traditional Vermont maple syrup). Green never looked so good!



A flowing sailcloth tent was accented by antler chandeliers and green florals, glassware, and linens. Photo courtesy Kelsey Regan Photography



A mixture of dark farm and linen tables blended with the natural Vermont environment to create the “Green Envy” look. The linens were a vibrant pop of green with a floral inlay, along with stunning see-through white floral runners. Photo courtesy Kelsey Regan Photography

The time is now to enter the 2024 Galas!

To submit an entry to this year’s Gala awards, please visit our [awards portal](#).

Important Dates

- **September 1, 2022–September, 30, 2023** | Eligibility Period for Entries
- **Sunday, October 15, 2023** | Regular submission deadline (\$99 fee)
- **Tuesday, October 31, 2023** | Late Bird submission deadline (\$160 fee)

If you are interested in entering in the ACE awards instead, you can enter the Catersource 2024 ACE awards in the same [online portal](#) as the Gala awards. [Catersource + The Special Event](#) will be held February 12-15, 2024 in Austin, TX. Both the ACE and Gala awards will be presented during the conference at a to-be-determined location in Austin on closing night, February 15th, during a ceremony that also includes lifetime achievement and volunteerism awards.

DESIGNER OF THE YEAR: Kristin Banta, Kristin Banta Events

Kristin Banta has been an innovator for over twenty years, setting the standard for high-end events. At the cutting edge of the latest trends in décor, catering, and entertainment, she takes the client's vision to an epic new level, orchestrating truly original celebrations in locations worldwide that are provocative and

impact all senses, telling a distinct story to each and every guest. She's known for her ability to completely transform spaces into immersive, interactive, and exploratory environments for attendees, always with fresh content that is multi-dimensional and memorable. ●



Kristin Banta Events' "Grand Slam Mitzvah" featured a fashion-forward baseball-themed approach that offered adults a place to be seated for dinner. This tablescape featured an installation of baseballs and baseball mitts with phalaenopsis florals. Photo courtesy Katie Edwards Photography



For ELLE's 2022 Women in Hollywood, guests were seated at round black acrylic tables featuring a sleek and sophisticated design, which included a trio of white calla lily arrangements, white dinner plates with black rims, and white linen hemstitched napkins, set with black chameleon chairs with velvet backings. Photo courtesy Kristin Banta Events



A fashion runway-inspired setting where one ceremony at Mizel Estate took place, featuring smoke acrylic chairs flanking a mirrored aisle and lush overgrown florals dressing either side of the path. Photo courtesy John and Joseph Photography



One of Banta's designs included multiple types of seating, like this table with brushed gold chairs, pink and green table elements, and crystal accents throughout the room. Photo courtesy John and Joseph Photography



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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Corporate

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



Weddings

At its collective portfolio of some of the most desirable wedding venues in the United States and Canada, the LCA caters many thousands of weddings annually.

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



Social

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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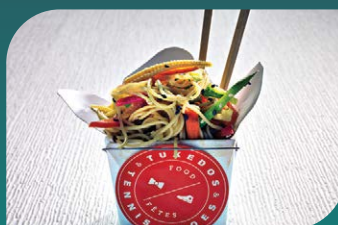
Photo Credit: Zilli Hospitality Group



SOUTH

Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas

Photo Credit: Bill Hansen Catering



WEST

Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington

Photo Credit: DSquared Hospitality Company



EAST

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

Photo Credit: The Classic Catering People

Learn more at [LeadingCaterers.com](https://www.leadingcaterers.com)

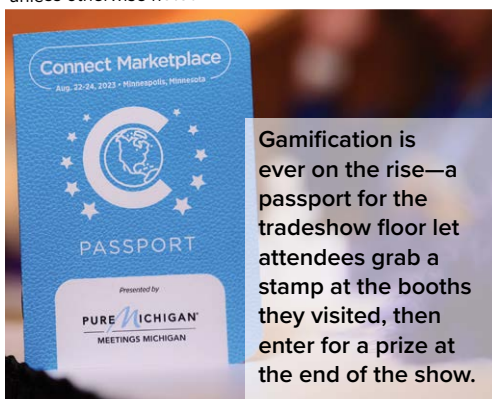
A TASTE OF... *Minneapolis*

at Connect Marketplace 2023

There was excitement in the air as event professionals gathered for Connect Marketplace 2023 (hosted by Connect Meetings and BizBash) in Minneapolis, MN. Held at the Minneapolis Convention Center, there were great opportunities for networking, education, and enjoyment over the conference's three days. From delicious food and beverages, creative tradeshow booths, interesting educational sessions, and even a puppy petting area, the tradeshow floor buzzed with excitement as event professionals gathered together. Perhaps the highlight of the show was the opening night mixer, "Party Like It's 1999," hosted by Meet Minneapolis. Everyone wore their glitziest purple outfits in honor of hometown artist Prince Rogers Nelson for a true Minneapolis-style celebration. With a Prince tribute band (Chase and Ovation) and photo wall designed to replicate the famous star-lined walls of music venue First Avenue (a frequent performance venue for Prince), it was truly a night to remember. ●

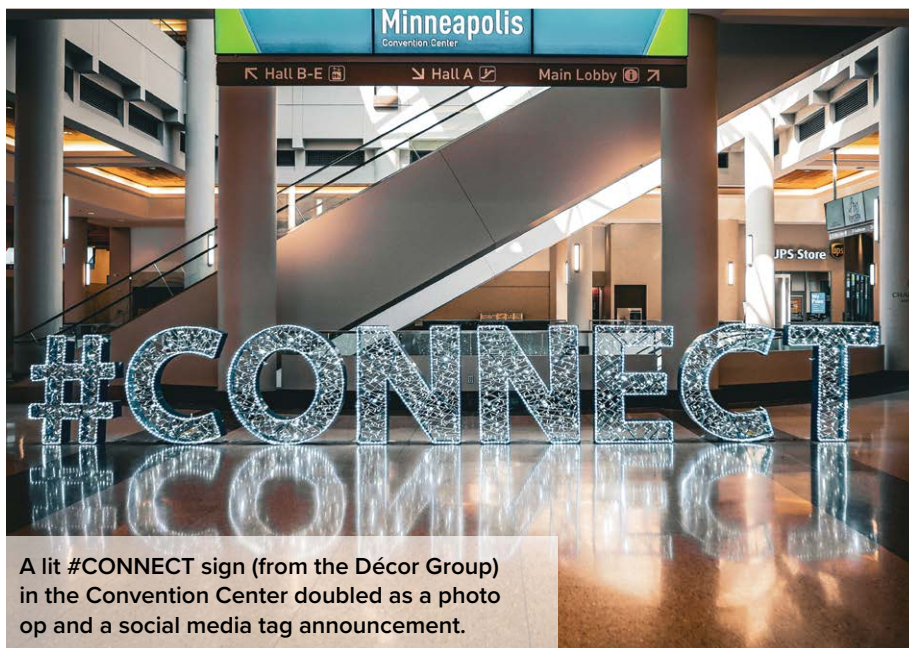
—Amanda Nicklaus

All photos courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography, unless otherwise noted

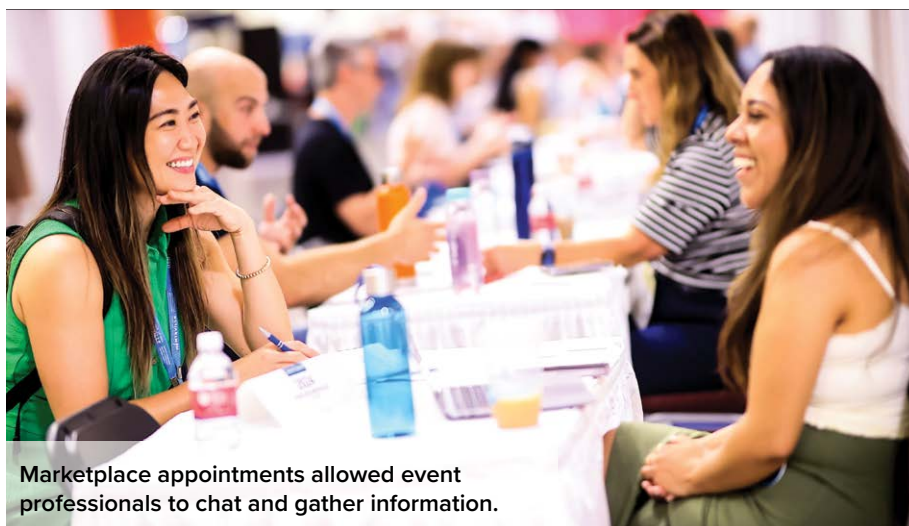


Conference goes partied like it's 1999. Prince would have been proud.





A lit #CONNECT sign (from the Décor Group) in the Convention Center doubled as a photo op and a social media tag announcement.



Marketplace appointments allowed event professionals to chat and gather information.



(Left) BizBash Founder David Adler mediated panels and led a session about event trend predictions titled *Event Visionaries: Planning the Future of Gatherings – A Journey with David Adler*.



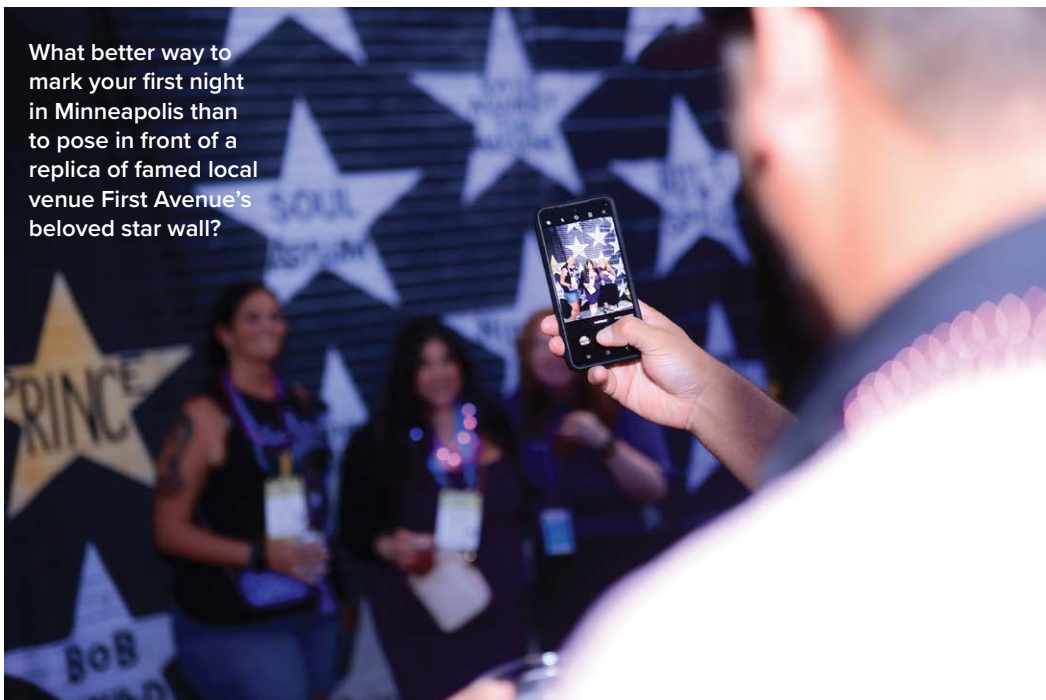
(Right) A DJ played Prince tunes in the lobby of Orchestra Hall while attendees drank lavender martinis and snacked on delicious bites during the “Party Like it’s 1999” opening night party.

A TASTE OF... *Minneapolis* at Connect Marketplace 2023

Michael Dominguez of Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI) (and 2023 *MeetingsNet* Lifetime Achievement Award recipient) leading his session *Event Forecasting*.



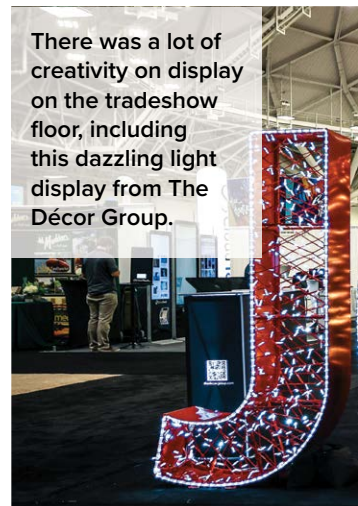
What better way to mark your first night in Minneapolis than to pose in front of a replica of famed local venue First Avenue's beloved star wall?



Canopy by Hilton put out quite the spread at the opening night party, including this delectable charcuterie board. Photo courtesy Amber Kispert



There was a lot of creativity on display on the tradeshow floor, including this dazzling light display from The Décor Group.

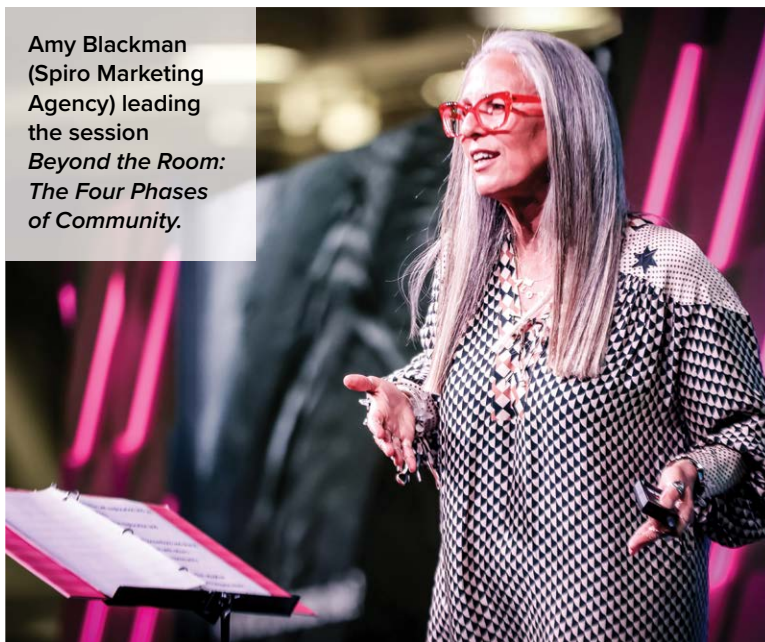


Jackie Bernstein (right) was very excited to don her purple attire (while some donned full Prince costumes) and "Party Like It's 1999."





Amy Blackman
(Spiro Marketing
Agency) leading
the session
*Beyond the Room:
The Four Phases
of Community.*



A puppy-petting
station on the
tradeshow floor
melted hearts left
and right...just look
at that face!



The tradeshow
floor featured
plenty of CVBs with
immersive booths,
like Visit Tampa
Bay's double-decker
beach booth.





STEAL THIS



Main stage arches framed in bougainvillea make an aesthetically pleasing set design | Event by 24 Carrots Catering and Events | Photo courtesy Villa Visuals



One way to sneak in a circle is with a lit floral ceiling arrangement by Phenomenon Creative Events | Photo courtesy [unclear]



Balloons and other inflatables are an easy way to pop some circles into a space, like these Airstar lit balloons from Catersource + The Special Event 2022 | Photo courtesy WASIO Faces



Circular floral arch by Jaclyn Watson Events | Photo courtesy [unclear]



Disco balls make great centerpieces! | Event by and photo courtesy Terry Mulryan Toomey



Round décor creates a comforting aesthetic, like this modern ice sculpture | Photo courtesy Stellar Ice

Events Come Full Circle

In this issue, we've talked about circularity and cycles, so let's take this opportunity to examine the design preference for circles. That's right—using rounded lines and circular shapes in your event design can create a better emotional reaction from attendees than sharp, angular shapes.

Author and designer Manuel Lima published a book in 2017 called *The Book of Circles: Visualizing Spheres of Knowledge*. In an article for the [BBC](#), he breaks down his findings as to why humans prefer round shapes. You may be surprised to learn that studies have found humans are born with a preference for circular shapes.

Studies have also found that sharp-cornered objects cause greater amygdala activation than rounded objects. The amygdala is the part of the brain that processes fear, anxiety, and aggressiveness stimuli.

In other words, angular shapes trigger fear. Round shapes evoke feelings of safety.

One other possible explanation is that, when mapped geometrically, positive human emotions create rounder lines on the human face, while negative emotions create angular lines.

Regardless of reason, time has shown that circles create positive emotions. Keep this in mind as you design your next event and gather inspiration from this roundup of our favorite circular event features! ● — Amanda Nicklaus



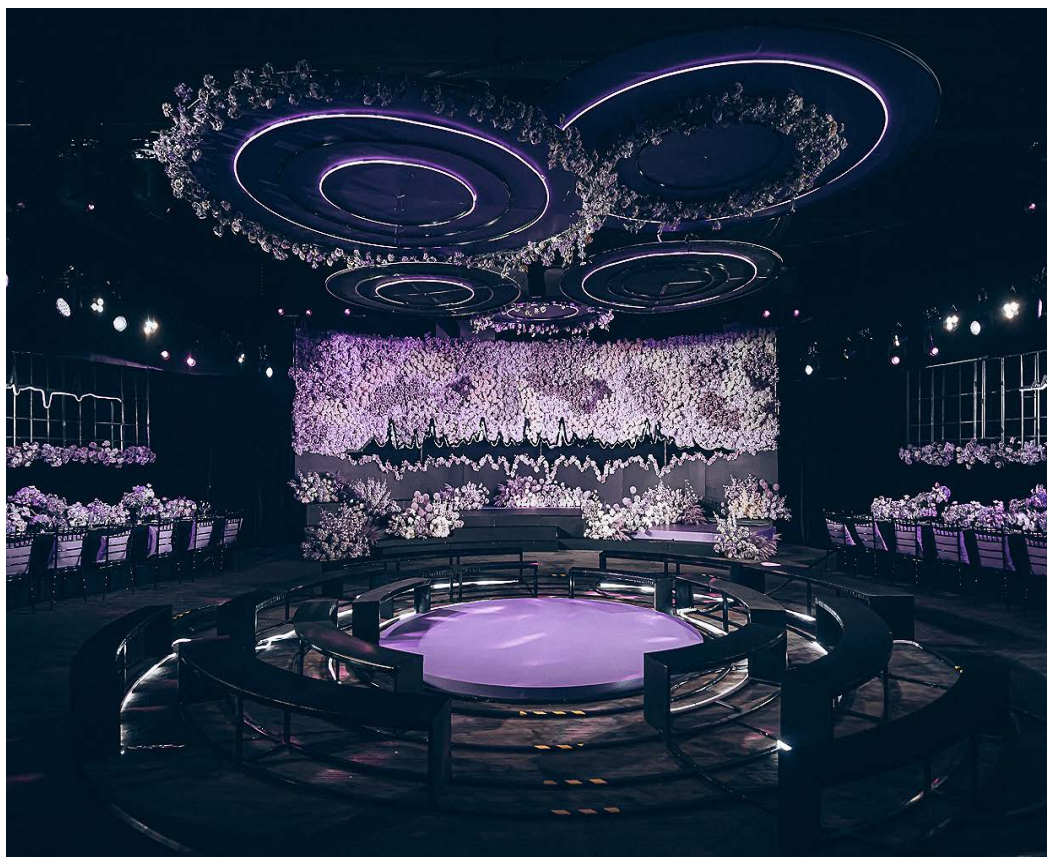
statement piece, like this colorful
courtesy Duncan Barnes



courtesy Rodeo & Co Photography



on-shaped



This wedding design by Wei Zhang features a lit circular stage mirrored by lit circular floral ceiling statement pieces | Photo courtesy Brandy Studio



STEAL THIS



Detroit Garden Works manufactures hanging light hoops, made of steel rings with prong bases that can be placed in a pot or in the ground | Photo courtesy Detroit Garden Works



It's not difficult to imagine why disco balls be happy celebrating beneath a few of the Banta Events | Photo courtesy John & Jos



Circular lit globes reflect off a holographic



Serving rows of food in round dishes crea Event by the Detroit Athletic Club | Photo



What better way to incorporate loads of circles than with a macaron tower? | Photo courtesy Enormous Creative



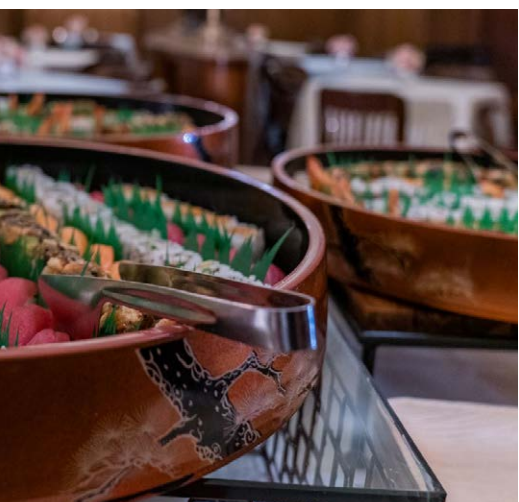
are gaining popularity—how can you not
ese glittering orbs? | Wedding by Kristin
eph Photography



Citrus fruits can double as circular décor! Shown here: infused water with
citrus slices arranged around these dispensers from Catersource + The Special
Event 2022 | Photo courtesy WASIO Faces



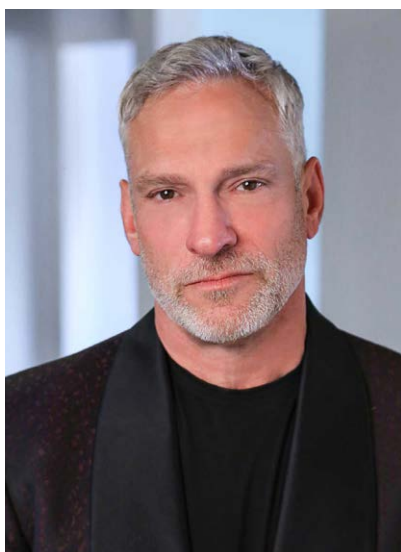
dance floor | Photo courtesy Holo-Walls, LLC



ates a pleasing effect |
courtesy DAC Photography



This wedding décor by Tailored Twig utilizes candles hanging in glass orbs and rounded
greenery baskets for a whimsical woodsy effect | Photo courtesy Tailored Twig



There is a saying by a 17th century poet that speaks to me now: “My barn having burned down, I can now see the moon.”

Trial By Fire: A Story of Resilience

By David Merrell

Life can change on a random Tuesday morning. It was 2:20 a.m. when I got the call from Mark Sheldon, AOO’s CFO. I was in Tucson and in a dead sleep. We had just completed the opening night of White Cap’s President’s Summit at the Ritz Carlton Dove Mountain. We had three more to go.

When he said, “There’s been a fire. The warehouse is burning,” I had to ask him to repeat it several times. It just wasn’t registering. When it did, there was no more sleep that night. It was horrible to contemplate. Luckily, there was no one in the building.

I still had work to do on the White Cap program and had to stay in a creative space. It was up to Mark to carry a heavy load for a few days until I could get back. Our client asked if I wanted to leave the event in order to get back to Los Angeles, but at that point there was nothing to do.

We completed all the events, which turned out great, despite everything. And it was a very good way to keep my mind off the future which would come soon enough.

Back in Los Angeles we began to retrieve data, deal with the insurance adjustors, and try to survey the damage. We still haven’t been let back in (as of writing this), but we’ve been told that everything is gone. There wasn’t much beyond some desks and a few furniture pieces there, but the saddest part was realizing that all our award trophies were gone. I know that actual trophies are merely symbols, but they were symbols of years of memories, events, and hard work, and we were proud of them.

I am so appreciative of my team for not missing a beat. We finished the White Cap events in Arizona flawlessly and returned home. Back in Los Angeles

we were up and running with only a week to go before The Heart Foundation annual event. Beyond that were six months of events on the books. We focused, regrouped fast, settled into a temporary space, and kept going.

There is a saying by a 17th century poet that speaks to me now: “My barn having burned down, I can now see the moon.”

Often tragic events have positive outcomes. We have an opportunity to rebuild anew. In the forest, a fire is a cleansing agent and a catalyst, bringing dormant seeds to life and producing a forest that now offers many new species of plants. We could look past the immediate issues—dealing with squatters, insurance grief, and going back to Zoom calls and home offices—and to the day when the business will grow again and come to life with new possibilities.

I thank everyone who reached out with messages of comfort and camaraderie. You’ve reminded my team and me once again what an amazing and resilient industry we are in. ●

***Editor’s Note:** I received a call from David when he was—as he noted—in the middle of the desert on site, phone breaking up. Through the garble, I heard, “Did you hear...my company...gone.” His voice came through again and said, “I’ll call you later when the signal is better.” So of course, it was pins and needles until I heard from him a week later. What did he do when he called again? Apologize that he had missed my CS+TSE 2024 Call for Session Proposals. My goodness. His business up in smoke and he is apologizing for missing a deadline. Let’s just say that you will definitely be seeing him in February 2024 at CS+TSE. —Kathleen Stoehr*

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Behind the Cover

This month's cover features *Eatertainment Events & Catering's* Ube Tarts. Ube has been one of the hottest ingredients throughout 2023. The unique purple sweet potato's flavor has been described as having a sweeter, more mellow taste than an orange. Turn to page 39 for *Eatertainment Events & Catering's* tart recipe. Photo courtesy *Eatertainment Events & Catering*

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The Fall Issue

Long ago, when magazines were almost always paper, the Fall issue was the most anticipated. It heralded the trends of the coming year; it was the thickest of books. I recall editing magazines that were literally 25 signatures—or, for you non-editors out

there—400 pages. But even more than that, at least for the editors-in-chief, those Fall issues that hit a particular rhythm in which all parts fit together, in which one article fed the next—that was the crowning achievement of magazines so to speak, as close to editing a non-fiction book as one can come. It doesn't happen often.

But today, I write this column in celebration of our senior writer, Amber Kispert, who freaking nailed it with the 2023 Fall issue of *Catersource* magazine. Amber started her work at *Catersource* a week or so before the pandemic began, learning her job the hard way: I've never had to train an employee on screen before. Learning typically comes via looking at red pen mark-ups on pages and over-the-shoulder collaboration. I won't say it was easy for either of us. This is—give or take—the 14th issue she has worked on, and by far the best.

But enough of the singular kudos, we had plenty of help on this issue via our regular columnists, as well as our spectacular art director, Sharon Carlson, who takes our words and photos to new levels of readable beauty.

I'd like to direct you to our three features, all written by Amber, which cover everything from self-sourcing of food (page 72) to live-fire cooking (page 18) to technology (page 42).

Moving into our departments, look to Anthony Lambatos to further the conversation about digital transformation and technology (page 40), to Robin Selden to discuss the importance of elevating food and service in a catered environment (page 86), and to Meryl Snow and her ideas regarding the shifting tides of buyer behavior (page 64). The articles all complement each other, leading you through a beautiful and hopefully enjoyable learning experience.

Speaking of an enjoyable learning experience, our conference news section will note that [registration is now open](#) for Art of Catering Food, and Catersource + The Special Event, in Austin, TX spanning February 11–15, 2024. Please consider joining us! It may be scorching hot in Texas right now, but February has mild and incredibly pleasant weather. Your colleagues will be eating all the barbecue, exploring the venues, taking all the classes, living it up at the evening events, walking the exhibit hall floor, and accepting all the awards—you won't want to miss it, and we don't want to miss you.

Kathleen Stoehr, Director of Community & Content Strategy

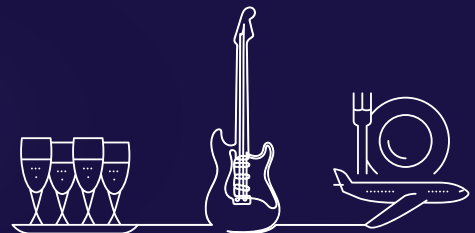
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Fall 2023 CONTRIBUTORS



Executive **Anthony Lambatos** explores the future of technology, AI, and automation



Sales expert **Meryl Snow** defines the characteristics of modern buyer behavior



Chef **Robin Selden** shares her secret recipe for elevating food and service in a catered environment



Catering consultant **Tara Maxey** discusses how marketing can tap into people's emotions



Caterer **Maya Rotman-Zaid** reflects back on her company's charitable work

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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Catersource + The Special Event, as well as Art of Catering Food, will be riding into Austin, TX February 11-15, 2024.

Conference updates

Cowboy Cool: Registration for Catersource + The Special Event is Now Open

Did you choose “Debut” as your Swiftie look for the Eras tour? Was the *Barbie* movie a harbinger? Are people experiencing *Yellowstone* withdrawal or do they all just want a reason to wear Harry Styles’ colorful western gear?

What the heck is Kathleen talking about?

Boots, buckles, and all things cowboy, my friends. Web searches for the words “cowboy hat” are up 117% according to *Women’s Wear Daily* and that’s not all. The western theme is hot, hot, hot and there is no better place to experience Cowboy Cool and more than in Austin, TX this February when Catersource + The Special Event—and Art of Catering Food—rides hard into town for an incredible week unlike any other.

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FEBRUARY 12-15, 2024 AUSTIN CONVENTION CENTER • AUSTIN, TX

Registration has launched for CS+TSE

The time is now to [register](#) at the best rates available to experience three days of conference sessions coupled with two full days of tradeshow exhibitions, opening and closing general sessions, awards ceremony, happy hour, and three evening events to keep you busy! All the major industry associations will be in attendance, conference sessions will allow attendees to keep their accreditations current, and “surprise and delight” installations are in the works to keep your social posts snappy.

It’s also open for Art of Catering Food!

Start your week early by attending [Art of Catering Food](#), two packed days of chef-forward sessions that promise to inspire and elevate the work you do, be it on-prem or off-prem, from large festivals to intimate weddings to corporate fundraisers. Taste samples as chefs talk about cuisines on stage, ask questions,

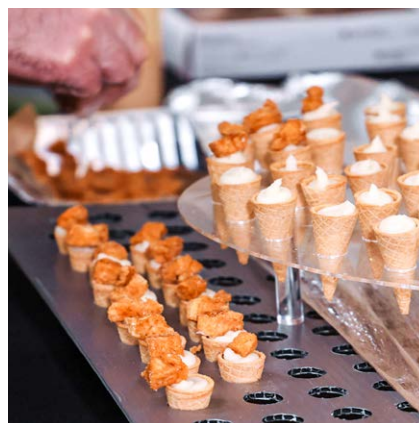
by Kathleen Stoehr

Chef Art Smith delivered the Closing General Session during Catersource + The Special Event 2023.



(Above) Champagne Creative Group could be seen roaming the Closing Night Celebration with their "napkin dresses" in 2023.

(Left) Chris Towne served fried chicken in mini waffle cones during his 2023 AOCF session.



(Below) A tomahawk carving station was featured as part of the culinary tour to Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering's facility.

Chef Jason Sutton (Footers Catering) gave a demo as part of AOCF 2023 during his session *Beef & Reef*.



All photos courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos, unless otherwise noted.



The evening Showcasing Events offer a lot of tasty libatons and bites.



Norm Bennett accepted two awards on behalf of 24 Carrots Catering and Events during the 2023 ACE and Gala awards ceremony: Best Off-Premise Catering and National Caterer of the Year.

and network with other chefs from around North America during breaks, lunches, and end of day happy hours.

Get your entries in!

In March 2023, we ushered in one of the most heartwarming and empowering awards galas ever. Tears were shed, beautiful crystal awards were held high with pride, and the energy was overwhelmingly positive. We expect nothing less than that in 2024, when we award ACE, Gala, and CATIE awards alongside some very deserving leadership and lifetime achievement awards. There is still

about a month to enter your best work into our [ACE and Gala portal](#), so head on over there now to get it done! We want to celebrate you!

Watch this space


As the month of September ends and October begins to say hello, sessions will begin to populate the [conference schedule](#). What might you see first? Perhaps an Opening General Session keynote? Maybe a few key sessions to tantalize? While we generally do not release the entirety of the schedule until after the super early bird rate has passed, we don't want to leave



This action station during the Closing Night Celebration truly came with some action courtesy of an acrobat from Key Artist Group.

you completely hanging. Every week brings something new!

Welcome to Austin, TX!

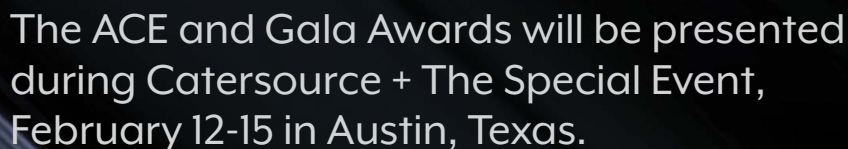
Of course, the city has more to offer than boots and buckles; it has an incredible music history as the Live Music Capital of the World, offers sumptuous food with barbecue as its backbone, and is the Texas state capital. Book your hotel room early [using this link](#) via Convention Housing Partners, come early, stay late—enjoy your week at Catersource + The Special Event! 

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ACE & Gala

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SPECIAL EVENTS



Creative Fusion: How to Develop an Alliance of Catering & Design

With the catering landscape more competitive than ever before, what are you doing to ensure your events stand out? This past June, International Caterers Association members learned the key to distinction during the monthly educational webinar: *Creating an Alliance Between Catering and Design*.

The JDK Group Catering & Events, a Harrisburg-based company that serves central Pennsylvania and the surrounding areas, brought their A-team to share exactly how they create catering experiences that differentiate them from the crowd—ultimately leading to more satisfied clients, a stellar portfolio, and an easier sales process.

In this article, Steve Sanchez (President), Colton Staver (Director of Floral & Design), and Brad Snyder (Event Specialist) share some incredible tips.

Start with the creative process

When catering and design teams work together as one during the creative process, it's easier to cultivate impressive experiences because you're truly showcasing every possibility to a potential client.

Using a well-known framework, The JDK Group team has tweaked it for their catering and event planning process. Here's how:

Preparation

During this phase, the team focuses on brainstorming and getting to know the client. One tip is to ask them for potentially “non-traditional” inspiration. This could be a request for images of their home or even a list of their favorite

furniture or clothing stores. This helps the creative team peel back the layers and unveil the client's ideal aesthetic, which provides more inspiration for the design and menu.

Taking this, they channel all five senses, asking themselves:

- What are the guests going to see as they walk in? What sights will surprise them throughout the event?
- What are they going to touch and feel?
- What are they going to smell and taste beyond the menu?
- What are they hearing in addition to the DJ? How can sound be immersive?

Tools they use for inspiration include Pinterest and TikTok. The team shared that if you're not on TikTok for inspiration, you're likely missing the trends and becoming stale.

Using these brainstorming and inspiration techniques, the team puts together three mood boards that exude the vibe, aesthetic, design elements, and artful dishes the client can anticipate.

After the client chooses which is best suited, the process moves to the incubation and illumination phases.

Incubation

This phase is about letting the vision marinate and seeing what sparks before putting the whole vision together on paper (and in the form of a proposal).

Illumination

Staver described the illumination phase as “when [those ideas, that vision] moves from your subconscious to the forefront of your mind. It’s putting your thoughts on the paper, doing sketches, that kind of thing—collecting that inspiration to your proposed vision.”

This phase is about putting together the:

- Internal vs. external labor required with cost
- Delivery and execution on-site with labor cost
- Product and design cost

Then, they put together a realistic

budget, which leads to the evaluation phase.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the phase where you critically examine your idea and weigh it against other options. The main questions are:



Your staff's appearance can be an extension of your event's theme. Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/The JDK Group Catering & Events



(Above) Welcome beverages can set the tone and serve as a focal point for your event; (opposite page) Custom signage is a great way to bring a touch of creativity to any food station. Photos courtesy International Caterers Association/The JDK Group Catering & Events

- Do you have a proposed budget from the client?
- Is the idea lining up to the cost of the design you envisioned?
- Do you have a design division in-house right now or is that a department your company is interested in launching?

The answers to these questions will then lead to how and what you show the client in the proposal. The JDK Group team mentioned that if you're just starting out with elevating design elements, you may need to discount for a bit as you build your portfolio—and that's okay!

From here, you can either tweak things to align better with the client's budget or get everything ready to send.

Verification

The final phase, verification, is how the idea will be presented to the client. While location may put

restrictions on how you're able to do this, it's always recommended to present in person with some special touch, like a welcome beverage or a gift to take home. Better yet, both. Have the proposal be an experience in itself, and you're more likely to build trust and get that 'yes'!

From afar, you can still do things like send gifts to elevate the proposal delivery.

Finally, to close the business, don't leave the meeting or email with an opportunity for the client to give an open-ended response. You want to ask things such as:

- Does this align with your vision?
- What are your next steps?
- Would you like to move forward?

From there, hopefully, you'll land the deal after all this careful consideration of their goals, vision, and your creative capabilities!

Tips for elevating basic to bougie

When going through the process above, the catering and design teams at The JDK Group work together to elevate from basic to bougie every time. This is how you're able to maximize your revenue and create an irresistible portfolio as a company.

1. Qualify & classify the event

Every event has its place on the catering spectrum. To determine where your client's event falls, start by asking key questions about the nature of the event, its scale, and the budget. Remember, initial budget estimates might not reflect the true potential, so digging deeper can reveal unexpected opportunities.

2. Quantify your budget

The key to truly elevating experiences is a piece that can be hard to manage: the budget. The JDK Group team asks



Creative food stations should be about capturing attention and sparking conversations. Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/The JDK Group Catering & Events



Leave a lasting impression with guests through the use of creative food stations. Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/The JDK Group Catering & Events

the client for budgets upfront, sharing that the team is able to dream up the world—but, if they're unaware of budget, it may simply end up being a tease if it is outside the scope.

When having budget conversations, if they won't give a number, ask quantifying questions like, "Are you comfortable with between \$6–10K for design, or are you more comfortable with \$1–3K for design?"

This will help provide a baseline as you start the creative process.

3. Elevate the execution

Then, do what you can to truly elevate the cuisine through presentation. That's where the marriage of catering and design really shines. A few examples The JDK Group shared were:

• **Dressing the part: staff uniforms**

Your staff's appearance can be an extension of your event's theme. From elegant tailcoat suits for a haunted mansion theme to tropical shirts for a relaxed pool party, staff uniforms can help set the ambiance.

• **Your canvas: go beyond passing trays**

Passing trays can become a canvas for your culinary creativity—not simply the vessel. Break away from tradition with unique displays, such as shrimp cocktails served with syringes of cocktail sauce, adult Capri Suns, or a welcome beverage board held by staff at the entrance for a playful twist.

• **Welcome beverages: more than just drinks**

Welcome beverages are more than a mere thirst quencher. They set the

(Right from top) Incorporate custom signage into your event; Elevate your food stations with creativity; Passing trays can become a canvas for your culinary creativity—not simply the vessel. Break away from tradition with unique displays for a playful twist. Photos courtesy International Caterers Association/The JDK Group Catering & Events

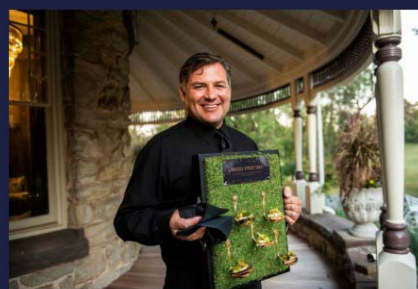
Custom Signage



Food Station Design



Passing Trays & Food Presentation



One of the stations that The JDK Group Catering & Events designed incorporated a wall of hands offering empanadas to guests. Photo courtesy the International Caterers Association/The JDK Group Catering & Events



tone and serve as a focal point for your event. Explore innovative ideas like a champagne wall that doubles as an entrance display.

• **Food station design: a way to get guests talking**

Picture this: a tomato soup station served from elegant teapots, a charcuterie board featuring local products and creative presentation, or a hanging pasta station that tells a story beyond the food. It's about capturing attention, sparking conversations among guests and with the team, and ultimately, leaving a lasting impression.

• **Add value: upsell in entertainment**

Why stop at catering when you can offer a full-service experience? By coordinating outside vendors and integrating their services seamlessly, you provide clients with a one-stop solution. Picture horse-drawn carriages, live ice carvers, or muralists who bring events to life with their artistry. You can also propose activations like flower bouquet bars or make-your-own candle stations.

These added touches elevate the experience and showcase your commitment to creating memorable moments that keep guests talking. And you know what that means—referrals!

Putting a unique event protocol in place for consistency

When you're taking design and experience to this level, you need to treat it with a more rigid approach. The JDK Group team deploys a "Unique Event Protocol" for events that are above and beyond standard. This could mean:


- Events with over 250 guests
- Events with a per-head cost of \$400+
- Logistically complicated events like a five-course dinner or non-typical station design
- An event like a white-glove dinner at the governor's mansion with VIP guests
- Unique themes or unusual/custom food items, etc.

For these events, The JDK Group ensures they have the following set up:

- Kitchen meeting
- Production and logistics meeting
- Site visit and final logistics review
- Departmental meetings as needed
- Debrief meeting

The unique part about this is that every team is involved in every step. The design and the kitchen team are working together to cultivate success.

Snyder shared, "We want to make sure that we're not missing anything, and we want to get all of those teams involved in the process. We also want to make sure that they're on that site visit so that they can walk through and touch everything and make sure that all of their questions are answered as well."

The moral of the story? In the world of catering, it's not just about the food—it's about crafting experiences that resonate with your clients and their guests. By mastering the art of design, presentation, and collaboration, you can transform any event into a truly unforgettable affair. 

The JDK Group is a proud member of the ICA. Every month, the ICA organizes educational roundtables like these to inspire, brainstorm, and educate about industry trends. For more information on how to join the ICA and to be notified of future catering industry webinars and education opportunities, visit www.internationalcaterers.org.

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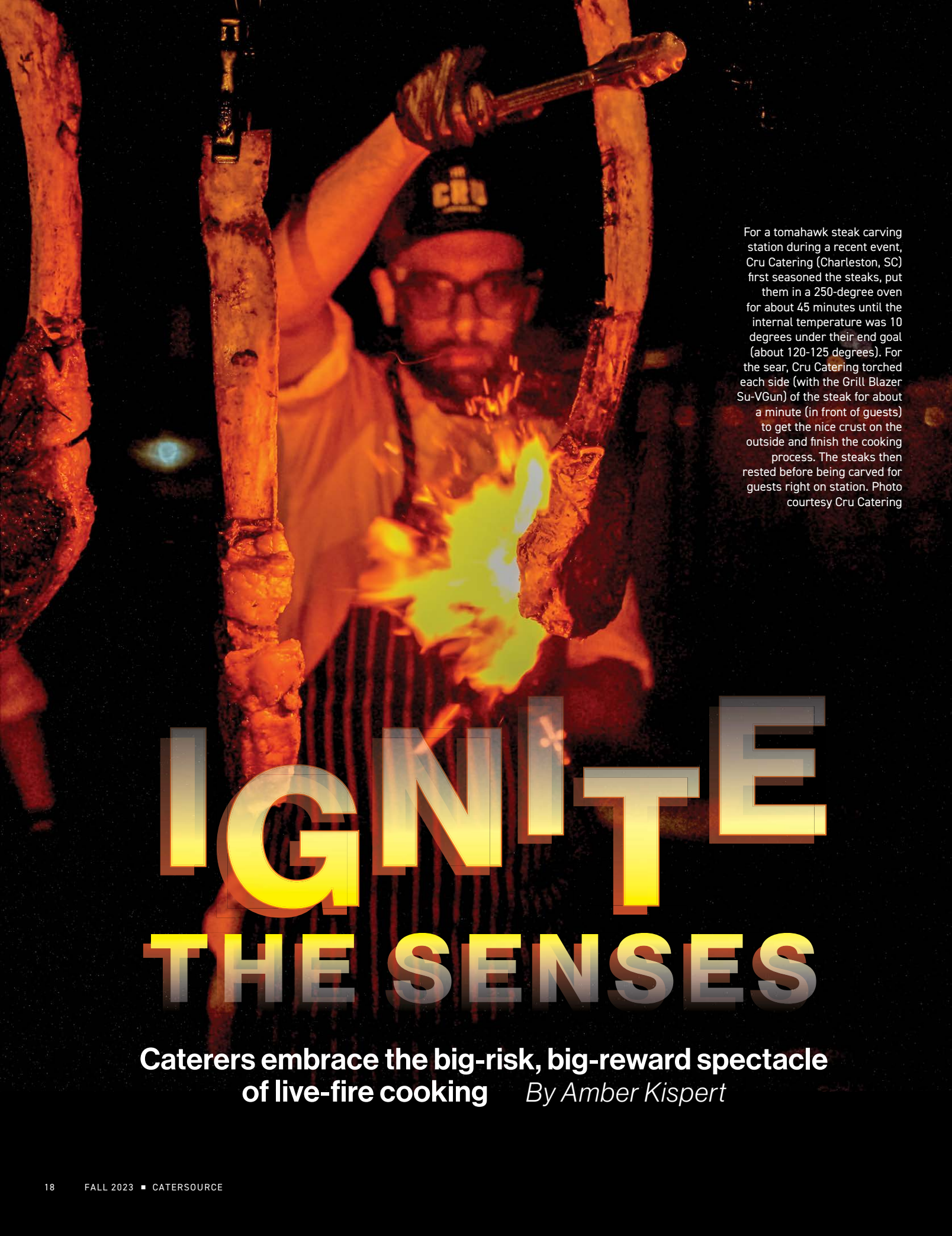
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A chef wearing a black cap with 'CRU' on it and glasses is using a blowtorch to sear a large piece of meat, likely a tomahawk steak, which is mounted on a wooden stick. The scene is dramatically lit with warm, orange and yellow light from the torch, creating a high-contrast, fiery atmosphere. The background is dark, making the chef and the cooking process the central focus.

For a tomahawk steak carving station during a recent event, Cru Catering (Charleston, SC) first seasoned the steaks, put them in a 250-degree oven for about 45 minutes until the internal temperature was 10 degrees under their end goal (about 120-125 degrees). For the sear, Cru Catering torched each side (with the Grill Blazer Su-VGun) of the steak for about a minute (in front of guests) to get the nice crust on the outside and finish the cooking process. The steaks then rested before being carved for guests right on station. Photo courtesy Cru Catering

IGNITE THE SENSES

**Caterers embrace the big-risk, big-reward spectacle
of live-fire cooking** *By Amber Kispert*



Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering (Orlando, FL) prepared a tomahawk steak (via live fire cooking) during the Art of Catering Food visit to its Orlando catering facility. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

Few things captivate the senses as profoundly as the mesmerizing dance of flames and the tantalizing aromas of live fire cooking.

“Live fire cooking involves all five senses—as all cooking does—but even more so than most cooking,” says Todd Annis with Cru Catering (Charleston, SC). “The smell of the smoke and fat burning over it, hearing the crackle of the wood, the sight of the flame and even the low embers slightly illuminating the fish or meat [are so enticing]. [Then there is] the feel of the heat near you and on the item that is being cooked, and lastly the taste and how you get that crispy crunchy char outside and the flavor and juices from the inside.”

“The sizzle, the aromatic smoke, the changing color of the meat—all these provide a visual experience that is as tantalizing as the taste

of the food itself,” adds Rich Rosendale with Rosendale Events (Atlanta, GA).

“Live fire cooking” refers to the method of cooking food over embers—wood or charcoal—that encompasses a variety of different techniques (grilling, smoking, roasting, etc.).

“I believe being able to manipulate fire and coals to produce a stunning meal is an art form in its own right,” says Patrick McCandless with Rambler Events (Nashville, TN).

Embracing the primal element

From ancient civilizations to modern-day gastronomy, cooking over an open flame has been an integral part of human culture.

“Cooking with fire is, of course, the oldest cooking method in the world, and was the only method of cooking for many thousands of years,” says McCandless. “It is fascinating to see how it has evolved over time.”

THE METHODS OF LIVE FIRE COOKING

Depending on which type of cuisine you plan to cook over an open flame, there are several live fire cooking methods that are used most often. Each technique is suited for particular foods, and each delivers different textures, flavors, and tastes.

1 DIRECT GRILLING

This is the simplest, most straightforward, and widely practiced method of grilling. In a nutshell, you cook small, tender, quick-cooking foods directly over a hot fire.

SETUP: Position the food on the grill grate or on skewers or in a grill basket directly over a hot fire.

TEMPERATURE: Most direct grilling is done over high or medium-high heat.

GRILLING TIME: Brief. Generally three to six minutes per side, depending on the cut of meat.

WELL SUITED TO: Steaks, chops, burgers, shish kebabs, chicken breasts, fish steaks or fillets, small high-moisture-content vegetables such as peppers, mushrooms, corn, asparagus, and onions (quartered or sliced), fruit (small or sliced), bread, pizza, as well as cake and other desserts.

A few examples from around the world include roasting whole pig or lamb as seen in Greek Orthodox or Hawaiian traditions, Hmong fire cooking, using tagines in Morocco, Spanish paella, baking bread in earthen ovens, wood-fired pizza ovens in Italy, and campfires. Making a fire doesn't necessarily mean you have to grill meat either—some Laotian cooking involves heating a pot of water over the fire for noodle soup with fresh greens and sprouts.

"I think at a basic level, human beings are tied to fire, and it's in our DNA," says James Gop with Heirloom Fire (Richmond, MA). "I believe that the moment that we learned how to harness the power of fire to cook was the moment we became civilized."

Live fire cooking embraces this primal element, infusing each dish with unique flavors and an undeniable sense of authenticity. Whether it's a crackling bonfire, a wood-fired oven, or a sizzling grill, the allure of live fire brings a touch of nostalgia and excitement to any event.

"We are always drawn to its rustic appeal and roots; there is something naturally romantic about it," says Chef Sean Holden with Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering (Orlando, FL).

"It's comfort and nourishment in its purest form. Sharing a fire and a meal with one another to me, at its core, is pure and the most natural way to connect and build relationships."

"It may be a trend now, but for some it's been a way of life," adds Jason

2 INDIRECT GRILLING

While direct grilling works great for cooking foods, what about larger cuts of meat or pork loins, or fatty cuts, like whole ducks or chickens? Indirect grilling, in which you cook the food not over the fire, or between two fires.

SETUP

- On a charcoal grill, rake the coals into two mounds at opposite sides of the grill and cook the food in the center. Place an aluminum foil drip pan under the food to catch the dripping fat. This also helps you corral the fire.

- To set up a two-burner gas grill for indirect grilling, light one side and do the indirect grilling on the other side. On a three-burner gas grill, light the outside or front and back burners and do the indirect grilling in the center. On a four-to six-burner gas grill, light the outside burners and do the indirect grilling in the center.

- On a kamado-style cooker, build the fire in the bottom. Install the heat diffuser under the grate

to shield the food from the exposure.

- Pellet grills have a design that allows for indirect grilling by converting the fire to a lower temperature.

TEMPERATURE
at medium heat.

GRILLING TIME
minutes to hours, depending on the size of the food. For example, a whole pork loin might take 3-4 hours.

WELL-SUITED
or fatty cuts of meat like chickens, pork, lamb, and whole fish. Vegetables like beets, whole onions, and

During a glamping-inspired event, Chef Alex Espinoza with Bottega (Napa, CA) did his take on a paella (over an open fire) with steak, lamb, and pasta. Photo courtesy Barilla



Hernandez with Blade and Tine Culinary Consulting. "We are not creating anything new here, this style has been around for centuries. There may be more light shone on it now as a trend, but look through history and this was a way of life and a way to survive, this was not a way to get followers. People may have changed over time but the way of cooking with fire has not."

The smoke show

Live fire cooking encompasses a range of techniques, each adding its own distinct character to the dishes

NG

or small, tender, quick-cuts, like whole chickens or pork shoulders? Enter text to—not directly over—

ld the food from direct fire to the fire.

grills are, by their very set up for indirect , although some can be ted to direct grilling.

RATURE: Generally done um or medium-high heat.

NG TIME: 30 to 45 for chicken pieces and s. One to one-and-a-half r whole chickens and ns. Two to four hours for oulders and rib roasts.

SUITED TO: Large foods, such as whole s, ducks, and turkeys; mb, and beef roasts; sh; large or dense les, such as cabbages, hole potatoes, and onions.

Heirloom Fire (Richmond, MA) is a sustainably minded, fire-based catering events company located deep in the Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts. Shown: Heirloom Fire roasting whole chickens around the hearth basket. Photo courtesy Logan Smith





Heirloom Fire prepares a whole lamb during an event. Photo courtesy Dear Edith and Lily

(see accompanying sidebar for some of the most popular techniques).

“You can essentially do everything that you do in an indoor kitchen outdoors, with a bit more skill and finesse,” says Gop. “You can dig a trench, fill it with coals so they cook in the earth. You can hang a piece of protein above a fire, so it never comes in direct contact, but cooks nice and slow with radiant heat. You can cook something on a spit directly over the flames. You can use large cauldrons and cook grain or braised items around the fire. You can utilize salt as a crust on top of proteins or vegetables that allows them to steam inside of a hard shell.”

While some chefs swear by whole logs or woodchips (e.g., hickory, cherry, oak, mesquite, apple, and peach), others rely on charcoal (e.g., binchotan, mesquite, tractional wood, and eucalyptus). Whichever fuel is used depends on each chef’s individual preference.

“The type of fuel you choose will significantly affect the flavor of your food,” Rosendale says. “For example, fruit woods like apple and cherry impart a milder, sweeter smoke flavor ideal for chicken or fish, while hickory and oak provide a stronger, hearty flavor perfect for beef or pork.”

“Certainly, there are countless combinations to achieve based on what we’re looking for,” adds Holden, “and the only way to get there is to literally play with fire.”

One thing to note: live fire cooking isn’t about the fire itself, but rather the smoke.

“There is way more to live fire cooking than many people expect,” says Annis. “The ‘smoke’ is an actual ingredient, so you have to choose your wood carefully. When you have that smell of sweet potatoes or onions on the fire or the char of a nice New York Strip with the fat dripping into the flame, it literally sends the smoke signal out.”

Live fire cooking is not just a feast for the palate either, but it can also be a captivating visual spectacle.

“Incorporating live action to any event allows the guests to interact with the experience, taking it to a level where fire is involved and awakens the senses,” says Holden.

“Rather than sitting at a table and having a beautiful plate brought to you, a guest can see, smell, hear, and watch the creation get built right before them, immersing them in the finished dish.”

“What we do is much more than just cooking food, it’s a performance,” Gop adds. “Since people can see everything that we do, there is a certain energy that is emitted. It’s essentially like going to see live music versus a DJ. You just feel it.”

While culinary theatrics add an unforgettable element to live fire cooking events, it’s essential to strike the right balance. The focus should remain on the quality



of the food and the culinary experience, with theatrics enhancing the overall ambiance rather than overshadowing it.

“Open fire always will have the best results when ingredients are handled properly,” says Holden.

“Going back to the idea that we eat with our eyes first, it’s important to have some showstoppers but it’s also important that the food tastes incredible, so you have to put thought into both aspects,” adds Gop.

Setting the stage

No matter how experienced a caterer is, there are a few things to be aware of up front when preparing food via live fire cooking. Let’s detail some

An example of how Rambler Events (Nashville, TN) sets up their field kitchen during live fire cooking events. Photo courtesy Kaitlin Mendoza

3 SMOKING

There are many ways you can smoke on a grill—while you’re direct grilling, indirect grilling, spit-roasting, even while grilling on a plancha.

THE SETUP

- **When direct grilling on a charcoal grill:** Add hardwood chunks or chips to the fire (you’ll need two chunks or one-and-a-half cups chips). You can also place a small log on the fire.
- **When indirect grilling and spit-roasting on a charcoal grill:** Set up your grill for indirect grilling. Place three-fourths cup wood chips or one large or two small chunks of wood on each mound of coals.
- **To smoke on a kamado-style cooker:** Most manufacturers call for interspersing unlit charcoal with wood chunks or chips, then lighting the coals from the top down. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions.
- **To smoke when plancha grilling:** Build a charcoal fire in the grill

(direct or indirect, depending on how hot you want the plancha). Add wood chips, chunks, or logs to the fire. Close the lid for part of the time while the food is on the plancha to trap the smoke.

- **To smoke on a pellet grill:**

By their very construction and nature, pellet grills are smokers. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions. Note: Pellet grills smoke best when run at lower temperatures.

TEMPERATURE: Smoke-roasting is generally done at a medium heat (325 to 350 degrees) or medium-high heat (375 to 400 degrees).

GRILLING TIME: Similar to indirect grilling times: 30 to 40 minutes for chicken pieces and sausages. One to one-and-a-half hours for whole chickens and pork loins. Two to four hours for pork shoulders and rib roasts.

WELL SUITED TO: Chicken; turkey; pork loin and shoulder; rib roast and beef long ribs; whole fish; whole vegetables; tofu.



of the dos and don'ts (broken down between set up, preparation, and clean up).

The spark

Live fire cooking requires quite a bit of equipment, but the specific equipment depends on each chef's or caterer's desired outcomes.

"It really depends on what you are cooking for and what you're trying to accomplish," McCandless explains. "At the most basic level of live-fire cooking, you just need the fire itself."

Standard equipment for live fire cooking includes wood fire and charcoal grills, torches, pots and pans, grates, spits, cassette burners, propane, smoker boxes, thermometers, skewers, cutting boards, broilers, and tongs.

"You want to make sure that you have all of the same things that you would use in a kitchen," Hernandez says.

While there's obviously a lot of standard equipment that is available for purchase, many caterers design their own custom equipment to better meet their needs.

"I've always been the type of person that will admire a specific kind of design or technique but then wonder how we can make it our own," says Gop.

Also, don't forget your safety equipment such as fire extinguishers, aprons, safety glasses, and heat resistant gloves.

Once the equipment list is set, it's time to load up and transport everything to the event.

"Transport for equipment and food is the root of catering," says Holden. "Culinary works in conjunction with warehousing and together formulate a list of required items, safety precautions, execution points, and storage."

Upon arrival at the event venue, it's time to build the field kitchen. On average, most caterers will set



(Above) Roy Porter (Engage Works, Inc.) prepared a whole lamb through live fire cooking as part of a Greek Orthodox Easter celebration. Photo courtesy Roy Porter

(Right) Chef David Olsen's (with Live Fire Republic in Grand Rapids, MI) Live Fire Australian Lamb Saddle is first smoked, then seared over the smoldering hardwood. A parsnip-carrot puree and chimichurri oil complete the dish. Photo courtesy Aussie Beef & Lamb



(Right) Chef Alex Sadowsky's (with Twin Peaks restaurant in Lewisville, TX) Aussie Wagyu Picanha with charred carrots and black garlic butter uses live fire for maximum flavor impact on the protein and the vegetables, while letting the indulgent flavor of the wagyu picanha (aka sirloin cap or culotte) shine through. Photo courtesy Aussie Beef & Lamb





4 SPIT-ROASTING (ROTISSERIE GRILLING)

Spit-roasting is one of the oldest methods of live-fire cooking. It combines the virtue of direct grilling (direct exposure to the fire) with that of indirect grilling (cooking next to, not directly over, the fire, so you don't get flare-ups). The gentle rotation helps the food cook evenly. The result: large cuts of meat with a savory seared surface and an extraordinarily moist interior.

SETUP

- **For a kettle grill**, set up the grill for indirect grilling. Place the rotisserie collar on the kettle and attach the motor to the mounting bracket. Install the spit, securing the end in the socket, and switch the motor on.
- **For a gas grill**, light the rear rotisserie burner (a feature on many high-end gas grills). Install the rotisserie motor and spit following the manufacturer's instructions.
- **Some kamado-style cookers**, like the Excalibur, come with a rotisserie attachment. Follow the manufacturer's instructions.

TEMPERATURE: Like indirect grilling, spit-roasting is generally done using medium to medium-high heat.

GRILLING TIME: Similar to indirect grilling, but spit-roasting goes a little faster: 30 to 40 minutes for chicken pieces and sausages. One to one-and-a-

quarter hours for whole chickens and pork loins. Two to three hours for pork shoulders and rib roasts.

WELL SUITED TO: Cylindrical or football-shaped foods, like whole chickens and ducks; pork shoulders and loins; rib roasts, etc. Good for whole fish, fish steaks, and large fillets.

5 CAVEMAN GRILLING (GRILLING IN THE EMBERS)

This theatrical method requires no grill grate. You grill the food directly on the coals. Although similar to direct grilling, caveman grilling gives you a crustier exterior and smokier flavor—the result of varying heat zones and micro-charring of the meat.

SETUP: Build a charcoal fire and rake the embers out in a single layer with a grill hoe or garden hoe. Fan the fire with a fan, folded newspaper, or hair dryer to dislodge any loose ash. Lay the food directly on the embers.

TEMPERATURE: Comparable to that of direct grilling, that is, hot (500 to 700 degrees).

GRILLING TIME: Quick—three to six minutes per side for most foods.

WELL SUITED TO: Steak is the obvious candidate for caveman grilling, but vegetables are also a great option (including sweet potatoes, onions, bell peppers, eggplant, and squash.) Less expected are ember-roasted shellfish and ember-roasted flatbread.

up their equipment a day prior at maximum, or four to five hours in advance at minimum.

“We take as much time designing our kitchen for our onsite events as we do preparing our food,” says Gop. “It’s essentially our stage.”

Taming the flames

There are different philosophies for cooking food onsite using live fire cooking. Some caterers will prepare everything onsite, which obviously requires considerable prep time, while others will pre-cook a lot of their menu items and only use the live fire setup for the final flourish.

“Timing is everything, having the grill set and ready, knowing what you are cooking and how it will be cooked, and what estimated time to serve all come into account,” Hernandez says. “Creating heat zones is critical when live fire cooking; you have a zone for meats, a zone for fish, a zone for the tender veggies, and a zone for seafood. Being able to understand the heat and the products that you are using really makes a difference.”

Cooking over an open flame requires constant care and attention given that active flames can oftentimes be unpredictable.

“Fire is an amazing element that you never control fully, it’s a constant negotiation and you work with it,” says Gop.

“I mark certain milestones, so I know when these items have to be on the fire,” he continues. “Once they’re on the fire, it still requires constant maintenance, because the wind direction and speed can change constantly, so it’s a constant dance.”

“You are now a meteorologist,” adds Hernandez. “The thing to remember is that this cooking method takes time. This is not a slap a burger on the grill and its ready in five minutes. Time, patience, and understanding of what you are cooking makes the difference.”

Information courtesy the [Barbecue Bible](#)



A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR LIVE FIRE COOKING

1 ARRANGE THE LOGS

Stack the logs into a square shape like they're Lincoln Logs, keeping the center of the shape open. Place some hardwood charcoal and clumps of paper and cardboard in the center, making sure there's enough room for air flow.

2 LIGHT THE CHARCOAL

Light the charcoal in the center, which will catch on fire easily and get red hot until it starts burning the wood around it.

3 WAIT ABOUT 30 MINUTES UNTIL EMBERS FORM

This is a good time to prep the food you're putting on the grill. You know the embers have formed when the wood and charcoal are covered in white ashes. Another test is to hold your hand 10 inches away from the embers. If you can only keep it there for a few seconds, the setup is ready for cooking.

4 CREATE HEAT ZONES WITH THE EMBERS

With your tongs, bank the embers up to one side of the live fire grill to create a hot side, warm side and cool side.

5 ADD THE FOOD

You want to add the meat when the embers are at their hottest. Smaller cuts of meat cook quickly over the hot side of the grill, while larger ones, such as a whole chicken, might start on direct heat and finish over indirect heat. Vegetables should be placed on the medium heat area where they'll cook low and slow.

6 CONTROL THE FIRE, DON'T LET IT CONTROL YOU

Don't be afraid of the fire. You can control how quickly everything is cooking with a few techniques.

Information above courtesy the [Food Network](#) and Chef Yia Vang

However, given the unpredictability of fire and cooking outdoors, this is where a caterer's creativity comes into play.

"Here's where experience and instinct play a massive part," says Rosendale. "You have to learn to judge the fire's heat and adjust the food's position accordingly. It's also vital to manage your fire and add fuel when necessary to maintain the required temperature."

The cool down

At the end of the event, caterers will need to extinguish the coals, break down and clean the cooking equipment, deconstruct the mobile

kitchen, and load everything back into its place in the truck.

"Clean up can make or break your company," says Gop. "After a 15-hour day we have to break down all of the gear that we set up earlier in the day and clean up the space to make it look like we were never there."

"It's a bit dirty with all of the smoke, ash, and charcoal," adds Hernandez, "and it really sticks to you."


At the end of the day, whether or not a live fire cooking event is successful comes down to how prepared and organized the caterer is.

"You have to really be passionate about this and want to do it, or it will wear you down quickly," says McCandless.

"Be very organized and give yourself over to the technique. It's going to be uncomfortable because you're

not used to it; and try not to use an indoor oven as a crutch. If you're going to do it and represent the culture, do it the whole way," adds Gop. "At the end of the day, you're either a good planner or you're not, and you also have to understand that we are all in this together."

So, are you up to the challenge of live fire cooking?

"Grilling over fire, it's an experience," said James Beard nominated Chef Yia Vang (and 2023 Art of Catering Food keynote) during the Food Network's *Stoked* television series. "You have to make a lot of mistakes. Once you are able to have an understanding and a flow of it and you're not fearful of the flames anymore, it becomes very fun. There's something very beautiful about cooking over fire." 

(Left) Heirloom Fire's Communal Table Board getting its final touches. Photo courtesy James Gop



Great Marketing is a Feeling

Great marketing has a clear mission and a story. When done well, it taps into people's emotions and sells not just a product, but also a feeling. That feeling generated by great marketing attracts your target customer base, as well as dedicated staffing candidates and press. Undervaluing strong marketing or getting it wrong leaves profits and growth on the table.

Tell your story

Catering is hard. Anyone diving into it and remaining afloat during economic trials, health department setbacks, bad hires, faulty equipment, permitting woes, rising rents, and ingredient shortages has a story. You willingly built a business in a volatile, impossible industry with the

odds stacked against you, yet you persevered. Define your story on the "About Us" page of your website, and then condense it into a line or two so you can tell it, in different ways, over and over again in pictures and in words, across your social media, in your deck (all catering companies should have a deck), and

to the engaged couples coming in for a tasting. Own your story and tell it, because it distinguishes you and generates emotion.

Keep a pulse on the cultural tone

If you are reading this, you survived the pandemic. So did anyone making an inquiry to your company. This experience has made us vulnerable and shaky. We all want to move on and yes, wag a tail feather. However, bragging about how well your company is doing or projecting smugness in any form is insensitive to your peers who are struggling or who have folded. The food industry continues to be in the headlines

“Undervaluing strong marketing or getting it wrong leaves profits and growth on the table.”

regarding the avalanche of ruptures it has endured over the past few years, so have grace. Keep your tone confident but humble in all of your marketing materials in this post-pandemic era.

Get outside of yourself

With the endless doomsday news cycle, customers want to feel that their purchasing power is contributing to their belief systems and the greater good. One of the most powerful marketing tools is to align your company with a non-profit. In your story, what matters to you? Is it climate change, underprivileged children, battered women, pet adoption, or cancer prevention? Research non-profits in your city that move you and reach out to the operator. I guarantee your call will be welcomed as soon as you say, “I will donate food.” Nurture this partnership to grow and find a way to involve your customers. Host a fundraising dinner with your favorite event planner to benefit your non-profit partner or throw an event with the non-profit as you call upon customers to volunteer alongside your team. People will start to identify your brand with this non-profit work, and they will feel that by supporting you, they are supporting your mission, so make sure to create and nourish one.

If you didn't photograph it, it didn't happen

The best marketing dollars you can spend is on a photographer.

Ever notice the most beautiful weddings you cater for have no good shots of the food? That is because photographers take their breaks during meal service. They need to eat too, and I heavily advise you to make sure you feed them very well so that they may be inspired to photograph your food before they eat it. Some do, some don't, but your graciousness will nevertheless make an impression on them; maybe you'll even be able to collaborate with them again in the future.

If you anticipate a particular event to be highly produced or in a scenic venue, consider hiring your own photographer to shoot the kitchen and your team. These shots can be used not only for your social media channels but also for your website and deck to show, rather than explain, your aptitude and brand.

Marketing decks are a secret weapon

Digital decks can be three pages or 30, and when done well, they can save your sales team a lot of

time. They can be featured on your website, and they can also be sent out to inquiries. They should feel like a beautiful magazine and be targeted at specific audiences (weddings, corporate clients, drop-offs for private parties, etc.). Strong photos with considerate design can illustrate your operations and why you charge what you do. Additionally, it doesn't force your sales team to spend valuable time defending your costs, procedures, or boundaries. Also, a client may keep this deck or pass it around to friends if it is particularly stunning, so make it stunning!

Be authentic


In marketing, let authenticity lead you by sticking to your core story and purpose. If marketing sounds overwhelming or outside your comfort zone, then hire someone who understands storytelling so that they can tell your story. Marketing costs, when executed well, lead your business in the direction you want to go. 



Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Times

Tara Maxey co-founded, operated, and co-owned Heirloom LA for 14 years. Launched in the recession in 2008, Heirloom LA emerged as a force in Los Angeles as the go-to for celebrity and corporate drop-off catering, full-service catering, and even a food truck which was named “The Best Gourmet Food Truck” by Los Angeles Magazine. While Tara served as Pastry Chef and Creative Director, Heirloom LA was featured in some of the most prestigious of publications. During the pandemic, Heirloom LA pivoted overnight into an online ordering food delivery service, and launched Meals for People, a non-profit that raised over 150k to feed high need families in the area. In 2022, Tara sold her shares and now works as a consultant with Certified Catering Consultants.

ON THE MENU

By Amber Kispert

(Below) A formal wedding pie. Photo courtesy Mon Cheri/Monika Hibbs for *Southern Living*

PIE in S



the SKY

WHETHER SWEET
OR SAVORY, TREAT
YOUR GUESTS
TO A SLICE OF
DELICIOUSNESS

In the ever-evolving landscape of catering trends, one culinary delight has resurfaced with a newfound popularity: pies.

These humble and comforting treats, once relegated to family dinners and cozy bakeries, are now making a grand entrance at catered events. From weddings and corporate functions to social gatherings and holiday parties, pies are capturing the hearts and taste buds of guests everywhere.

“Our palates crave an array of different things, from sweet and salty, to fruity and crunchy or even smooth and custardy,” says Deanna Johnson, Executive Pastry Chef for Bold Catering & Design. “People want things that are familiar to them but presented to them in such a way to create an experience.”

Let’s take a look at this sweet (and sometimes savory) trend and how it is getting its own slice of the catering business.

Getting a piece of the pie

Before we get into the pie trend, we can’t flake on recognizing its origins. According to [Food & Drink Resources](#), ancient Greeks and Romans were the first to make pie. The crust was simple, and it usually contained meat or other savory fillings. Pilgrims then brought English-style “pye” recipes with them to the colonies. Pies were practical because the crusts preserved the fillings and kept them fresh during the winter months.

“For all of time people have taken ingredients native to their lands, created a dough, filled it with something hearty and delicious and baked them in the oven,” says Johnson.



Warm Potato Tart with Arugula, Figs, Prosciutto, and Truffle Vinaigrette (goat cheese, Idaho potato puree, fig and Vidalia onion marmalade, arugula, truffle vinaigrette, prosciutto, and figs). Photo courtesy Idaho Potato Commission

Today pie has emerged as the third most common dessert on menus, after cakes and cheesecakes, according to [Datassential's *Dessert Keynote* report](#). In fact, a whopping 78% of consumers indicated that they love or like pie, according to the report.

What's causing the rise in pie's popularity?

For starters, pies tap into the nostalgia and comfort trend that has gripped customers' attention for the past couple years. Consumers crave the familiar, the dishes that bring them back to simpler times. Think: holiday traditions such as enjoying a piece of pumpkin or apple pie during Thanksgiving.

Probably the biggest contributor to pie's popularity stems from its versatility since there's no shortage of ways to approach this flaky favorite. Pie is nothing more than a crust with filling, which means it's a culinary blank canvas.

"Because pies are constantly pushing the boundaries of what both savory and sweet foods can be, it has become easier and more exciting for event chefs to create and play with their food," says Bryce Cherven, Executive Pastry Chef for Footers Catering. "A lot of clients who host events regularly don't want to see the same thing every time,



Italian Egg Tart (puff pastry crust, eggs, parmesan cheese, and Italian seasoning). Photo courtesy General Mills Foodservice



Honey Glazed Strawberry Tart (honey, apricot nectar, lemon juice, cream cheese, almond extract, strawberries, mint, and orange peel). Photo courtesy National Honey Board

which challenges us as chefs to create new and exciting items that the competition isn't going to propose."

Any way you slice it

Whether they're baked, fried, sweet, savory, extravagant, or simple, pies can check a lot of different boxes for consumer tastes. Let's take a look at pie's versatility.

Sweet versus savory

Obviously, pie's sweet spot is at the end of the meal as a satisfying dessert.

"Almost everyone has a sweet tooth, the moment where your taste buds start talking to you and your mouth waters and that tiny voice in your head says, 'I want something sweet,'" says Johnson. "People want to be wowed, they want to create memories that will last a lifetime for their guests and make their event the talk of the town. What better way to do it than with the last thing they'll have before they leave your event: dessert?"

On the other hand, savory pies offer a tantalizing twist, bringing a touch of culinary adventure to catered events. These include chicken pot pies, shepherd's pies, and empanadas, to name just a few.

"Wikipedia's definition of the word pie is as follows: 'A baked dish which is usually made of a pastry dough casing that contains a filling of various sweet or savory ingredients.' Think of how many foods that really includes technically, even down to breakfast," says Johnson. "You've got quiches, turnovers, and even toaster strudels, whole pies, and hand pies. From cultures all around the world, you've got Spanish empanadas, European pierogies, Italian calzones, Chicago deep dish, and Jamaican beef patties."

The first step in creating a delicious pie is finding the right crust recipe. "I think of the dough recipes as the foundation of any good pie or tart," says Bryce Cherven, Executive Pastry Chef for Footers Catering. "Find one great pie dough recipe and one great tart shell recipe and keep them forever. It's easier to make small changes on a great recipe than to re-build it completely."



Footers Catering provides Lemon Berry Tartlets that utilize a sablée crust. Photo courtesy Bryce Cherven

SABLÉE

YIELD: 5 LBS

*Recipe courtesy Bryce Cherven,
Footers Catering*

INGREDIENTS

567 g butter
396 g sugar
5 g salt
4 ea. eggs
1,667 g flour
113.4 g water/milk/booze
Optional: nuts

METHOD

1. Using a paddle, cream the butter and sugar well.
2. Add eggs, scraping well. Add salt, flour, and nuts if using.
3. Add liquid last. Combine well. Chill before baking. If not using nuts add flour by half weight.



Strawberry Rhubarb mini pies. Photo courtesy Bryce Cherven

PIE DOUGH

YIELD: 5 ½ LBS OF DOUGH (approximately six 9-inch pie shells)

*Recipe courtesy Bryce Cherven,
Footers Catering*

INGREDIENTS

1,361 g all-purpose flour
21 g salt
114 g sugar
680 g butter, cold and cubed
227 g shortening, cold and cubed
340 g cold water

METHOD

1. Combine all dry ingredients in the mixer with a paddle attachment.
2. Add butter and shortening, allowing to mix until fats are smaller than pea-sized, being careful not to overmix.
3. Add water slowly until dough is combined—you might not need all of it. Portion to 1 lb disks and chill.

The addition of savory pies to the catering menu provides a delightful balance to the sweet offerings and caters to the diverse preferences of guests.

“Savory pies and tarts are the best way to intermingle sweet and savory departments in the kitchen,” says Cherven.

Service styles

When thinking about how to serve pie during events, the sky’s the limit. Individual bite-sized options, pies stacked to look like a wedding cake, pies on a stick, pie bars, and even in cookie or cocktail form—all different ways of serving pie have their proper place.

“Individual-sized desserts are admittedly more work on your team, but they provide a much bigger variety to the client. Being able to sample a few small bites and not commit to a whole slice of pie at the end of an already large meal will really appeal to the guests,” Cherven says. “Full-sized pies and things like pie bars, where the selection is a little smaller, can be great for the client that may have a hard time making decisions.

“These larger format desserts also open an incredible window of opportunity to turn each slice into a chef-attended short plate. Rather than having someone place a slice on a plate and let the guests self-serve toppings, turn it into an experience where the slice is drizzled with strawberry rose coulis, a dollop of fresh meringue, and then torched in front of the guest. They will remember the experience you created in front of them as well as being able to enjoy a curated small dish.”



Elevate it

Pies can be equally at home in formal settings as they are at a simple family gathering, where they can be plated and garnished with finesse. With beautiful golden crusts, intricate lattice designs, and vibrant fruit fillings, pies become edible works of art.

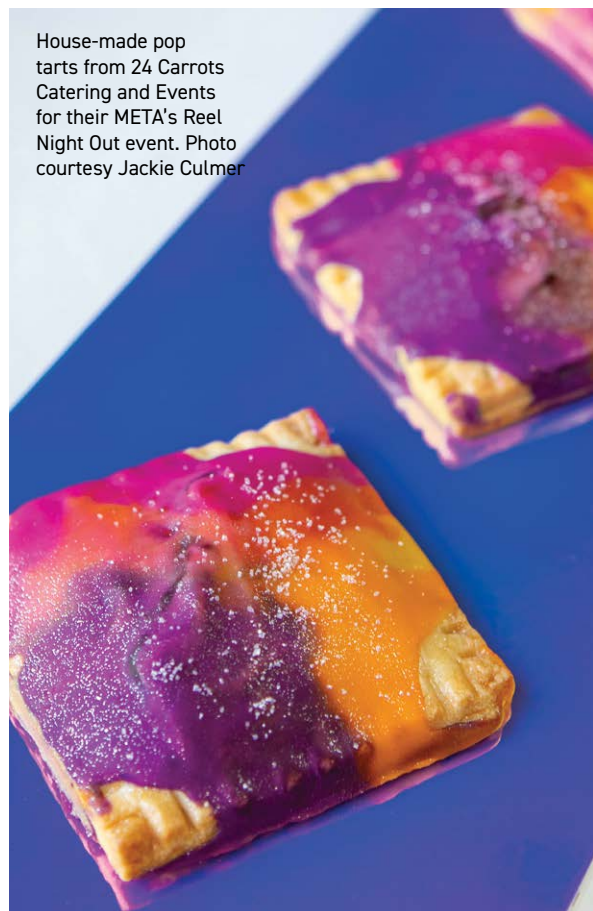
“To elevate any dessert, you must reconfigure what it is visually in your mind,” Johnson says. “Food is art, so you must be able to take any number of raw ingredients and transform them into a completely different creation. Tell the audience a story.

“Change the shape, add texture, layer flavors, change the consumers’ ideas of what the dish should be, what they’re used to. Show them what it could be when you use your imagination.”



Bold Catering & Design offers an Eat & Greet dessert station. Photo courtesy Deanna Johnson

House-made pop tarts from 24 Carrots Catering and Events for their META's Reel Night Out event. Photo courtesy Jackie Culmer



(Above) Mango Tart (coconut cream, brown sugar, vanilla, toasted coconut, mango, simple syrup, and lime zest). Photo courtesy National Mango Board



MEYER LEMON OLIVE OIL MERINGUE PIE with Herbes de Provence Crust

YIELD: 1

*Recipe courtesy Bryce Cherven,
Footers Catering*

INGREDIENTS FOR PIE CRUST

247 g all-purpose flour
4 g sea salt
2 g Herbes De Provence
20 g granulated sugar
123 g butter, cubed and cold
41 g shortening, cubed and cold
61 g cold water

METHOD

1. In a mixing bowl with a paddle attachment, combine all dry ingredients.
2. Add butter and shortening, allowing to mix until the fats are smaller than pea-sized. Add cold water slowly until the dough is combined—you might not need all of it!
3. Chill before rolling out. Once rolled out, freeze before par-baking in a 350°F oven for approximately 15 minutes.

INGREDIENTS FOR PIE FILLING

113 g sour cream
936 g sweetened condensed milk
150 g Meyer Lemon juice
25 g extra virgin olive oil

METHOD

1. Combine all ingredients.
2. Pour over the pie shell and bake at 300°F for approximately 20 minutes or until the center has a firm jiggle.
3. Remove and allow to cool completely before decorating.

INGREDIENTS FOR MERINGUE TOPPING

160 g egg whites
200 g granulated sugar
113 g water
3 g vanilla bean paste

METHOD

1. Place egg whites in a mixing bowl with a whisk attachment. Start on low to allow egg whites to “foam” while cooking sugar mixture.
2. Combine sugar and water in a sauce pot until a candy thermometer reads 225°F.

3. Turn your mixer up to get egg whites to soft peaks.

4. Once your sugar mixture has reached 240°F, remove it from the heat and slowly stream it into the egg whites while they are continuing to whip on a medium-low speed. Whip your egg white and sugar mixture until the meringue is shiny and stiff peaks form.

5. Add vanilla bean paste, mix until it's distributed throughout, then turn your mixer off.

6. To decorate your pie, you can either pile the meringue directly onto the pie and manipulate with a spoon or offset spatula or place the meringue in a piping bag with a piping tip and pipe rosettes or another border around the edge.

7. Optional final step: Garnish the meringue with fresh lemon zest.

As Easy as Pie

Check out this completely delicious guide to popular types of pie.

"There are such a vast number of pastries, both savory and sweet, as per definition that would be included under the 'pie or tart' umbrella," says Deanna Johnson, Executive Pastry Chef for Bold Catering & Design.

Double-crust

This type of pie refers to any type of sweet or savory pie that has both top and bottom crusts.

Examples: *Chicken pot pie, fruit pies, etc.*

Fruit

Any type of pie filled with fruit. Typically, a fruit pie has a fruit filling cooked in between two crusts, one on bottom and one on top, though the top crust could be replaced with streusel.

Examples: *apple, berries, peach, etc. (based on the produce that's in season)*

Hand pies

A hand pie is just as it sounds, a pie made the perfect size for you to hold in your hand.

Examples: *fruit, pierogi, empanadas, etc.*

Chiffon

A chiffon pie is usually made with gelatin and requires refrigeration. The Jello-like filling is very light and a popular type of pie for summer.

Examples: *lemon, strawberry, pumpkin, etc.*

Cream

What distinguishes cream pie from a custard or chiffon pie is that it contains a pudding filling made predominantly with whipped cream and egg yolks. Generally, the filling is not cooked, but rather sets up in the fridge for at least four hours until it has solidified.

Examples: *coconut cream pie, chocolate pudding pie, lemon cream pie, etc.*

Custard

The difference between a custard pie and a cream pie is the proportion of cream and egg yolks. A custard pie will have a firmer filling and will require baking. The custard filling is mixed until super smooth before it's poured into a pre-baked pie crust and finished in the oven.

Examples: *pumpkin pie, sweet potato pie, etc.*

Galette

A galette is a free-form pie that is made not in a pie dish but on a sheet tray. One single layer of pie dough is rolled out into a large circle. There's usually a one to two-inch border of pie crust that is then folded over on the filling and the whole pie is baked in the oven until bubbling.

Examples: *fruit (blueberry, apple, etc.), Galette Breton, Galette de Rois, etc.*

Crostata

A crostata is an open-faced, free-form pie where a prepared fruit filling is placed over the top of raw pie dough, the edges folded over with the filling exposed. It is then egg washed and baked.

Examples: *apricot jam, strawberry jam, onion, etc.*

Tart

Unlike a pie, which is made with a pie crust, tarts are usually made with a buttery short crust (think: shortbread). The difference is that a traditional pie crust will always experience some shrinkage as it bakes, but a short crust will maintain its form, which is essential for delicate tarts.

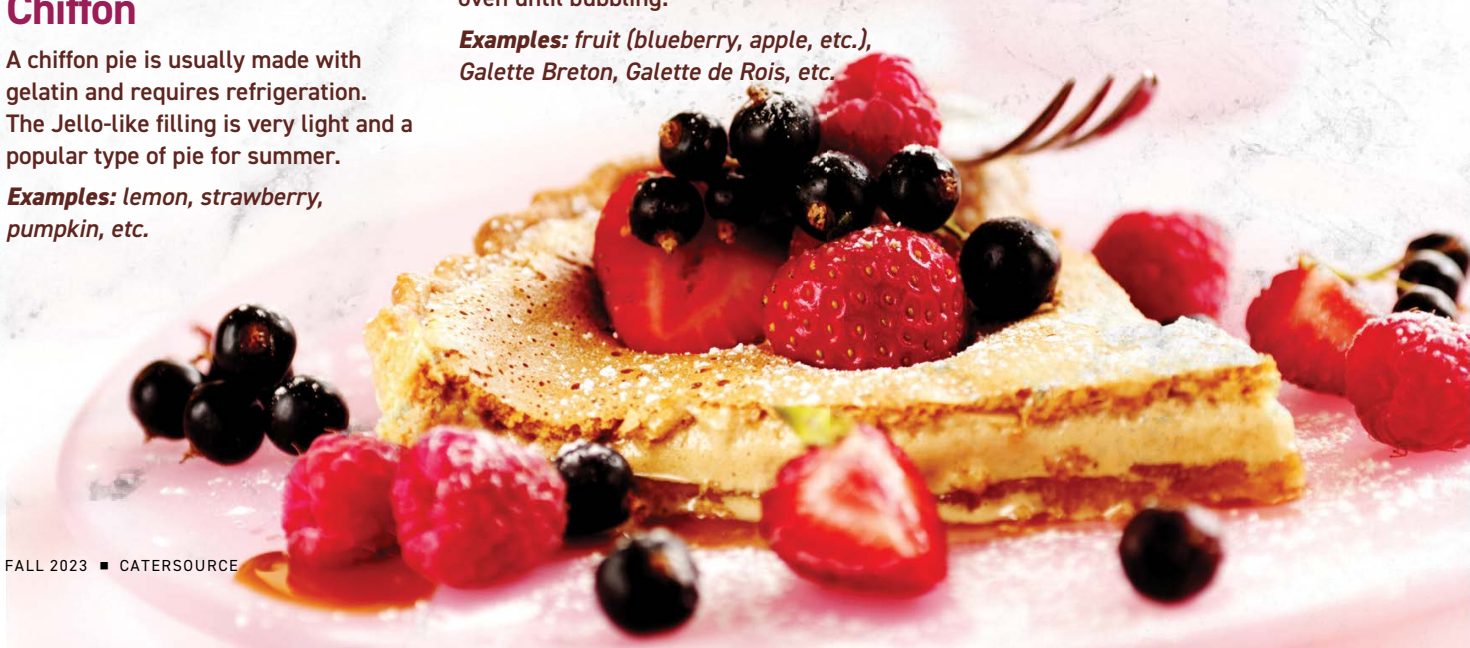
Examples: *fresh fruits, custards, eggs, or meats, etc.*

Savory

Savory pies are non-sweet, "salty rather than sweet" pies served as meals or snacks, rather than as a dessert.

Examples: *fish pies, pasties, pot pies, meat pies, shepherd's pies, cottage pie, beef wellington, spanakopita, quiche, etc.*

Information above courtesy [Food52](#)





Grape Frangipane Tart (red or black seedless grapes and almond paste). Photo courtesy California Table Grape Commission

Something as small as changing the crust or tweaking the garnish can make a big impact on overall flavor and presentation, Cherven adds.

It comes down to the crust

One of the most important parts of any pie is the crust, which also brings a lot of versatility to the table.

“I tend to categorize pies by what the ‘crust’ is,” Cherven says. “Sometimes a ‘crust’ is an oat crumble, and sometimes it’s a batter, and sometimes it’s a biscuit!”

There’s something to be said for making the crust in-house as a way to experiment and create something truly unique, but pre-made shells also offer a great solution to ensure ease and won’t put as much time constraints on the kitchen staff.

Customization is key

Lastly, pies offer a wonderful opportunity for customization. It doesn’t take many adjustments for a pie to be vegan, sugar-free, dairy-free, gluten-free, and so on. This adaptability makes pies an ideal choice for events where guests have diverse tastes and dietary needs. By offering a range of fillings, crust variations, and sizes, caterers can ensure that every guest finds a pie that suits their palate.

Take me to flavor town

One of pie’s greatest assets is the fact that it can be a showcase for seasonal ingredients (turn to page 42 in the adjoining *Special Events* magazine for more ideas on seasonality) and regional tastes.

“I break my desserts down the way a savory chef might think about an entrée,” says Cherven. “Where you might have a starch, protein, and vegetable; I have a base, filling, and a top.”

“Think about how it’s going to be eaten, and work backward from there. If it’s a one-bite mini tart, the filling will want to be big and flavorful. Conversely, a large slice doesn’t need to have as big of a flavor impact; it can be more subtle and nuanced and build as the guest eats it.”

Pie can transport people to places they’ve been and places they want to be, according to Food & Drink Resources. From Greek Spanakopita and Moroccan Bisteeya to Florida Key Lime pie and Pennsylvania Shoofly pie, this pastry provides an authentic taste of a place that people are looking for today.

“If there’s one thing I’ve come to learn in this industry, it is that locals really appreciate homegrown products, something to be proud of,” says Johnson.



Sweet Potato Fondue Tart (puff pastry crust, white wine, heavy whipping cream, Emmental cheese, Brie de France cheese, maple syrup, cardamom, cinnamon, eggplant, and sweet potatoes). Photo courtesy General Mills Foodservice

IRISH SLAMMER TART

Recipe and image courtesy Deanna Johnson, Bold Catering & Design

INGREDIENTS

Heritage Black Cocoa Tart Shell (store bought)
1 tsp Salted Pretzel Crumb (recipe below)
Salted Caramel Filling (recipe below)
Bailey's Ganache (recipe below)

TO ASSEMBLE

1. In the bottom of each tart shell add 1 teaspoon pretzel crumb.
2. Pipe salted caramel filling halfway up tart shell, freeze.
3. Once caramel layer is frozen, top with freshly made Irish crème ganache.
4. Garnish as desired. Suggested: drizzle with dark coating chocolate about of the corner and sprinkle with pretzel crumb and gold leaf.

INGREDIENTS FOR SALTED CARAMEL FILLING

470 g water
1,600 g sugar
340 g light corn syrup
480 g cream
454 g butter
½ cup crème fraiche
2 T salt

METHOD

1. Pour water, sugar, and corn syrup in a heavy bottom saucepan, be sure to select a pan with at least four to five inches of additional height over the fill point, as when adding the cream the mixture will bubble heavily. DO NOT STIR. Boil to an amber in color, approx. 248°F

2. In a separate pot, heat cream with salt until dissolved.
3. Remove caramel from heat, add in heated cream mixture, slowly, as caramel will bubble vigorously. BE CAREFUL.
4. Stir in butter and crème fraiche.

Note: Test a drop on the table to see how it sets once cooled, continue cooking finished caramel to thicken if needed depending on the consistency you're looking for. Alternatively, add cream to thin if needed for sauces, etc.

INGREDIENTS FOR BAILEY'S GANACHE

20 oz white chocolate
4 oz heavy cream
4 oz Bailey's Irish Cream

METHOD

1. Pour white chocolate in a stainless-steel bowl over double boiler, melt slightly.
2. In a medium bottom saucepan, heat Bailey's and heavy cream, pour over partially melted white chocolate.
3. Allow to set, covered for approximately two minutes to ensure white chocolate is melted. Whisk to combine.

INGREDIENTS FOR PRETZEL CRUMB

500 g pretzels, coarsely chopped
12 oz butter, melted
¾ cup plus 1 T sugar
1/3 cup plus 1 T brown sugar
2 T sea salt
¾ cup cocoa nibs

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 350°F
2. Combine all ingredients except cocoa nibs in a stainless-steel bowl, toast for three to four minutes or until golden brown. Once mixture cools, add in cocoa nibs.





UBE TARTS

Recipe and photo courtesy Eatertainment Events & Catering

INGREDIENTS

- 12 ea. pre-made medium tart shells (or 24 minis)
- 18 oz cream cheese, room temperature
- 6 oz ube jam, room temperature
- ½ cup sweetened condensed milk
- 1½ T ube extract
- Pinch salt
- Shredded coconut and saffron, for garnish

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. In a mixing bowl, add all the ingredients and mix until well combined (use a hand-held mixer or stand mixer).
3. Pour the ube filling into the tart shells and bake for 10-12 minutes.
4. Remove from the oven and cool completely.
5. Top with shredded coconut and saffron.

Go to your local farmer's market and see what's in season or partner with local purveyors to get access to the freshest ingredients.

"When presented with the opportunity to utilize fresh seasonal ingredients, take advantage," says Johnson. "Pair with complementary flavors that will highlight the main ingredient, not mask it."

Now it's your turn to slice off a piece of this tasty trend.

"The flavor landscape of pie becomes a playground for creativity," says Sebastien Centner, Creative Director and Founder for Eatertainment Events & Catering. "Our team of expert chefs relish the chance to push the boundaries and present guests with an unforgettable experience, where each bite is a delightful adventure into uncharted taste territories. Embracing these trends allows us to craft delectable treats that captivate the senses and leave a lasting impression on every event attendee."

Bon Appetit! **CS**



Bold Catering & Design's Strawberry Pistachio Tart. Photo courtesy Deanna Johnson



Leading Through Digital Transformation

There is no shortage of headlines and articles about the advances taking place in artificial intelligence. From how people are experimenting with text generation tools like ChatGPT to discussions about how robots are being used in new ways (turn to page 42 for more on robotics in the catering industry), there seems to be a constant buzz about the topic.

When new technology comes out, people tend to fall into one of two camps: either they are excited by the potential benefits and become early adopters or they are leery about the downsides that may come with it, and they wait to explore it until the kinks have been worked out or it becomes absolutely necessary to adopt.

As leaders, it's important to be aware of what is out there and constantly evaluate the implications it will

have on our respective businesses. Roy Amara, American scientist and president of the Institute of the Future, coined what is now known as Amara's Law; "We tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run."

It's difficult to keep up with the speed of technological advances happening, especially when people are touting how each one will "change everything," but if we don't at least pay attention to what is going on, we risk being left behind. Here are three questions leaders should ask when deciding if new technology is worth adopting.

Does it improve the guest experience?

Finding and hiring staff members continues to be a major challenge for the hospitality industry. In several states, companies are also dealing with onerous pieces of legislation that make it more difficult and expensive to have employees.

“TECHNOLOGY THAT MAKES US MORE EFFICIENT CAN ALLOW OUR TEAM MEMBERS TO SPEND MORE TIME DOING MEANINGFUL WORK THAT THEY ENJOY AND ARE TRULY GIFTED AT DOING.”

Those factors have led to business owners being more willing to explore ways to automate positions and reduce headcount. More and more robots are popping up around dining rooms and kitchens in restaurants across the U.S. I've been to Las Vegas and had a drink poured by a robot bartender. While it was attention grabbing and novel, I can't say that it enhanced my experience as a guest. Robots won't be replacing all labor needed on a catered event anytime soon, but there is potential for companies that can figure out how robots can be integrated with their team members. A robot that brings plates from the kitchen to the dining tables would allow a server to stay on the floor and provide a higher level of service.


Does it improve the employee experience?

Technology that makes us more efficient can allow our team members to spend more time doing meaningful work that they enjoy and are truly gifted at doing. Years ago, when we automated our pack lists for events, it freed up hours of time each week and allowed our event coordinators to spend more time planning events and working with their clients. I know caterers who are using ChatGPT to assist with tasks such as writing job descriptions, creating proposal language, and drafting marketing blogs. While there still needs to be time spent editing, it creates more time for team members to do tasks they are passionate about. Technology is also critical for attracting the next generation of talent. One of the top things Gen Z is looking for in a job is the presence of technology. They expect it to be integrated into day-to-day operations and to be able to access that technology from their phone.

What resources are necessary?

From the price of the actual technology to the time needed for training and implementation, adopting new technology comes with a variety of costs. In addition to calculating those costs, it can be difficult to quantify the potential benefits to determine if it is worth pursuing, especially when some of those benefits are intangible. Like any investment, leaders must decide if tying up cash and resources in the short term will pay off in the long term. To do that, it's important to evaluate the capacity of the team and the communication systems in place. If there is no bandwidth to learn a new system or technology, then it's unlikely an organization will be able to maximize the value of that investment. I speak with many companies who have spent significant money on new technology yet are only using a fraction of what it can do. Healthy communication systems are a great way to expedite implementation. When team members are clear on the end goal, they are more invested in realizing the benefits as soon as possible. They take steps to learn new systems and encourage others to do the same instead of watching others do the work while they wait to see what will happen.

Computers will continue to become smarter and able to perform tasks that previously required humans. As technology advances, leaders will differentiate themselves not by how much they know, but rather by how they treat other people. Focusing on interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and other skills that computers can't do will insulate leaders from their jobs being automated. Those who can blend the tools of automation with the human emotions and heart leadership will find it easier to retain top talent, take advantage of efficiencies that make them more profitable, and create opportunities that put their organizations ahead of the rest.

Just because new technology exists doesn't mean it should be implemented. While artificial intelligence tools, robots, and other emerging technologies dominate headlines, leaders need to determine what is applicable to their businesses and their teams both in the short and long term. By evaluating the resources necessary as well as the impact on both guests and employees, they can make informed decisions that will lead to the successful implementation of new technology. 



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).

THE ROBOT UPRISING

Robotics technology offers innovative solutions within the catering and events industry

BY AMBER KISPERT



Robots, once limited to the realm of science fiction, are now making their mark in the catering world. These intelligent machines are transforming the way caterers prepare, cook, and serve food, offering unprecedented levels of efficiency, precision, and consistency.

“I think it’s the logical next step. Robotics have been used for decades within the manufacturing sector, and the synergy between human workers and robotic automation has been of enormous benefit to productivity and efficiency,” says Steve Kane, who works with [Pringle Robotics](#) in their Hospitality Innovation department. “Now, with advances in smaller, more personable service robots, the hospitality industry can reap similar rewards—especially during this time of labor shortages coupled with increased consumer demand.”

So, how can caterers successfully harness the power of this emerging technology? Let’s take a look at the different robots currently on the market and the different ways they can support catering operations.

BREAKING DOWN THE BOTS

Robots, with their articulated arms, multiple cameras, and machine learning, can lend the ultimate helping hand to the hospitality industry by assisting with many of the repetitive or mind-numbing tasks workers must repeat again and again.

“And guess what,” said Michael Stavros during his Catersource + The Special Event 2023 session, *Caterers, Assemble! - Tantalizing Trends, Captivating Concepts, Inspired Interactivity*, “it doesn’t complain.”

(Right, top) Chippy from Miso Robotics is designed to fry one or two high-volume products that need seasoning and finishing—such as tortilla chips. Photo courtesy Miso Robotics

(Right, middle) Flippy from Miso Robotics is the world’s first-ever AI-powered robotic fry cook. With its incredible multitasking capabilities, Flippy can fry frozen ingredients and plate finished food with remarkable precision while keeping multiple recipes on the go. Photo courtesy Miso Robotics

(Right, bottom) Pringle Robotics currently offers a number of different service robots including KettyBoT, which can be mapped to an event space and programmed to deliver items such as appetizers, beer, water, and swag; BellaBoT (shown), which can accompany serving staff to tables, carrying multiple plates of food at a time and reducing worker fatigue; and HolaBoT, their dish bussing robot that can carry 120 pounds worth of dishes. Photo courtesy Pringle Robotics



Today's robots range from front-of-house to back-of-house, each with their own specialized functions. Prices can range from a couple hundred to thousands of dollars depending on the model you invest in, and whether you rent or purchase them.

"To grow your business with the ever-changing landscape of technology, I think it's important to embrace the change and at least try it," says Robin Selden, Executive Chef with Marcia Selden Catering & Events. "Change is often scary as we are creatures of habit, but if you don't try it, you'll never know the benefits it will have."

Super servers

Probably the most prevalent at this current juncture are service robots, which are popping up in all sorts of scenarios such as in hotels (room service delivery) and during events. For example, they are a good solution for butler-passed service during events.

"Bartenders love our bots because when they finish making a drink, they can simply place the drink on the serving bot and send it to the table where it is needed, rather than waiting for the server to return to the drink station to get it and take it to the customer," says Kane.

These types of robots are outfitted with shelving and can be programmed to move along a pre-designated path bringing beverages and hors d'oeuvres to guests.

"Think of it like a Roomba with shelves," said Stavros.

Selden had her first interaction with a service robot in Orlando, FL during Catersource + The Special Event 2023. After requesting some additional towels and bottled water at her hotel, "within minutes there was a buzz at the door. I opened the door and to my surprise there was a robot there, which as you can imagine, blew my mind.

"I was so impressed with this that we ended up calling again the following day as we wanted to video the whole interaction," she adds. "Sadly, this time when we opened the door, we were met with a smile (which don't get me wrong, was great) but we were bummed."

A few of the models on the market include [Matradee](#), [Servi](#), and Pringle's many service robots. These same robots can also be programmed for table bussing as well. There are even models that help scrub floors.

Some of the service robots on the market are outfitted with video screens, which are great opportunities to include directional information, logos, and even descriptions of signature cocktails or bites. Robots can also assist with guest check-in.

"I definitely think that it would elevate the guest experience and create a great memory," says Selden. "After all that is our job as memory makers, right?"

But there's even more potential with robots than just delivery and bussing.

"I can see larger delivery robots being used to transport big quantities of food from kitchen to truck, or truck to venue," says Kane, "and I do see a place for robots to eventually be right in the kitchen, helping prepare the food."

Robotic chefs

The emergence of robot chefs is a game-changer in the culinary industry, with their ability to redefine the traditional approach to food preparation and service. Early iterations of the robotic chef included such options as burger flipping bots ([Aniai](#)), French fry bots ([Miso](#)),



(Left) Cecilia.ai is an interactive bartender where guests interested in a drink can come up and tell it their order. Cecilia.ai can respond to the order, such as saying a certain ingredient isn't available or suggesting an alternative option. Cocktails are also available on a touchscreen menu, and the drink is delivered through a slot in the machine. Photo courtesy Cecilia.ai



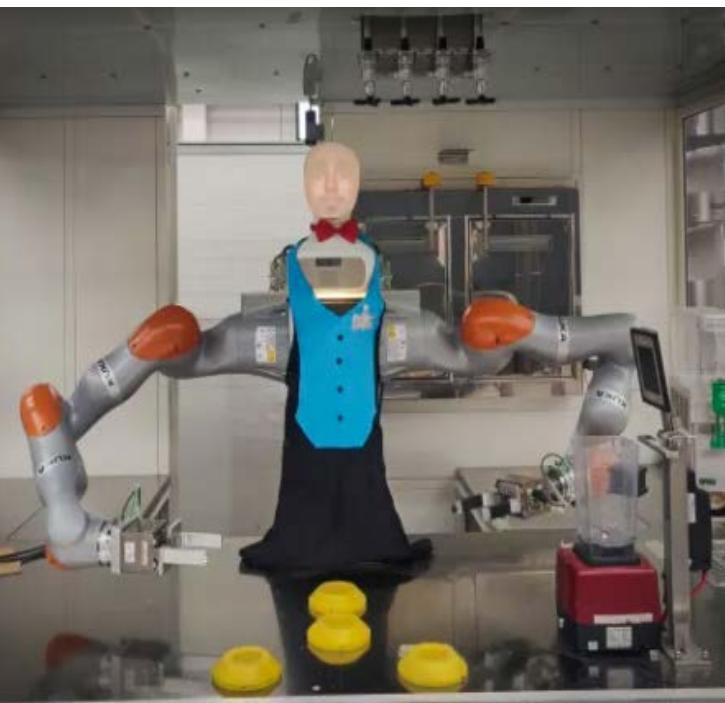
A barista
Kitchen



BRILLO
complex



A robot served up coffee to attendees during the 2023 National Restaurant Association Show as part of the Kitchen Innovations Awards. Photo courtesy National Restaurant Association



PRISCA is an AI-powered bartending robot that's capable of engaging in dialogue with customers. Photo courtesy PRISCA Lab



Bear Robotics displayed its Servi robots during the 2023 National Restaurant Association Show. Servi can help run food or bus dishes. Photo courtesy National Restaurant Association

sandwich and salad bots ([Dexai](#)), and even pizza bots ([Picnic Works](#)). But today's robots can do so much more. With the aid of onboard sensors, optical cameras, and enhanced artificial intelligence technology, these robotic cooks are fundamentally designed to multi-task, executing the actions and movements of professional human cooks in real time.

Most innovative, however, are the fully-automated robotic kitchens being developed by such companies as [Moley](#), [REMY](#), and [Nala](#) that include everything from multi-cuisine-making robots to sushi making bots to dishwashing robots to ice cream scooping bots. Robots who can plate are also emerging. This means the robot kitchen can retrieve ingredients from the fridge, adjust oven temperatures, use the sink to fill pans and pour, mix, and plate up just as a human cook would. The robot even cleans up after itself.

These robotic kitchens utilize AI technology to follow pre-recorded chef instructions and are equipped with multiple sensors and machine learning capabilities, enabling it to precisely measure ingredients and execute complex cooking techniques.

"Right now, the general sense is that there's going to be a lot more robots," said Dina Zemke, assistant professor at

Ball State University, in an article for [CNBC](#). "The recipes are highly standardized. And really, it's mostly heating and assembly. No one's creating just the right secret sauce in the back of the house, all of that is provided through a commissary system."

Beyond robotic chefs, there's also a growing demand for "smart appliances." For instance, smart ovens can automatically adjust cooking times and temperatures based on the type of food being prepared, while AI-powered refrigerators can monitor expiration dates and suggest recipes based on the ingredients available.

According to [Global Market Estimates](#) the global cooking robot market is projected to grow at a CAGR value of 16.5% from 2022 to 2027, with the multi-cuisine-making segment expected to grow the fastest.

In fact, several companies have already started to implement robotic chefs into their operations. For example, Chartwells Higher Education has added Picnic Works' Pizza Picnic Station (an automated pizza assembly technology) to several of its college campuses; and dnata—one of the world's largest air and travel services providers—has implemented Moley's AI-powered cooking robot into its catering operations, serving up identical dishes at scale.



Dexai's robot dubbed "Alfred" can assemble dishes like salads and grain bowls. Photo courtesy Dexai



"Alfred" is a food safe-certified robotic arm that can sit in front of a row of hotel pans of ingredients and can hold traditional kitchen utensils like scoops and tongs. Photo courtesy Lane Turner/[Boston Globe](#)

"I love the idea of a station where somebody walks up to the robotic arm and is telling it what to build for their station item," Stavros said. "I love the idea of a robotic arm doing a perfectly uniform plate decoration on every single plate that goes out. This is not eliminating the need for chefs, this is not eliminating the need for human touch, but this is offering you that perfect precision piece."

Beverage bots

Rounding out the robots are the beverage and barista bots that are ready and waiting to serve up libations to waiting customers.

Cocktail making robots have been around for quite some time on cruise ships and during events. Guests select their cocktails from a pre-selected electronic menu, and then the robotic arm dispenses spirits and mixers from bottles hanging from the ceiling or along the bar top. Today's cocktail bots are growing in both intelligence and sophistication through such options as [Cecilia.ai](#) or [Rotender](#), which is essentially a cocktail vending machine that has the capability to interact with guests.

Then there's BRILLO. Developed by researchers at the University of Naples Federico II, [BRILLO](#) can not only



The Artly Barista Bot uses deep learning-based visual inspection to monitor drink quality at each step to ensure a perfect cup with every order. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



data—one of the world's largest air and travel services providers—has implemented Moley Robotics' AI-powered cooking robot into its catering operations, serving identical dishes at scale. With advanced machine learning capabilities, it can recreate recipes by following pre-recorded chef instructions. It is also equipped with multiple sensors that enables it to precisely measure ingredients and execute complex cooking techniques. On top of that, the robot ensures consistent quality and good food hygiene. It can also quickly adapt to changes in real time. Photo courtesy Ulrich Perrey



Moley Robotics' robotic kitchen features a dexterous robot integrated into a luxury kitchen that prepares freshly-cooked meals at the touch of a button. At the heart of the new technology are two robotic arms featuring fully-articulated "hands" that can reliably reproduce the movements of human hands. Photo courtesy Moley Robotics



With manual labor and responsibilities handed off to robots, staff can spend more time with things that need a human touch, such as interconnecting with invitees and directing the event experience.”

—Karen May, Scottsdale Private Event Venues

whip up a cocktail but can also remember your favorite drink and have a conversation. The robot can gauge whether the tone of a conversation is serious or playful and even ask appropriate questions, or crack a joke, depending on the situation.

Barista bots (such as [Artly](#)), who churn out coffee drinks with mechanical flair, are also trending.

AUTOMATION MEETS EXPECTATIONS

So, what is driving the growing commonality of robotics in the hospitality industry?

“For one thing, the general public is becoming more accustomed to the idea of robots being part of everyday life,” says Kane. “It’s still a novelty, sure, but a fun one that can be a big draw for businesses that add robots to their operations.

“But on the business side of things, I can’t think of anyone in the hospitality sector that isn’t hurting for staff right now. The labor force just isn’t there. But the show must go on, and service robots have the ability to take care of a lot of the repetitive yet essential tasks that need to be done. This not only helps out the existing staff members, but can actually assist with recruitment if potential employees know that they’re not going to have to clean the floors or carry mountains of dishes back to the kitchen because we have robots to do that.”

Staffing solutions

Hiring and retaining catering staff is a constant headache given that foodservice and hospitality have one of the highest “quit rates” of any industry. Many catering companies are still struggling to find quality staff following the “great resignation.”

According to the National Restaurant Association, 65% of restaurant owners still say finding enough workers is a central problem, and one surefire way to augment serving staff while wowing guests is by taking advantage of robotic food service assistance.

“It allows us to rethink the customer experience, and redeploy people to hospitality moments,” said Dexai cofounder Nicolas Jammet in an [article for the Boston Globe](#). “The team member gets to be friendly, and the engine gets to be fast and accurate.”

To ensure robots become an ally to service staff, it’s important to set expectations about what these automated co-workers can and can’t do. The most successful way to utilize robots is to have them perform physical, repetitive, and manually straining tasks, thus relieving staff from these duties. All these routine tasks, when handed off to a robot, free up front-of-house employees to do the more important tasks that require interaction with guests, like recommending the right dish, making memorable conversation or fulfilling a more specific ask. The robot allows staff to focus on what matters most: the overall dining experience.

“With manual labor and responsibilities handed off to robots, staff can spend more time with things that need a human touch, such as interconnecting with invitees and directing the event experience,” says Karen May, Chief Experience Officer for Scottsdale Private Event Venues (which deployed Pringle’s service robots during a recent event).

Selden agrees. “This enables the staff to do other jobs that require human interaction,” she says. “I think it would be a really fun ‘marriage’ of sorts. I want one for sure!”

Increasing efficiencies

Beyond alleviating staffing pressures and utilizing skills more effectively, robots can also be instrumental in enhancing productivity, efficiency, and in some cases even creativity.

With their advanced capabilities, robots can precisely measure ingredients, chop vegetables, mix dough, and perform repetitive tasks with unparalleled consistency. This not only saves time but also ensures uniformity in taste and presentation.

Additionally, robots can play a significant role in automating inventory management by ensuring accurate stock control and reducing waste. Equipped with sensors



During the 2023 National Restaurant Association Show ConverTherm displayed its ConvoSense, the world's first AI-powered combi oven for fully automated cooking. Photo courtesy National Restaurant Association



During a recent event, the Scottsdale Private Event Venues and Pringle Robotics deployed one of Pringle Robotics' service robots (KettyBoT), where it displayed the event logo on its digital display while it delivered chocolate tacos to guests. Photo courtesy Dee Anne Deaton Grooveheads

and cameras, robots can scan shelves and track inventory levels in real-time. They can alert staff when supplies are running low, allowing for timely restocking. This automated system minimizes human error, eliminates the need for manual stock checks, and optimizes the overall inventory management process.

Finally, robots can help to decrease on-the-job injuries. According to Global Market Estimates, every year, more than 300,000 individuals are injured in kitchen-related mishaps (such as burns, cuts, air quality concerns, and even ergonomic issues).

Consider this anecdote that Jiyoung Hwang, Marketing Manager for Aniai, shared following the National Restaurant Show (where Aniai robots teamed up with culinary chefs from Savor throughout the conference): “One of the chefs shared an interesting insight with me. The chef mentioned that during catering events, he often has to cook thousands of burgers. In the past, he used to wrap wet towels around his arm for protection because the heat from the grill was too intense. But with our Alpha Grill, robots handle all the hard work for the

chefs, allowing them to dedicate more time to creatively developing recipes.”

Making a moment

Lastly, the novel aspect of robotics during events can't be overlooked. “Robots make us consider our own humanity, so what better way to get a room talking,” says May.

Robots create that Instagrammable moment that caterers are always chasing.

“I know they're gimmicks,” said Stavros, “but people love gimmicks.”

THE ROBOT REVOLUTION

As we look to the future, many speculate that robotics in the hospitality industry will move beyond just a gimmick or a novelty, but instead become part of the norm. [A recent study by Lightspeed](#) found that 50% of restaurant owners plan to install automation technology within the next two or three years.

“I believe that if anyone wanted to, they could go see a robot working in a restaurant in 2024, 2025,” said Jake Brewer, Chief Strategy Officer for Miso Robotics, in the CNBC article. “You can go see robots cooking right now and that's only going to grow week over week.”

Not everyone is 100% sold on robots' role in the catering industry, however.

“While I find robotics super cool and intriguing, I find it hard to imagine that they will ever replace fine dining service teams,” says Selden. “The level of service expected by our clients, especially in our market, is so personalized and next level.”

Footers Catering's Anthony Lambatos shares similar sentiments.

“I think we are still a ways off for applications in the catering space,” he says. “I don't foresee robots putting plates down in front of guests anytime soon,” he says. “[Although] I think we will see some initial applications that will be attention-grabbing and ‘trendy.’”

The robots themselves will continue to evolve from “automation” (where they must be constantly overseen and programmed by catering staff and technicians) to have full autonomy within their respective roles.

“After the pandemic, there's a new world right now,” said Ajay Sunkara, President and CEO of Nala Robotics. “Let's



Artosa USA displayed its Intelligent French Fry Robotic Solution during the 2023 National Restaurant Association Show. The six-axis collaborative “co-bot” robot solution provides system adaptability during peak and non-peak times and allows the system to operate entirely manually when needed. Photo courtesy National Restaurant Association



Picnic Works' Picnic Pizza Station is an automated, robotic back-of-house makeline that allows one person to make up to 100 consistent pizzas an hour, while reducing food waste to around 2%. Photo courtesy Picnic Works



Aniai's flagship product, Alpha Grill, is designed to cook hamburgers easily, efficiently, and with consistent quality. Featuring a double-sided grill design and a rapid cooking system, the Alpha Grill is able to cook eight perfect burger patties in under a minute. Alpha Grill is packed with AI components to check and control food quality. With an intuitive touch-screen monitor, users can customize cooking conditions, access real-time quality metrics, operational stats, inventory data, and more. Photo courtesy Aniai


talk about hygiene. Let's talk about the labor shortage. Let's talk about staff not showing up at all because of health issues right now. The best part of [robots] is consistency. You don't have to do training. It always does the same thing.

"If you look at the catering world, I believe it can utilize automation quite a lot—I think it's the best industry that can utilize technology."

When it comes to the catering industry, the future means a symbiotic relationship between robots and humans. The integration of robotics into the catering industry is not about replacing human chefs; it's about enhancing their skills and improving overall efficiency.

"The first-time people see a robot passing hors d'oeuvres they will be snapping pictures left and right, posting to social media and talking all about it. The question becomes—will it be sustainable? Will people continue to appreciate it or miss the connection with an actual person in the process? I believe companies will need to double down on their strategy when it comes to client-facing applications of robotics," says Lambatos. "There will be those that look to highly automate everything and serve a market that appreciates that, and then there will be caterers that realize their clientele appreciates high touch/high service and they will need to invest heavily in that. Understanding the market you want to compete in will be critical when it comes to introducing technology and robots into your business."

Embracing this technological revolution opens a world of possibilities, where culinary creativity meets cutting-edge automation. The future of catering is here, and it's powered by robots.

"Humans do what they do best. Let robots do the rest," says Kane. "Robots, especially service robots, exist to do the dull, dirty, or dangerous jobs that can sap people's time, joy, and motivation at work. Now no one's saying that catering is dangerous, but there can be a lot of repetition, a lot of physical strain, and steps involved in catering and events work. When robots can automatically do some of the not-so-fun tasks, it creates a better environment for workers and their customers. People can focus on the higher-value work that's uniquely human. And they do all of this without tiring. Basically, they allow great catering staff to be even better because they have the time and energy to focus on guest experience." 

CATERING TO DIVERSITY

BY AMBER KISPERT





THE (R)EVOLUTION *of* INDIGENOUS FOODS

Indigenous chefs and caterers are helping to revitalize traditional cuisine and ingredients

Food has always been a gateway to understanding and appreciating different cultures. It takes us on a culinary journey where we seek to discover the rich tapestry of flavors and traditions that different cultures offer.

One such cuisine that has been given new life in recent years is Indigenous, specifically Native American. Chefs and caterers across North America are entering into the culinary spotlight to share their stories. Their decolonized approach to cooking lets heritage dishes and ingredients shine, educating diners on what American food means and where it came from. The approach may be new, but the cuisine is very, very old.

However, it is not just about tantalizing taste buds, but also about celebrating the cultural richness and heritage of Indigenous communities.

“[Food] is so integral to our identity as Cherokee people and native people,” said Chef Nico Albert Williams (a member of the Cherokee

Buffalo salad with wild blueberries from Chef Crystal Wahpepah (a member of the Kickapoo Nation). Photo courtesy Wahpepah's Kitchen via [Facebook](#)



Cherokee Nation citizen and Chef Nico Albert Williams forages for wild edibles. Williams shares her knowledge of Indigenous foods to educate and teach people how to reconnect to their heritage through food. Photo courtesy Burning Cedar Indigenous Foods via [Facebook](#)

nation) with Burning Cedar Indigenous Foods (Tulsa) in [an article](#). “Our foods teach us lessons about who we are, and they connect us to our ancestors through the ingredients that we use, and they connect us to the land. Our ancestors lived so closely tied with the land, and then over the course of colonization, we’ve kind of been removed from that land.”

As we explore the current world of Indigenous cuisine, we must first look at its past to understand its present and its future.

A loss of tradition

Throughout history, Native Americans have passed down information—including food traditions—from one generation to the next through stories, histories, legends, and myths. Elders would teach younger generations how to prepare wild game and fish, how to find wild plants, which plants are edible, their names, their uses for food and medicine, and how to grow, prepare, and store them.

However, as European settlers spread throughout America and displaced Native American tribes onto reservations, Indigenous food customs were upended and completely disrupted, and in some cases completely lost.

“For many years I couldn’t celebrate my culture or the foods of Canada because I didn’t know what they were,” says Chef Destiny Moser (who is Anishinaabe, which is part of the Ojibway tribe) with Cedar Spoon Indigenous Catering (Rainy River, Ontario). “Growing up I didn’t hear the traditional stories behind the Indigenous food, nor was I passed down their recipes.”

The ingredients that arrived with the Europeans included many of the ingredients found in today’s conventional recipes—poultry, wheat, dairy, and beef. Along with the new food came a host of health problems; today, the high rates of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease can all be traced back to the European diet.

It’s only been in recent years that Indigenous peoples are starting to reconnect with their food traditions to revitalize their cultures.

“I realized the complete absence of Indigenous foods, I could name less than a handful of Lakota recipes that were truly Lakota,” says Chef Sean Sherman (member of the Oglala Lakota tribe), James Beard winning chef and owner of Owanmi by the Sioux Chef (Minneapolis). “It’s not like I could go online and order the ‘Joy of Native American Cooking.’

“We should know about it because no matter where we are in North America, obviously all of its history begins with Indigenous history.”



Chef Destiny Moser, owner of FoodZen and founder of Cedar Spoon Indigenous Catering. Photo courtesy Sylvia Pond Photography



James Beard-winning Chef Sean Sherman, owner of Owanmi by the Sioux Chef, is a key component of the Indigenous cuisine resurgence. He recently received the Julia Child Award and was featured in *Time Magazine*’s 100 Most Influential People. Photo courtesy Heidi Ehalt



Owamni by the Sioux Chef in Minneapolis was named the Best New Restaurant during the James Beard Awards in 2022. Owner Chef Sean Sherman was named Best Chef: Midwest. Photo courtesy Nancy Bundt

“I’m not trying to do a timepiece and cook like it’s 1491, but I want to take all that generational knowledge that we’re relearning and apply it to today to do something bigger with it.”

—Chef Sean Sherman

Reconnecting to the roots of cuisine

Sherman, Moser, and Williams are just three Indigenous chefs who are aiming to reconnect with the diet of their ancestors, who for thousands of years survived on food they found around them.

“We’re trying to define what modern Indigenous food is today because we’re not trying to cook like the past. We’re trying to understand the past to apply it to now,” says Sherman. “I’m not trying to do a timepiece and cook like it’s 1491, but I want to take all that generational knowledge that we’re relearning and apply it to today to do something bigger with it. It’s become more than just serving food, it’s about talking about it and talking about why [Indigenous cuisine] isn’t here.”

For Moser, her mission is to bring Indigenous ingredients back to the table, regardless of whether her recipes are traditionally “Indigenous.”



Smoked Lake Superior trout with white bean spread served with wojape and tostadas from Owamni by the Sioux Chef. Photo courtesy *Catersource* staff

“My mission as a chef is to use the recipes I learned from my grandmothers but substitute them with Indigenous ingredients,” she says. “Food has become my path to reconciliation and a way for me to heal, show my emotions and passion. Food is holistic, it’s medicine. One of the best places to listen and learn is to break bread together and I’m excited to continue to grow and learn with our community.”

Although Indigenous cuisine encompasses a wide range of foods and regional variations (Indigenous cultures have diverse culinary practices and food traditions), it can usually be classified as naturally high in protein, dairy-free, and gluten-free with a focus on utilizing locally sourced, seasonal ingredients and traditional cooking methods that have been passed down through generations. For example, many dishes are cooked over an open fire (turn to page 18 for more on that), in a clay pot, or in a horno (a traditional Native American oven).

“The Indigenous diet is really one of the most ideal diets. It’s healthy fats, it’s diverse proteins, it’s low carbs, it’s low salt, it’s a ton of plant diversity, it’s organic agriculture, and it’s celebrating cultural and regional diversity,” says Sherman. “It’s what the paleo diet wishes it was.”

The bounty of the land

So, what classifies Indigenous ingredients? Essentially, Indigenous ingredients are any proteins, fruits, vegetables, grains, or greens that are native to an area. More specifically, these ingredients come directly from the ground or an animal, not from a supply chain. Indigenous ingredients are hyper local and ultra-seasonal.

“The western diet has really never taken the time to learn this amazing biology that’s around us and all these plants all around us,” says Sherman (turn to page 72 for more information on how chefs are self-sourcing their regional

A Guide to *Indigenous* Ingredients

Vegetables

Common vegetables included wild greens and roots such as dandelion greens, cattail roots, camas bulbs, wild onions, and turnips; and starchy vegetables such as corn and different squash varieties.

Protein

Buffalo was the predominant protein, and was used to make many dishes, including pemmican, which is dried wild meat made into a powder and mixed with melted fat and sometimes berries. Other game meat such as moose, deer, and duck were popular, along with certain types of fish. Plant-based protein sources included beans

and certain types of nuts and seeds, such as sunflower seeds or pumpkin seeds.

Grains

Popular grains consisted of corn and wild rice, while wheat and wheat products were not originally part of the traditional diet. Corn was very versatile, as it could be dried, ground into a flour, and used in many dishes, including cornmeal. Wild rice, an aquatic grass, was considered an important crop and was also used in many dishes.

Fruit

Some popular fruits included berries, such as chokecherries,

cranberries, saskatoon berries, blueberries, wild strawberries, and raspberries. Fruit was not only consumed fresh, but also canned, dried, or in the form of sauces.

Dairy and alternatives

Traditionally, dairy was not consumed—it was introduced later by European settlers. Calcium and Vitamin D, which are important nutrients found in dairy products, were supplied through foods such as wild greens, seeds, squash, and fish.

Information courtesy [Food Insight](#)



Wild onions accompanied
by magnolia petals. Photo
courtesy Burning Cedar
Indigenous Foods via [Facebook](#)

Beyond Native American Cuisine

While Native American may be the most widely known, Indigenous cuisine encompasses traditions and flavors of Indigenous cultures around the world. Each dish is carefully crafted to honor the ancestral knowledge and techniques that have shaped Indigenous cuisines. From

the Indigenous communities of North and South America to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, the Māori of New Zealand, and the Inuit of the Arctic, Indigenous cuisine embraces a wide range of culinary practices.

Māori

The Māori have been cooking with ingredients from New Zealand's native forests for more than a thousand years. Examples of Māori food include:

- Plants: kūmara, yam, taro, puha, Māori potato (taewa tutaekuri), watercress, seaweed, asparagus

fronds, kawakawa, horopito, native ferns, vines, palms, fungi, kamokamo, berries, fruit, manuka (Ti tree), and seeds

- Proteins: Kiore (the Polynesian rat) and Kurī (the Polynesian dog)
- Birds: mutton birds and moa
- Seafood: abalone, oysters, crayfish,

green-lipped mussels, kina (sea urchin), and paua (sea snails)

- Grains: Rēwena paraoa (potato bread) tastes sweet and has a slight sour or tangy flavor to it, a result of the long period of fermentation it undergoes.

Information courtesy www.newzealand.com

Latin America

Within Latin America, there are several Indigenous peoples including the Huichol (also known as the Wixárika), the Aztecs, the Mayans, and the Purhépecha.

Examples of Indigenous foods include:

- Plants: maize (corn), wild plums, guava, berries, chilies, plantains, squash, tomatoes, prickly pear cacti, and chocolate
- Roots: cassava
- Herbs: cilantro

- Legumes: beans
- Proteins: iguana eggs, poultry, pork, grasshoppers, and deer
- Grains: rice, quinoa, and tortillas
- Dishes: tamales, churipú, and mole

Information courtesy XYU and Beyond

Caribbean

Originally the culture of the Caribbean was comprised of the Indigenous Arawaks, Caribs, Taino, and Ciboney. These Indigenous peoples were mostly hunters and gatherers, but they did cultivate some crops as well.

Examples of their Indigenous foods include:

- Roots: cassava
- Tubers: sweet potato

- Legumes: peanuts, beans
- Plants: corn, peppers, chilies, squash, and pineapples
- Jerk: Originally a style of cooking meat that originated with the Taino people
- Bush teas: derived from native ingredients such as Ginger Thomas (trumpet flower bush), soursop (a fruit that tastes like apple and strawberries and has a custard-

like inner flesh), Wormgrassk, and inflammation bush

- Pepperpot Stew: this spicy concoction is of Taino origin full of vegetables, chilies, and meat thickened with boiled cassava
- Ouicou: a fermented cassava beer developed by the Carib people
- Taumali: a Carib sauce made from the green livers of lobsters with hot chilies and lime added

Information courtesy XYU and Beyond

Continued on page 60



Bison blueberry meatballs with fresh harvest lettuce and turnip apple salad slaw from Chef Crystal Wahpepah (a member of the Kickapoo Nation). Photo courtesy Wahpepah's Kitchen via [Facebook](#)

ingredients). “There’s food everywhere, we should be making our pantries taste like where we are—what makes us unique in our own region. For us, with the ingredient choices we make, we are trying to make food taste like a place. We need to be better connected to our nature around us and really truly understand how it’s a symbiotic relationship.”

A few examples may include bison, trout, maple syrup, and wild rice, as well as local flora such as mushrooms, beans, tips of spruce trees, wild onion, corn, squash, and berries.

“There are foods that most people eat every day [that] they do not realize are Indigenous things, like carrots, squash, various nuts and berries,” said Chef Walks First, also known as Jessica Paemonekot, (a member of the Menominee tribe of Wisconsin) with Ketapanen Kitchen (Chicago) [in an article](#).

The Indigenous style of cooking also eliminates the use of colonial ingredients such as dairy, flour, cane sugar, beef, pork, and chicken, which Sherman says encourages diners to explore new ingredients outside of what they’re used to.

“You shouldn’t be afraid of something if it’s not a cow, a pig, or a chicken,” says Sherman. “There’s a lot of cool foods out there, there’s so much flavor, there’s so much to explore, there’s so much health. It’s fun for chefs to create and play with all these flavors. Chefs should be really



A corn sandwich featuring duck fat squash, cranberry, and sage from Owamni by the Sioux Chef. Photo courtesy *Catersource* staff

Continued from page 58

Beyond Native American Cuisine

Polynesian/Native Hawaiian

The Waianae Diet in Hawaii is based on the traditional Hawaiian diet, which is high in complex carbohydrates and fiber and low in fat.

Traditional foods include:

- Proteins: pipi kaula (salt-rubbed, dried beef delicacy), Lomi salmon (a fresh tomato, onion, and salmon salad), beef stew, squid luau, and kālúa pork
- Roots: poi (taro)

- Tubers: sweet potatoes and yams
- Plants: breadfruit, greens, seaweed, and fruit,
- Dessert: haupia (coconut milk and yam)

Information courtesy National Library of Medicine

Aboriginal/Native Australian

Australian bush food, colloquially and affectionately called “bush tucker,” refers to any food or ingredient native to the lands of Australia, be it flora or fauna. Much of Australia’s native bush foods were traditionally used by the

Indigenous inhabitants as a source of nourishment during the hunter-gatherer days before the arrival of the colonial settler. These foods include:

- Proteins: kangaroo, emu, crocodile, and witchetty grubs

- Plants: desert quandong (desert peach), desert lime, finger lime, ruby saltbush, lemon myrtle, and Tasmanian Pepperberry
- Nuts and Seeds: bunya nut, Moreton Bay chestnut, and bush coconut

Information courtesy Tour Hero

Inuit

The Inuit nations primarily come from Alaska, Canada, and Greenland and historically consisted of foods found in Greenlandic cuisine, Yup’ik, and Aleut cuisines, often referred to as country food. This style of cuisine traditionally included game meats, migratory birds, fish, and foraged foods.

Traditional foods include:

- Proteins: walrus, seal, whale, reindeer (caribou), polar bear, muskox, migratory birds (duck and goose), sculpin, Arctic cod, Arctic char, capelin, and lake trout

- Plants: berries (crowberry and cloudberry) and herbaceous plants (grasses and fireweed)
- Tubers and stems: mousefood and roots of various tundra plants
- Roots: tuberous spring beauty and sweet vetch
- Seaweed

Information courtesy the Canadian Encyclopedia

Sámi

The Sámi people are the Indigenous people of the northern part of the Scandinavian Peninsula and large parts of the Kola Peninsula and live in Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia.

Traditional foods include:

- Proteins: reindeer, salmon, common whitefish, perch, roach, Arctic char, moose, and sheep
- Plants: cloudberry and lingonberry
- Fungi: mushrooms

- Herbs: garden angelica
- Tubers: almond potatoes
- Breads: Gahkko or tunnbröd (thin bread)

Information courtesy Backpack Adventures

Continued on page 62

excited about just getting to learn all these plants that aren't in their diet."

"I like to separate foods that were here before the settlers and after," adds Moser.

Diversifying your menu

When incorporating Indigenous recipes and ingredients into your catering offerings (whether by client request or to diversify your menu) it's important to approach it with open eyes and an open heart to safeguard against tokenizing and cultural appropriation.

"It's so much about bringing to light the struggles that Indigenous peoples had and still have, and the mass inequalities that are out there. So instead of trying to put it on your menu because it's trendy and you want to entice more clientele, it's better to make sure that there's a special story behind it," says Sherman.

To incorporate Indigenous cuisine into your menu, the first step is to immerse yourself in research and understanding. Learn about the local Indigenous cultures, their history,

traditional ingredients, cooking techniques, and the significance of food in their daily lives. Consult resources such as cookbooks, documentaries, and local experts to gain a deeper appreciation for the diverse Indigenous culinary traditions.

"Don't just request the Indigenous menu, or use the ingredients; there is so much unlearning and knowledge that needs to be shared," says Moser.

Next, approach the process with humility, acknowledging that you are a guest in their culinary world. Collaborate with Indigenous communities, chefs, and culinary experts who can guide you on cultural sensitivities, traditional recipes, and appropriate adaptations. Partnership with Indigenous farmers and producers is also paramount.

"I think the biggest thing is to really try to center some recipe creations around some Indigenous food products from Indigenous food producers," says Sherman. "It's about sharing that story and honoring the work that goes into it, the long legacies that these groups and tribal communities have upheld. If you're able to do it respectfully and you're able to really tell the story and you're able to really



Coal-roasted Cherokee tan pumpkin stuffed with wild rice, red corn hominy, pinto beans, wild onions and garnished with dandelion from Chef Nico Albert Williams (Cherokee Nation). Photo courtesy Burning Cedar Indigenous Foods via [Facebook](#)



Methiikwak "Oklahoma Pearl Hominy" sautéed in duck fat with sweet peppers and onions from Chef Crystal Wahpepah (a member of the Kickapoo Nation). Photo courtesy Wahpepah's Kitchen via [Facebook](#)



Bison Frybread Tacos from Chef Crystal Wahpepah (a member of the Kickapoo Nation). Photo courtesy Wahpepah's Kitchen via [Facebook](#)

Continued from page 60

Beyond Native American Cuisine

Peru

Within the Amazon region of Peru dwells several Indigenous groups (51 in total) including Achuar, Aguaruna, Asháninka, Shipibo, Huambisa, Quechua, and Aymara, who together comprise about 45% of the population. Peru's rainforest-to-table movement is based on foods long eaten by Indigenous people in Peru's largest region, and this cuisine is as full of flavor as it is of health benefits.

Traditional foods include:

- Fruits: acai berries, aguaje, camu camu, cocona, cupuaco, passion fruit, and bananas/plantains
- Nuts and seeds: Sacha Inchi seeds
- Juane: a mixture of rice, meat (such as chicken or guinea pig), hard-boiled eggs, olives, herbs, and spices, wrapped in bijao leaves, and boiled in clay pots
- Tacacho balls: sliced plantain that's been fried and then mashed with fried pork fat (chicharones), usually served with a side of fried sausage (chorizo) or cecina, which is salted dried pork or beef which is smoked before being fried
- Inchicapi: a classic, creamy Amazonian soup of chicken, crunchy chunks of hearts of palm or manioc, flavored with peanuts, coriander leaves and stems (cilantro), and coriander seeds
- Jungle spaghetti: shredded new shoots from the heart of the palm, harvested from the top of the tree
- Manioc (also known as yucca or cassava): a starchy root vegetable that's a staple for Amazonian communities—an ingredient in many soups, stews, and other traditional dishes, also thickly sliced and fried, and roasted as chips
- Seafood: tambaqui (also called pacu) and paiche (also known as arapaima and pirarucú)
- Patarashca: a packet of marinated fish, onions, and other vegetables seasoned with cilantro, tumeric, and other spices, wrapped in bijao leaves and grilled

Information courtesy PROMPERU

Africa

In the time before recorded history, Africa was not only the birthplace of humans but also the food basket.

Traditional foods include:

- Plants: Baobab Tree fruit, celosia, eggplants, egusi melon
- Greens: amaranth, moringa, okra
- Nuts and seeds: marama, dika nuts, shea nuts
- Legumes: locust bean, Bambara Bean, cowpea, long beans, yam bean
- Tubers: potatoes

Information courtesy XYU and Beyond

Asia

Asia and the Pacific region is home to the largest number of Indigenous peoples with more than 70% of the world's total Indigenous population. Some of the Indigenous people of Asia are the Veddas of Sri Lanka, The Jarawa of the Andaman Islands of India, the Kalash of Pakistan, the

Naga from northeastern India and northwestern Myanmar, the Lhop of Bhutan, the Bodo of Nepal and the Giraavaru of the Maldives. In Japan, the two Indigenous peoples, the Ainu and the Okinawans, live on the northernmost and southernmost islands of the country's archipelago.

Traditional foods include:

- Fermented foods: kimchi, kombucha, natto, miso, and Douchi (a black bean paste), and Mianchi (a white bean paste)
- Roots: taro
- Green vegetables: bok choy, bitter melon, choy, and cucumbers
- Legumes: soybeans
- Grains: rice

Information courtesy XYU and Beyond



(Top left) Sunflower seed cake with agave squash caramel from Owamni by the Sioux Chef. Photo courtesy Dana Thompson



(Left) Corn soup and top bread from Chef Nico Albert Williams (Cherokee Nation). Photo courtesy Burning Cedar Indigenous Foods via [Facebook](#)

highlight some of the people or partners or products that you're utilizing and some of their stories, then it makes it more authentic.

"Claiming this food as your own and not paying respect where respect is due and putting it on your menu to make money because it looks like a good fad to jump into—then that's a direct example of appropriation, because it's extracting for profit, basically using somebody else's culture."


Also, make sure to use it as a storytelling opportunity. Indigenous cuisine is deeply intertwined with cultural narratives and histories, so incorporate storytelling into your menu, providing guests with insights into the traditions, symbolism, and significance of the dishes they are experiencing.

"I think showcasing Indigenous ingredients at any event is important, and not just serving it, but telling the story about why they may not have known it was Indigenous or why they may not have seen this on a menu before," says Moser. "I know for me, food tastes way better when you know the story behind it."

Lastly, don't expect it to be the same as what you're used to.

"Don't expect the pricing to be the same as other catered foods you might have had; because of colonization, Indigenous ingredients have been labelled as 'exotic' or 'specialty' and that usually comes with higher prices," says Moser, "and don't try and use Indigenous dishes per se, but do what you know and feel comfortable with but use Indigenous ingredients."

Bringing Indigenous cuisine and cooking styles to menus is a powerful way to honor and celebrate the diverse culinary heritage of Indigenous communities. You can create a menu that reflects the depth and richness of Indigenous culinary traditions.

"It's an exciting time to be Indigenous because we are taking all of these lessons from our ancestors that should have been passed down to us, relearning them, and utilizing them in the world today," says Sherman. "People should celebrate the Indigenous foods and be aware of it. We should all be celebrating food no matter what because that's something we all share." 

Embrace the Evolution: Salespeople & the Shifting Tides of Buyer Behavior

Picture this: a world where customers are armed with information at their fingertips, wielding the power to make decisions with lightning speed. Gone are the days of uninformed purchases and blind trust. Now our beloved buyers are more informed than ever, and they demand the *crème de la crème*—the personalized and value-driven solutions that make their hearts skip a beat.

Welcome to the era of shifting buyer behavior. It's a rollercoaster ride of challenge, and as salespeople, it's our chance to shine bright.

With the rise of digital technologies, our customers have transformed into savvy, well-informed beings who have set their standards sky-high. They browse the internet, engage in social media discussions, and devour reviews. They want to know every detail, every difference, every nuance before they even think about making a commitment.

What does this mean for us, the fearless sales warriors? It means we must adapt, evolve, and rise above the storm to secure our spot in the sun. It's time to embrace the changing tides of buyer behavior and unleash our dazzling sales prowess.

1. Personalization

First and foremost, we need to shed the one-size-fits-all approach. It's time to dive headfirst into the realm of personalization. Our customers aren't just numbers on a spreadsheet; they are unique individuals with dreams, desires, and challenges. By understanding their needs and tailoring our solutions accordingly,

we have the power to create a connection that transcends the transactional and builds loyal, long-lasting relationships.

2. Value-driven solutions


Personalization alone won't cut it, however. Our customers are well aware of their value, and they expect us to bring the same level of value to the table. No more are generic pitches and empty promises acceptable. We must become the masters of value-driven solutions, showing our customers that we understand their pain points by offering them the most attractive solutions.

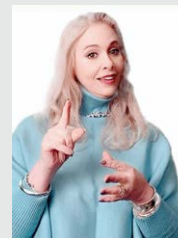
3. Be a trusted advisor

As many of you know, I have been touting this for many years, and it is worth repeating: The key to thriving in this era of shifting buyer behavior lies in being more than just a salesperson; we must become trusted advisors. We need to step into our customers' shoes, understand their dreams and aspirations, and guide them toward success with our expertise. It's about building relationships based on trust, transparency, and genuine care.

When our customers view us as their trusted confidants, they'll keep coming back.

Remember, the world of sales isn't for the faint of heart. It's a thrilling dance, an ever-changing landscape filled with twists and turns. But with the rise of digital technologies, customers have become conductors, setting the tempo and demanding excellence. So, let's adapt, let's evolve, and let's conquer the world of shifting buyer behavior together.

I'll leave you with this final thought: the world of sales is changing, and it's time to step up and claim your place at the forefront. The journey may be challenging, but the rewards are worth every twist and turn. Embrace the evolution and let the winds of change carry you to unprecedented sales success. 



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 she covers the funny side of life and business

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By Amber Kispert



MORE THAN JUST A PROVINCIAL WEDDING

**Catering by Design received this year's
CATIE award for Best Catered Wedding for
their French Provincial Getaway Wedding**



(Left) The dessert options included smoked salt chocolate pot de crème (shown) as well as a churro station served alongside Brandy Alexanders.

This showstopping wedding included a lush, flower-filled wonderland with romantic accents and details.

Denver-based **Catering by Design** knew they were in for something special when they were contracted for a French provincial-inspired wedding in Aspen, CO.

The showstopping wedding included a lush, flower-filled wonderland, romantic accents and details, an extensive variety of food, and an award-winning vendor team.

The goal was to create a fresh, unique menu that matched the overall elegance and luxury of the entire weekend. What resulted was a seamless experience of wonder and delight, showing that there is much more to a “provincial life” than meets the eye.

Located on over 150 acres of pristine landscape, the wedding took place at The Dunbar, nestled deep in the Elk Mountain Range. The three-day wedding weekend featured a Spanish-inspired welcome party, a nostalgic game of bride versus groom kickball featuring an elevated picnic-style

lunch, an outdoor movie night, and an intimate family-style rehearsal dinner, culminating in the big day itself.

The venue proved to be a logistical challenge resulting in some creative solutions. For starters, the venue's large size meant walkie talkies were needed to help with communication onsite. Power sources were brought in and skillfully hidden, integrated into the reception area to make up for the lack of power onsite. With no water access, the team brought in water coolers each day and 1,000 bottles of VOSS water were sourced months before the wedding to keep guests hydrated.

The menu

The cuisine needed to highlight the best and freshest ingredients in elegant and innovative ways while highlighting flavor profiles that acknowledged the couple's Texas roots. However, it also had to accommodate gluten and dairy allergies.

The menu for the wedding featured a ceviche raw bar, unique passed hors d'oeuvres, a pre-set salad served in a cloche, and savory and sweet food stations.



Bar decals pulled into the whole theme with elegant hanging chandeliers.



The raw bar, which was originally planned for a tiered outdoor ice sculpture but became passed indoors following rain, featured mini sake boxes accompanied by pipettes of sauce.



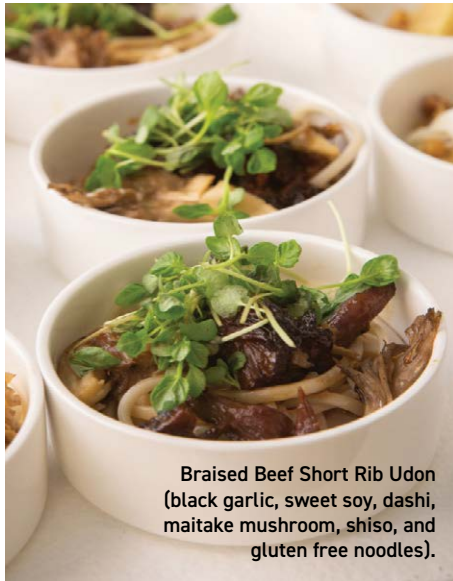
The venue for the wedding was The Dunbar, nestled deep in the Elk Mountain Range (in Aspen, CO) surrounded by majestic views.



(Left) A gluten free, dairy free salad was a must for the family. Catering by Design accomplished this with an arugula and fennel salad with candied pecans (served during the family-style rehearsal dinner).

(Below) The clear top tent made for a beautiful ambiance in the room. The full build of the tent and florals took over a week to complete. The grand reveal took place moments before guests arrived for the ceremony.





Braised Beef Short Rib Udon
(black garlic, sweet soy, dashi, maitake mushroom, shiso, and gluten free noodles).



Each place setting was pre-set with a peach and burrata salad (heirloom tomato, mint, basil, parsley, chive, lemon herb vinaigrette, balsamic syrup, fresh cracked pepper, and salt).



A candy bar featured truffle popcorn, caramel bites, and an assortment of different candies.



This Spanish inspired grazing table featured everything from chorizo, Serrano ham, to drunken goat cheese, Manchego, Iberico cheese, marcona almonds, fresh figs, queso de cabra, Spanish tortilla, and olive bread (served during the welcome party). Turn to page 96 for more grazing table inspiration.

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Lobster rolls were passed as an hors d'oeuvre for the wedding night. The clients wanted fresh seafood, so Catering by Design was able to get fresh lobster flown directly to them in order to ensure delicious seafood.



Caprese Ice Cream Cone (diced Roma tomato, fresh mozzarella, basil chiffonade, olive oil, and balsamic) served in a savory gluten free miniature ice cream cone.



Rocky Ford Melon Crudo (diver scallop, cucumber, Szechuan peppercorn, chive blossom, and black sesame) served with a yuzu and living basil vinaigrette pipette.

For cocktail hour, custom floral acrylic trays were created to match the wedding's floral design. The trays held savory hors d'oeuvres such as beet macarons with goat cheese, smoked salmon galettes with creme fraiche and chives, and spicy tuna on crispy rice cubes. The team also set up a raw bar and each dish came with its own pipette.

During the reception, tables were pre-set with a peach and burrata salad. For the meal, they created composed small plates of prime beef tenderloin with fire roasted tomato demi, smashed fingerling potatoes, and grilled broccolini, as well as miso-glazed Chilean sea bass with ginger carrot puree, grilled citrus bok choy, and petite wasabi greens.

But perhaps the most unique station was the "Pour-Over Station," which is what attracted the couple to Catering by Design in the first place. In this signature service, the team developed




(Above) At the Pour-Over Station, Catering by Design offered two different options: hot dashi served over a bowl of braised short rib udon or hot porcino brodo poured over fresh herbs of sage and rosemary onto a bowl of roasted summer squash penne. In this signature service, the broth is poured over a clay pot filled with herbs. The broth then travels to the open bottom of the pot and, on its way, soaks up the rich herbal flavors and aromas before it trickles over the dish.

a delightful broth that was poured over a clay pot filled with herbs. The broth then traveled to the open bottom of the pot and, on its way, soaked up the rich herbal flavors and aromas before it trickled over a delightful dish.

The Pour-Over Station featured hot dashi served over a bowl of braised short rib udon, as well as a vegetarian option of hot porcino brodo poured over fresh herbs of sage and rosemary onto a bowl of roasted summer squash penne.

For dessert, guests enjoyed Brandy Alexanders (served in miniature milk bottles) along with cinnamon sugar churros with various dipping sauces. For a late-night snack, the team laid out a tater tot bar with myriad accoutrements.

Congratulations to Catering by Design for their CATIE win! 

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Visit our [ACE and Gala awards portal](#) to start your submission today!

From Field

Chefs and caterers are developing a deeper connection with their ingredients by self-sourcing through farming, foraging, and beekeeping

By Amber Kispert

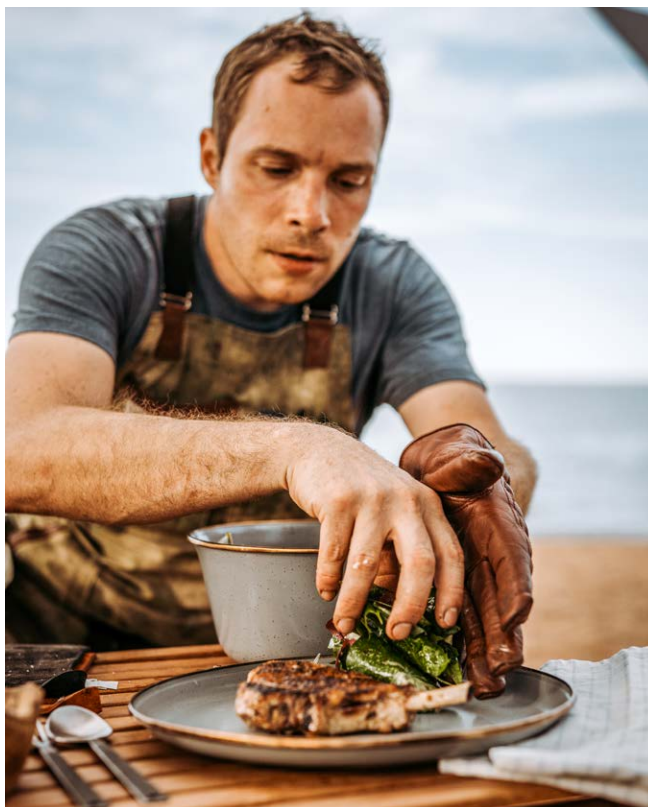
to Fork



Virginia Bluebells are ephemerals that are described as having “a unique, green flavor” or a flavor that is “mushroomy” or “aquatic.” Right: Japanese-inspired Virginia Bluebell greens served with a mushroom broth (topped with sesame seeds and finishing oil) makes a light, refreshing, and interesting appetizer. Photos courtesy Chef Alan Bergo



Chef Alan Bergo is one of America's leading culinary authorities on mushroom hunting and foraging. A veteran of the restaurant industry, he spent nearly two decades as a professional chef specializing in local and wild foods in restaurants throughout St. Paul and Minneapolis, MN. He's best known for his blogs, recipes, and photography. In 2022, Bergo was the James Beard Foundation Award Winner for Instructional Visual Media for his work on *The Wild Harvest with Alan Bergo*. Photo courtesy Alan Bergo



Alan Bergo says that foraging has "awoken dormant instincts" in him since it allows him to have a much better understanding of the local seasons, and how wild food can be incorporated with cultivated foods. He also believes that it's very rewarding to harvest his own food because it helps him "feel more connected to it, and from there, proud of it." Photo courtesy Alan Bergo



“You take care of something in a different way when you plant it, tend to it, harvest it instead of simply accepting a delivery from a produce company. You get a deeper understanding of the ingredients and the reverence it deserves in the kitchen. Understanding the struggle of growing the crop really makes you make the most of the ingredient and make it shine on the menu.”

— Chef Kieron Hales, Zingerman’s Cornman Farms

In the culinary world, chefs and caterers have long been revered for their creativity, skill, and ability to craft exquisite dishes. However, a new trend is emerging where these culinary maestros are taking their commitment to excellence a step further by producing their own ingredients. From foraging for wild edibles to establishing farms and beekeeping operations, these enterprising professionals are redefining the concept of farm-to-table cuisine.

“You will have incredible ingredients on your menus people won’t see anywhere else, which gives a great competitive advantage,” says James Beard winning Chef Alan Bergo ([Forager Chef](#)). “Guests will appreciate the novelty and flavor.”

Let’s take a look at how several chefs are revolutionizing the way we experience food.

Farm fresh food

Farm-to-table isn’t really anything new or earth-shattering, but it’s not just a trend anymore; it’s a way of life.

“The freshness is second to none,” says Chef Keiron Hales ([Zingerman’s Cornman Farms](#)). “Vegetables and fruits and herbs you grow yourself just taste more like themselves. For me though, what stands out is the warmth the harvest has. When you pick something that day and use it, when a

Clockwise from top left: farm hands harvesting rosemary; Chef Kieron Hales tending his blueberry bush; prepared kale salads; guests prepare their own salads during an event. First two images courtesy Lolagrace Photography; last two images courtesy Rachel Dion

* Zingerman’s Cornman Farms and Jeffrey A. Miller Catering are proud members of the Leading Caterers of America, a consortium of the top catering and event planners throughout the United States and Canada.



(Above) Jeffrey A. Miller Catering (New Jersey) believes that food preparation begins even before the ingredients reach the kitchen. That's why they grow many of the herbs and vegetables (and harvest their own honey through their onsite apiaries) for their recipes right in their own organic garden. Tended by their chefs, the garden is the origin of many of the wonderful flavors guests will find at their table. Photos courtesy Jeffrey A. Miller Catering

carrot or berry never has to be chilled, it brings a glow and a warmth that can be tasted in the dish.”

While farm-to-table menus have been popular for quite a while (and continue to grow in popularity due to the continued importance of sustainability), Hales joins a growing number of chefs who have started taking matters into their own hands (literally) by swapping out their chef's coats for gardening gloves by helping to cultivate their own ingredients right on property.

Take Cornman Farms (Michigan) for example; its Chef's Garden is used to grow vegetables and herbs for use in Hales' creations. Throughout the year, their seasonal menus are based on what is growing in the garden at the moment. Whatever isn't used during the harvest is preserved by pickling or by making jams, chutneys, and sauces for use in their winter menus.

“You take care of something in a different way when you plant it, tend to it, harvest it instead of simply accepting a delivery from a produce company,” says Hales. “You get a deeper understanding of the ingredients and the reverence it deserves in the kitchen. Understanding the struggle of growing the crop really makes you make the most of the ingredient and make it shine on the menu.”

Another caterer, [Jeffrey A. Miller Catering*](#) (New Jersey) takes his gardening to the next level by putting everything back into the ground through composting his food waste.

“Since we are organic, and do not use chemical fertilizers, we use the compost to provide nutrients to the soil,” Jeff Miller says. “Then, we grow great produce and the cycle starts again. That is the way food and farming should work, and we love that we can do it, even on a small scale.”

Additionally, Miller says he likes to get creative with ways to use his ingredients within the kitchen, to help limit waste.

“When we have a bumper crop, we get creative to figure out ways to use what our farmers have produced so it does not go to waste,” he says. “We will make pickles with our cucumbers, and deviled eggs when the chickens are especially productive. We also make a great succotash that varies with what we can produce,” he says. “It's always corn, whatever tomatoes or squash we are harvesting, string beans, and the fresh herbs that we raise onsite.”

On a larger, more global scale, chefs who work to cultivate their own produce can also initiate a conversation about being stewards of the land. One example is [Blue Hill at Stone Barns](#) out of New York where owner and chef Dan Barber is one of the fiercest culinary advocates for



Although smaller, wild blueberries have twice the antioxidants of cultivated blueberries, provide more fiber, and are superior in flavor. Right: [Wild Blueberry Upside-Down Cake](#) made with hazelnut meal, finished with a spoonful of meadowsweet infused cream. Photos courtesy Alan Bergo



Lateral cattail rhizomes are crisp, refreshing, and faintly sweet, with a subtle resemblance to cucumber. Right: [Cattail Rhizome Salad](#) with smoked trout and tarragon. Photos courtesy Alan Bergo



Chef Dan Barber is the chef and co-owner of Blue Hill in Manhattan and Blue Hill at Stone Barns and one of the fiercest culinary advocates for sustainable, ethical farming and seasonal cooking. Photo courtesy Netflix

“There’s a real advantage to creating a cuisine, a menu where the vectors don’t all point at you, at the chef, but where the food that you’re eating points out to something larger.” —Chef Dan Barber

sustainable, ethical farming and seasonal cooking.

“There’s a real advantage to creating a cuisine, a menu where the vectors don’t all point at you, at the chef, but where the food that you’re eating points out to something larger” said Barber in season one of the Netflix series *Chef’s Table*. “When you are chasing after the best flavor, you’re chasing after the best ingredients; and when you’re chasing after the best ingredients, you’re in search of great farming. It’s not just about the dish, it’s about what the radish represents, it has to add up to something larger than a plate of food.

“Chefs play a huge role; we have this power now that we never had before. We can introduce change. We need to look at modernity and science when it comes to flavor. That is the future of really great cooking and really great farming. When you treat nature well, it gives you the gift of great food.”

Obviously farming at this scale isn’t feasible for a lot of caterers, which is why Hales suggests starting small, such as an herb garden or small plants (e.g., urban gardens, deck boxes, aquaponics, haybale, and vertical farming setups).

“Think of things you use all the time or vegetables that can be easily harvested and preserved, such as strawberries, crookneck squash, and green mountain potatoes,” he says.

Self-sourced ingredients don’t have to be solely reserved for produce either. Although not quite as prevalent, farm-fresh eggs through onsite chicken coops and fresh milks

and cheeses thanks to livestock (cows and goats) are another option for the farm-to-table mindset.

When thinking about what types of products you want to have on your property, consider not only what you have access to, but what you can also successfully maintain for a considerable part of the year, Pat Christofolo, owner of Artisan by Santa Barbara Catering (Arizona), told *Catersource* in 2020. If you live in a colder weather climate, fresh fruits may not be the best option, but perhaps you can look at heartier root vegetables or greens.

Even if you can’t use your fresh ingredients in everything you serve, consider using it as an upsell.

“It doesn’t matter if you’re a big catering company and you cannot realistically support all of your food service out of one garden, that’s fine,” said Michael Stavros (M Culinary Concepts) during his *Catersource + The Special Event 2023* session *Caterers, Assemble! - Tantalizing Trends, Captivating Concepts, Inspired Interactivity*, “that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t do it, you shouldn’t try it. Make it a boutique thing, make it a special thing for your particular clients, make it a premium, or use it like we do as a marketing tool.”

Hales says he recommends that chefs get their hands dirty and try gardening, because it will help with innovation and deepen their connection with the food they are preparing.

“Nothing is easy here. You can do everything right and still have failure because of weather, bugs, or so many elements beyond your control. My advice is to know it will be hard and you will fail big...but that you can also learn from failure and have some fun along the way,” he says. “It contributes to innovation as much as it helps us understand the journey the produce has taken; it forces you to consider the sisters and brothers it grows near, the history of the development of the produce. It allows us to have a thing to focus on that we must use and use to the fullest. It gives us focus and drive to make the most of what we have. It is quite simply the start of the cooking process—planting the seed in what we all do.”

Forest to fork

For centuries, humans have relied on foraging to find sustenance from the natural world. But now, several pioneering chefs and caterers have rediscovered the beauty of foraged ingredients. These intrepid culinary explorers venture into forests, meadows, and coastal regions in search of wild mushrooms, herbs, berries, and edible flowers.

“I feel like foraged ingredients offer an exciting opportunity for caterers to offer truly unique menu options that appeal to both foodies and health-conscious

Interactions on the Farm

While self-sourcing ingredients brings a lot of benefits within the kitchen, it also brings an added element to the guest experience. By self-sourcing ingredients, guests have the opportunity to fully know the story of their food.

"Encouraging guest involvement is a great way to get them engaged, and help to really drive home the message," says Alan Bergo (The Forager Chef).

There are a few different ways for guests to experience their food in a completely different way. One option (from the foraging perspective) would be to participate in a simple plant walk before dinner where guests can gather to identify plants together and then see first-hand the process for cleaning and prepping, before heading into the kitchen where the food is prepared.

"That way they leave with knowledge of how to do it themselves and are empowered," says Bergo.

Chef Will Pfeiffer at IBM's Louis V. Gerstner Center for Learning welcomed guests to their onsite apiaries during their inaugural honey harvest where they spun the honey themselves, completed a honey tasting to compare different floral varieties, and culminated with a culinary feast that paired small bites and cocktails with touches of honey.

On the farm side of things, at Zingerman's Cornman Farms guests can even have a say in what crops are grown. They've had guests bring seeds from grandparents, which are then planted and grown.

"We even have guests who plant a crop themselves and pop back throughout the season to tend it with us and then harvest it on the day leading up to the event," says Chef Kieron Hales. "More than ever couples want an experience in addition to a meal."

Other experiences that Cornman Farms has offered over the years include guests and their children helping harvest crops before making lunch together, and they've even had guests pick fresh herbs during cocktail hour to be used in their drinks. Pizza dinners are also very popular, where guests can pick, wash, cut, and top their pizza right in the fields.

"You can connect on a level that simply stopping at the farm might not allow," says Keith Sarasin (the Farmer's Dinner). "Connecting with food is a right, not a privilege, and at our events, the customers sit just feet from where the food they are eating grows while the farmers engage and tell stories about the farm."



(From top) Gentleman Forager's classes on wild mushroom and wild plant identification, harvesting, and culinary applications are designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of foraging. Photo courtesy Mike Kempenich/Gentleman Forager ■ Guests exploring Zingerman's Cornman Farms' Chef's Garden during a wedding. Photo courtesy Jill DeVries ■ Guests explore the hoop house at Zingerman's Cornman Farms. Photo courtesy Marina Goldi ■ Bottom Stung Beekeepers provides its harvested honey to the Ritz-Carlton and JW Marriott Orlando for use in their restaurants and spas. Photo courtesy Bottom Stung Beekeepers



Flathead and pumpkin caramelized with chicken, mushroom, and dried liver from Brae Bed & Breakfast and Restaurant. Photo courtesy Colin Page



Short rib, rock samphire, and Otway shiitake from Brae Bed & Breakfast and Restaurant. Photo courtesy Colin Page

customers,” says Mike Kempenich with [Gentleman Forager](#) (Minneapolis). “Foraged ingredients are an exciting addition to any dish or menu, often because of the exotic nature—they’re simply less well known and less widely used—but also because their flavors are often more intense than a conventional counterpart. We all have lots of items growing in our yards and on our property that are overlooked.”

By integrating these unique elements into their menus, these chefs are able to infuse dishes with a taste of the surrounding landscapes, creating a truly immersive dining experience.

“As a chef, foraging gives me access to the most incredible ingredients imaginable. Things no other chef will get to work with unless they harvest it themselves,” says Bergo, who lives in Western Wisconsin. “It’s exciting and fun to find free food. Foraging basically turns nature into a giant edible scavenger hunt.”

Common ingredients that can be foraged range from mushrooms (e.g., morels, chanterelles, black trumpets, and porcinis) to plants (e.g., nettles, amaranth, wild mustard greens, and watercress), nuts and starches (e.g., black walnuts, cattail shoots, pine pollen, and parsnip roots), herbs and alliums (e.g., ramps, wild caraway, and spruce tips), and fruits (e.g., gooseberries, crabapples, wild plums, and aronia berries).

“Basically, if it’s delicious and grows wild, we probably can get it for a client,” says Kempenich.

Bergo has even worked with a distillery to create a [line of foraged liquors](#).

If interested in starting to forage, caterers and chefs must do a bit of research upfront to ensure that they are not only foraging edible ingredients (and not poisonous), but they also have to be aware of the laws regulating foraging (which can only be done on private land, not public).

“Foraging is a learned skill and comes with a learning curve. You need to educate yourself before you serve food you harvest to the general public since mistakes are not an option,” says Bergo.

The [Association of Foragers](#) is a good place to start for engaging an expert, with an online directory of professional foragers, all of whom have signed a code of conduct to promote sustainable, safe, and mindful foraging. Gentleman Forager also offers educational foraging walks and presentations.

“Once you know the flavor profile of a wild ingredient it is fun to develop a recipe around it by combining old and new concepts and ingredients,” says Kempenich.

By starting to forage their own ingredients, chefs have the opportunity to innovate their menus and present



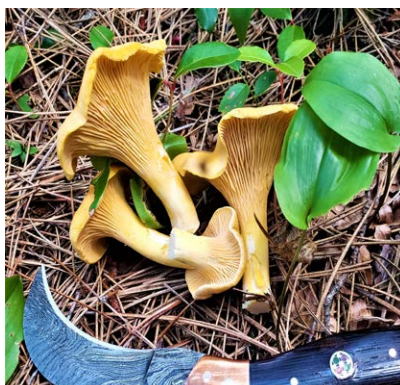
GENTLEMAN FORAGER is a company dedicated to exploring the world of foraging and wild foods, founded by Mike Kempenich, an experienced foraging and wild foods expert. Gentleman Forager offers a range of services, including foraging classes, wild food products, outdoor events, catering, and wild-themed dinners. The outdoor events and dinners provide a unique opportunity to learn more about foraging and wild foods while enjoying delicious meals made with ingredients gathered by Kempenich himself. Photo courtesy Mike Kempenich/Gentleman Forager



BLACK TRUMPET MUSHROOMS have a deeply sweet aroma and can add a dynamic flavor profile to any pasta dish, yet are versatile enough to be used as a substitute in any recipe that calls for mushrooms. Photo courtesy Mike Kempenich/Gentleman Forager



MATSUTAKE MUSHROOMS have an aroma similar to cinnamon and a unique flavor that is spicy, pungent, and piney because of the mushrooms' natural habitat. Photo courtesy Mike Kempenich/Gentleman Forager



CHANTERELLE MUSHROOMS have the aroma and flavor of apricot. Photo courtesy Mike Kempenich/Gentleman Forager



MOREL MUSHROOMS have a deeply umami flavor, which could be compared to savory. The umami factor enhances the flavor of all meats to which it is added. Photo courtesy Mike Kempenich/Gentleman Forager



A **LOBSTER MUSHROOM** is made when a parasite invades wild fungi. The parasite coats the wild mushrooms and turns them red, firming the flesh and giving the fungi a hearty meatiness that otherwise wasn't there. The lumpy-shaped mushrooms also take on notes of shellfish, namely lobster, especially when cooked. Photo courtesy Mike Kempenich/Gentleman Forager



ENOKI MUSHROOMS (sometimes called enokitake mushrooms) have a pleasantly chewy texture, with a mild, fruity flavor that is slightly earthy. Enokis stand out from other types of mushrooms for their texture: the long, thin strands are reminiscent of noodles, which is probably why they are so popular in Japanese cuisine. Photo courtesy Mike Kempenich/Gentleman Forager



CHICKEN OF THE WOODS, does not, as the name might imply, taste like chicken. Rather, it derives the name for the consistency, which is strikingly similar to chicken breast, making it a favorite of vegetarians for this reason. Photo courtesy Mike Kempenich/Gentleman Forager



(Above and right) Jimmy Wessman oversees 120 bee colonies through Bottom Stung Beekeepers. Photos courtesy Rafael Tongol



Vista Brewing is a 21-acre ranch brewery and restaurant in Austin, TX with a vegetable farm onsite as well as a 16-hive apiary. Photo courtesy Karen Killough/Vista Brewing



At IBM's Louis V. Gerstner Center for Learning in Armonk, NY, FLIK Hospitality's Chef Will Pfeiffer is taking his commitment to "local" and "sustainable" to new heights thanks to his honeybee hives located on-site at the FLIK-managed conference center and hotel. Photo courtesy FLIK Hospitality



A cheese board featuring Chef Will Pfeiffer's harvested honey. Photo courtesy FLIK Hospitality



Bourbon Old Fashioned Panna Cotta with Burnt Honey. Photo courtesy FLIK Hospitality

something truly unique. While it may be difficult to include foraged ingredients in everything on the menu (depending on the season and the availability), it does offer opportunities for customization, upsells, and specialized menus.

“Foraging has changed the way that I cook,” says Bergo. “I’m trying to show off the ingredients that I harvest, so my food is lighter now, fresher, and less reliant on traditional starch-meat-veg combos. Foraging makes your food ingredient-focused, less reliant or sensitive to trends, and, for me, more minimalist. All I want to do now is find the greatest ingredients possible and do as little to them as I can. You will have incredible ingredients on your menus people won’t see anywhere else, which gives a great competitive advantage and allows you to increase per-plate charges. Guests will appreciate the novelty and flavor, and your food coast will thank you.”

Additionally, knowledge is power, and for a chef that is something to be valued.

“For chefs and caterers, I think it’s especially helpful to be able to discuss the unique products, at least to some degree, first-hand,” Kempenich says. “It lends credibility to their menu and to their skills as a professional that really looks for the best.”

What’s the buzz?

The role of bees in pollination and the production of honey has long been acknowledged, but some chefs and caterers have now taken an active role in nurturing these essential insects. Beekeeping has become an exciting endeavor for many chefs who want to incorporate their own honey and other bee products into their culinary creations, while also helping to improve the food cycle as a whole.

“The bees do double duty by pollinating the orchard and the vegetable garden, as well as providing us with fresh, and very local honey,” says Miller, who also houses apiaries at this Waterloo Village property. “And, as bees across the country have faced colony collapse, it is important for folks to raise small hives in as many areas as possible.”

Bees are vital pollinators that have a huge influence on the health, productivity, and viability of crops and the natural environment. So, by taking care of the bees, chefs are also helping to increase the quality of their farm-fresh ingredients.

“It all begins with bees,” said Stavros in an article for [Catersource](#). “More than 30% of all food we consume is dependent on the pollination the bees create—so we’re starting at the very beginning of our food.”



Baked Honey Feta with Sumac (block of sheep's milk feta cheese, olive oil, local honey, sumac, and edible micro flowers). Photo courtesy FLIK Hospitality



FLIK Hospitality's sheet pan [ginger honey shrimp with vegetables](#) is all lean protein and colorful veggies for when you need something super light, but still incredibly flavorful. Ginger, garlic, and sesame give this dish just the zip it needs. Photo courtesy FLIK Hospitality



In FLIK Hospitality's [grilled peach, vanilla Greek yogurt, and honey oat crumble](#), the tart and creamy Greek yogurt balances this dessert nicely and the crunch of the oat crumble is like the icing on the cake. Photo courtesy FLIK Hospitality



FLIK Hospitality's [spinach quinoa salad with yogurt honey Dijon dressing](#) checks all of the boxes: quick, healthy, minimal prep, and great for leftovers. Protein-packed eggs and fiber-rich quinoa and vegetables make this salad a filling meal for lunch or dinner. Prepare it as written or sub with vegetables you have on hand and top with a homemade Greek yogurt dressing. Photo courtesy FLIK Hospitality



FLIK Hospitality's charred chili honey broccoli and ricotta crostini slashes calories, saturated fat, and sodium without sacrificing presentation or flavor. Photo courtesy FLIK Hospitality

One chef, Jimmy Wessman, has taken an extremely active role in the health of bees. He has actually traded in his chef coat for beekeeping gear as he tends to 120 bee colonies with his company [Bottom Stung Beekeepers](#), and the honey is then provided to several hotels and resorts, including The Ritz-Carlton and the JW Marriott Orlando, where it is used in the in-room dining and breakfast offerings, in the spa, and at the restaurant.

"I knew there was a culinary component to keeping the bees, and as a chef, I felt like I could offer that insight along with my knowledge of bees," he said in an [article for Marriott](#). "It has been a great fit for me."

When keeping bees, chefs and caterers have to be conscious of how they utilize the honey, however, since only about a teaspoon of honey is the life's work of a dozen bees.

"You don't realize how precious honey is until you become a beekeeper," says Karen Killough, owner of [Vista Brewing](#) (Austin, TX), which houses apiaries (or hives) onsite and utilizes the product within their beer recipes and on their menus. "This has greatly affected my perspective on how we use honey in dishes. Instead of using honey as a base generic sweetener, we like to use honey more as a finishing touch, a flavorful addition to highlight its unique local flavor. We particularly like to use fresh cut honeycomb as an accent on a cheese board or dessert.

"There is no comparison between fresh and store-bought honey—honey is a truly local, agricultural product. The flavors of your local honey are unique and tied to a specific place."

For Juliet Olson, with [Epicuriosity Catering](#) (Dunsborough, Australia), beekeeping offers a lot of fun (and education).

"It's a fascinating hobby that becomes completely absorbing," she says. "We enjoy being small scale and keeping a close eye on what's happening in the hive. There's no end to the learning.

"It's important to understand that bees need caring for—you can't just set them up and forget about them until you're ready for some honey. Regular observation ensures you're aware of what's happening in the hive."


[FLIK Hospitality Group](#) has even started to generate some buzz due to its partnership with its corporate chef Will Pfeiffer (IBM's Louis V. Gerstner Center for Learning) who has developed custom-built hives and honey-powered new menu items.

"Knowing we have honey onsite adds an extra layer to our menu innovation," says Pfeiffer. "I understand how much work and effort goes into making raw unfiltered and unheated local honey now, so the ingredients that we pair with our honey are chosen very carefully and executed at different levels."

In the catering industry, where every detail matters, chefs and caterers who produce their own ingredients are setting a new standard of excellence. Whether through foraging, farming, beekeeping, or other innovative approaches, these culinary trailblazers are demonstrating a deep respect for nature and a commitment to sustainability.

"A chef who is in touch with their local farmer, rancher, and beekeeper will be in tune with what's in season and fresh," says Killough. "Choosing local products, at their freshest, not only promotes the health of our local food systems, but also creates the best tasting dishes."

By embracing self-sourcing, chefs and caterers can create unique dining experiences that capture the essence of their surroundings and delight the taste buds of their guests. As we celebrate these inspiring individuals, let us remember that the journey from field to fork begins with the passion and dedication of these visionary chefs and caterers.

"I take menu development very seriously regardless of if I am using my own harvested ingredients or not," says Pfeiffer. "Now, it's a completely different story. I've always been a foodie and have a great appreciation for the quality ingredients used in each dish and the process it takes to get there. I believe great chefs have an intimate relationship with the ingredients they choose to use." 

Learn More

Want more information and recipes from the chefs who self-source their own ingredients? Head over to www.catersource.com.

The Recipe for Elevating Food & Service in a Catered Environment

Creating a successful restaurant experience in a catered environment requires a delicate blend of culinary artistry and exquisite service. The dining landscape has evolved, and today's catering clients demand not only delectable dishes but also unforgettable experiences. We are pushed daily to create newness and to elevate what we did yesterday.

I say it all the time, but what we do in the catering world is much like creating a Broadway show. You need to set the stage and in our case it's a culinary stage. There's a beginning, a middle, and an end, and as those moments unfold, they must surprise and delight your client and their guests.

Step 1: The food

We've found that the first element in this successful recipe is that everything hinges on the quality of the food offerings. We need to establish a strong culinary identity and must curate a menu that reflects our expertise, creativity, and commitment to fresh, seasonal ingredients. Our dishes should be thoughtfully designed, showcasing a balance of flavors, textures, and a stunning presentation. This may sound simple but it's pretty complex. We recognize that it takes a ton of training to have a culinary team see things the way they are designed. As an example, even with a photo to guide them, the way that they see things is often not the way I personally design them. I am an A-personality creative that pays attention to every detail. Not everyone sees what I see and the way that I see

it. Taking the time to train the eyes of your team is a must, as the execution is critical to the success of this recipe to create an elevated restaurant experience at a catered event.

Step 2: The experience

The second step in the recipe is elevating your client and guests' dining experience which actually extends beyond the plate. Attention to ambience, décor, and music creates an immersive atmosphere that complements the cuisine and sets the stage that you are creating. Aesthetic considerations should align with the concept, whether it's elegant fine dining or even a cozy family-style setup.

Step 3: The staff

The third step in the recipe, which is the heartbeat of any catered event, is the staff. Staff members must be trained to embody warmth, professionalism, and attentiveness. Timely service, addressing dietary restrictions, and anticipating needs contribute to an exceptional customer experience. Seamless coordination between the kitchen and the front of house ensures that your client and their guests receive a

flawless experience. Never forget that your event team is a direct reflection of your brand. Make sure that they embody your company mission, the core values of your company, and everything that is important to you. They need to speak your language. We recognize this wholeheartedly and therefore put a tremendous amount of time, effort, love, and training into our team. You must remember the adage that you are only as good as your last event. We never take that for granted and neither should you.

Our job is to create delicious memories for our clients and their guests. It's all about the way that we make people feel. At the end of the day, if we accomplish making them feel special, valued, heard, and accommodated, we have done our jobs.


Step 4: The personal touch

The next ingredient in the recipe here is personalization and customization. We cater to a diverse clientele, each with their preferences and dietary requirements. Providing customization allows your client and their guests to feel valued and accommodated. Whether it's offering gluten-free, dairy-free, nut-free, and vegan alternatives, or tailoring dishes to suit individual tastes, personalization enhances the overall experience. Having multiple menu options that embody all of the potential dietary requirements sets us up for success at every event. To be more specific, we always have vegan,



Attention to ambience, décor, and music creates an immersive atmosphere that complements the cuisine and helps set the stage. Photo courtesy Roey Yohai Studios

with local farmers, utilizing seasonal ingredients, and minimizing food waste not only resonates with the eco-conscious client but also contributes to the overall quality of the food. The taste of the food produced with fresher, local, and sustainable ingredients is far better in so many ways; while more expensive to source, the freshness factor will 100% elevate your dishes and the guest experience when they enjoy your culinary creations. On a personal level, and as a mother of 20-something-year-old twins, being thoughtful of this is of utmost importance to me, as I am constantly thinking of the future for them too... just saying!

Creating a luxurious restaurant dining experience in a catered environment is an art that intertwines the culinary mastery of the kitchen with the grace and precision of an awesome service team. A successful company revolves around quality food that tantalizes the taste buds, creates an inviting ambience that captivates the senses, and service that makes clients and their guests feel truly cherished. By embracing innovation, personalization, sustainability, and a commitment to excellence, caterers can ensure their events become a beacon of culinary delight and exceptional hospitality one bite at a time. 

dairy-, gluten-, and nut-free menu items at every “act” of our events.

Step 5: The innovation


When creating restaurant experiences in a catered environment, another critical ingredient is staying relevant, embracing innovation, and being adaptable. The culinary world requires continuous innovation. We should be open to experimenting with new flavors, cooking techniques, and global culinary trends. Regular menu updates can intrigue clients and will attract new ones, making the dining experience a dynamic journey for your clients and their guests.

Step 6: The sourcing

Sustainability and ethical sourcing are the next ingredient. Our clients (social, corporate, and nonprofit) increasingly prioritize sustainability and ethical sourcing. Partnering



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.



A Pinch of Salt

A close-up photograph of a bartender's hand holding a metal strainer over a glass. The glass is filled with a pinkish-orange liquid and has a thick rim of white salt. The background is dark and blurred, showing a bar setting with warm lighting.

Incorporating salt into
cocktails can help with
tempering bitterness
while enhancing citrus
and sweet flavors



Daiquiri++: Caña Brava Rum, Clément Première Canne Rhum, lime juice, salted lime cordial, yuzu vinegar, and lime curd. Photo courtesy Naren Young for [Eater](#)

It's long been understood by chefs and bakers that salt can enhance any dish, but salt is also a secret weapon in the world of mixology. By helping to balance and enhance cocktails in myriad ways, salt transforms cocktails by adding depth, complexity, and balance.

"Salt has been used in cooking for over 5,000 years, and just as food needs seasoning so do cocktails," says Shannon Boudreau (The Lazy Gourmet).

Let's take a look at why salt is considered a magical ingredient in the world of mixology.



Grey Gusano: mezcal, Ancho Reyes Verde liqueur, rhum agricole blanc, fresh lime juice, simple syrup, Townshend's Distillery Bluebird Alpine liqueur, sal de gusano, and Scrappy's Firewater Tincture. Photo courtesy [Saveur](#)



BEECHFRONT VIEW

Photo and recipe courtesy The Mushroom Council

INGREDIENTS

1½ oz Beech Mushroom and Citrus Cordial
(recipe below)

½ oz lemon juice

3 dashes of Poi Dog Chili Peppah Water

2 oz club soda

Chili-lime salt rim (recipe below)

METHOD

1. Use a lime wedge to wet the outer edge of a rocks glass. Pass the glass through the chili-lime salt rim to coat the rim of the glass.
2. Add the cordial, lemon, and Chili Peppah Water to an ice-filled cocktail shaker and shake until well chilled.
3. Strain over fresh ice in the rimmed glass and top with two ounces of club soda.

INGREDIENTS FOR CHILI-LIME SALT RIM

½ cup Maldon salt

1 T tajin chili-lime seasoning

METHOD

Lightly crack Maldon salt with a spice grinder or mortar and pestle. Add one tablespoon tajin to cracked salt. Stir to incorporate and store at room temp.

INGREDIENTS FOR BEECH MUSHROOM & CITRUS CORDIAL

8 ea. lemons, peeled

1½ cups sugar

300 g beech mushrooms

2 cups lime juice

METHOD

1. Peel eight medium-sized lemons, trying to remove as little of the white pith as possible. Place peels in a bowl along with sugar and muddle to release the peels' oils. Cover and let sit overnight at room temperature.
2. The next day, use a rubber spatula to scrape the peels and sugar into a medium saucepan along with the beech mushrooms and lime juice. Gently heat to a simmer stirring every few minutes to help sugar dissolve (do not let it boil). Turn off the heat and allow it to cool to room temperature. Cover and refrigerate overnight to allow it to infuse.
3. The next day, strain out lemon peels and beech mushrooms, being sure to try and squeeze as much liquid from them as possible. Discard the peels and mushrooms and pour the cordial into an airtight container. Will keep in the refrigerator for approximately two weeks.

The science behind salt

Before we get into the creative possibilities, it's essential to understand salt's scientific impact. Chemically known as sodium chloride, salt enhances flavors (such as citrus) by suppressing the perception of bitterness on our tastebuds and amplifying sweetness while simultaneously enhancing other taste sensations.

This balancing act helps create well-rounded and harmonious flavor profiles in cocktails. Essentially, salt is the glue that holds a cocktail together.

"Salt can highlight savory notes as well as bring out flavors that might be hiding behind other components

of a cocktail," said Jamie Dodge, (Cul+ure Collective Hospitality Group) in an article for [Liquor.com](#).

"I don't think salt has a place in every cocktail," he says. "Some drinks should be left for the ingredients to speak for themselves, while others might need that little boost from saline to help showcase certain flavors."

For example, salt can temper the sweetness in a Manhattan or Negroni, while it can amplify the fresh citrus in a daiquiri or gimlet.

Bartenders can look at salt the same way they might bitters: a few drops

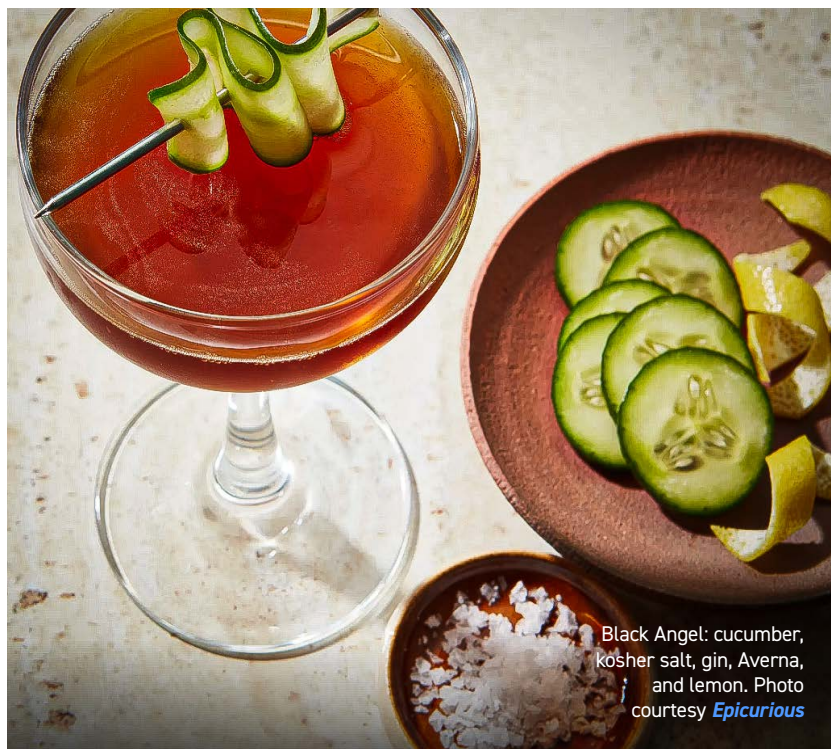
can go a long way toward rounding out the rough edges of a drink.

"A lot of mixologists refer to bitters as the salt and pepper of cocktails," Boudreau says, "but I believe salt is the salt of cocktails and bitters are more like pepper—both play an important role to a balanced, delicious cocktail."

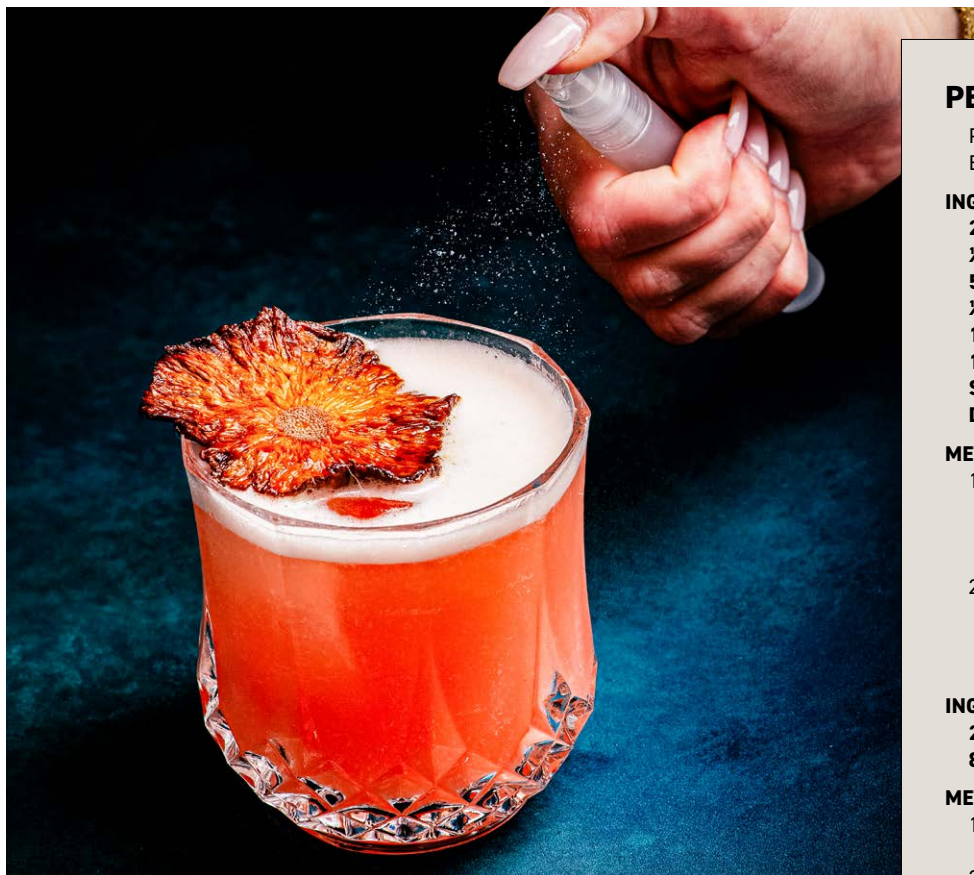
Salt can also help to increase the flow of saliva in the mouth, which in turn will make any drink feel slightly more viscous or rich, according to an article from [Serious Eats](#).

However, the full effect salt has on a drink really depends on the other ingredients it's joining: citrus becomes brighter, drinks with egg white become more aromatic, and beverages topped with sparkling wine get a bit sharper, according to an article from [Punch](#).

"I've recently been experimenting with a more cooking-oriented approach to cocktail development, where certain elements in a cocktail act as seasoning agents as opposed to full blown ingredients," said Devon Tarby (Proprietors LLC) in an article for [Eater](#). "Simply put, salt makes ingredients taste more like themselves," she continues. "Salt isn't just for savory cocktails, either. The addition of a small amount of salt helps brighten citrus and delicate flavors like fresh herbs and light fruits, dampens bitterness, and acts as an overall bridge between powerful booze and the more subtle non-alcoholic ingredients we tend to mix it with."



Black Angel: cucumber, kosher salt, gin, Avera, and lemon. Photo courtesy [Epicurious](#)



PEACH BUM

Photo and recipe courtesy Shannon Boudreau, the Lazy Gourmet

INGREDIENTS

2 oz coconut tequila
 ½ oz Aperol
 5 dashes pineapple bitters
 ½ ea. white peach
 1 ea. lime
 1 ea. egg white
 Saline spray (recipe below)
 Dehydrated pineapple for garnish

METHOD

1. Combine the first five ingredients into a Boston shaker, muddle the peaches, add egg white and shake, add ice and shake again.
2. In a cocktail glass, spray to coat with saline solution, strain and serve over king cube, garnish with dehydrated pineapple.

INGREDIENTS FOR SALINE SPRAY

20 g sea salt
 80 g warm water

METHOD

1. In a jar add 20 grams of sea salt to 80 grams of warm water, let cool.
2. Pour into cocktail atomizer (or any spray bottle).



CAPRESE MARTINI

Photo and recipe courtesy Shannon Boudreau, the Lazy Gourmet

INGREDIENTS

2 oz vodka
 ½ oz dry vermouth
 ½ oz rose vinegar
 5 ea. cherry tomatoes (yellow or red)
 6 ea. basil leaves
 ½ tsp sugar
 Sprinkle of sea salt
 Grated parmesan cheese, for garnish

METHOD

1. Muddle all ingredients, add ice, stir, strain, and serve in coupe martini glass.
2. Garnish with fresh grated parmesan cheese.

Harnessing the power of salt

When incorporating salt into a cocktail, there's several ways to approach it.

"Salt is an underutilized ingredient in most bars. Just like in food, it can really enhance and bring out the flavors of all the ingredients in a cocktail," says Gui Jaroschy (Unfiltered Hospitality).

However, granulated salt still has its place in the cocktail world.

Probably the most common use of granulated salt in cocktails is to rim the glass.

"Salt rims are nothing new, but they are a great way to add texture and another dimension to a cocktail," Jaroschy says.

"I was never a fan of salt on the rim until I really understood what it was there for—making flavors pop—and it also makes you want to go back for another sip faster," said Dodge in the [Liquor.com](#) article.

While salt rims are most popular in agave spirit cocktails (such as margaritas or palomas), a rim of cocoa nib, salt, and sugar can work beautifully with a bourbon cocktail.

Beyond the classic salt rim, granulated salt can also be sprinkled over a cocktail as a finishing touch.

Bartenders have also started experimenting with salt infusions to create unique and complex flavor profiles. By infusing salts with herbs, fruits, spices, or even smoke, mixologists can impart distinct characteristics into their cocktails. For example, a smoky salt infusion can add a hint of complexity to a whiskey-based cocktail, while a citrus-infused salt can brighten up a refreshing gin and tonic.

"We enjoy making flavored salts that don't just add salinity, but also help the drink tell a story," says Jaroschy.



Jungle Bird: white rum, passion fruit liqueur, Campari, falernum, lime juice, saline solution, and mango syrup.
Photo courtesy [Saveur](#)

The finishing touch

Granulated salt can be looked at much like sugar: utilizing it in its granulated form is much more limited given the fact that liquids mix better with liquids, which is why simple syrups are most often used in cocktail recipes rather than granulated sugar.

The most classic example is a margarita with its salted rim, adding a contrasting savory element to the drink's tangy sweetness. The salt rim not only provides a visually appealing presentation but also introduces a subtle salty note that complements and balances the overall flavor profile.

Salty solutions

On the opposite end of the salty spectrum, saline solutions, sprays, and tinctures have gained popularity in the cocktail world. These solutions offer precise control over the amount of salt added to a drink, allowing for consistent results. A few drops of saline solution (made by dissolving salt in water) can work wonders,

The Nutty Professor includes peanut butter fat-washed whiskey, Chocolate Galliano, Amaro, Bailey's Irish Cream, chocolate bitters, cinnamon, and Maldon Sea Salt. Photo courtesy Shannon Boudreau



THE NUTTY PROFESSOR

Recipe courtesy Shannon Boudreau, the Lazy Gourmet

INGREDIENTS

1 oz Peanut Butter Fat-Washed Whiskey (recipe below)
½ oz Chocolate Galliano
½ oz Amaro
½ oz Baileys Original Irish Cream
4 dashes chocolate bitters
Sprinkle of cinnamon
Generous sprinkle Maldon Sea Salt
Chocolate shavings, for garnish

METHOD

1. In a shaker combine all ingredients, shake for 30 seconds.
2. Strain into cocktail glass with crushed ice.
3. Garnish with chocolate shavings.

INGREDIENTS FOR PEANUT BUTTER FAT-WASHED WHISKEY

½ lb peanut butter
500 ml bourbon (or preferred whiskey)

METHOD

1. Spread peanut butter across the bottom of a deep sheet pan or casserole dish.
2. Pour bourbon, rye, or unpeated scotch on top of the peanut butter.
3. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit for two days.
4. Strain with a cheese cloth until all the liquid is out. Pour it back into the bottle for use.

enhancing the flavors and creating a more rounded and balanced taste.

To further explore the versatility of salt in cocktails, bartenders have also begun crafting salty syrups and tinctures. These concoctions add a concentrated burst of saline goodness to drinks. Salty syrups can be made by dissolving salt in simple syrup, while tinctures are created by infusing salt into high-proof alcohol. These additions open a world of possibilities, allowing mixologists to experiment with unique flavors.

Fat washing

Rounding out the salty cocktail styles is fat washing, a technique that adds a savory flavor to spirits. To fat-wash your alcohol, you add a liquid like sesame oil or

melted butter to a spirit at room temperature. Let it sit for a few hours, then chill everything in the refrigerator or freezer until the fat solidifies and can be skimmed off or better, strained through a cheesecloth. The spirit retains the flavors of the fat even after you've done the skimming. However, be aware that certain fat-washing recipes utilize oils or ingredients that may not necessarily have saltiness, which will produce a flatter flavor profile. As such, avoid using fats such as unsalted butter or uncured bacon.

"Think of what bacon would taste like if it was not salt cured. Or eating a piece of unsalted butter, there's not much flavor," says Boudreau, "but as soon as you add salt, it becomes a completely different product.

"So, while fat washing without salt will add a richness and creaminess to your cocktail, it won't exactly taste like much."

Check out the above recipes to help get your bar program in on this salty trend.

"I think it's important for bartenders to experiment with salt, as it might open up an entirely new dimension as to how you put together cocktails and flavor pairings that might not have looked too interesting in the past," said Staffan Alexandersson, (The Tasting Room) in an article for [Tales of the Cocktail](#).

Cheers! 



Graze Anatomy

The anatomy of a grazing table looks different for everyone.

For some, it's essentially the next generation buffet where guests can nibble on charcuterie and cheese at their leisure. For caterers, grazing tables are an opportunity to think outside the box in terms of display. Regardless of how you may approach grazing tables, it's an enduring trend that caterers must get on board with sooner rather than later.

All things grazing (both boards and tables) have hit an all-time high over the past several years—whether its charcuterie, bread boards, fruit and vegetables displays, or even dessert boards—guests are still loving the opportunity to sample and create their own plates.

While charcuterie and cheese displays continue to be the popular kids on the block, the display itself has started to get elevated through such ideas as stacking wheels of cheese to mirror a wedding cake, or hand-pulling mozzarella live onsite before being placed on the display.

Other grazing table iterations are also gaining momentum. Burrata boards are trending, as are hummus or polenta boards. Seafood displays continue to be popular, but a new take on this trend is popping up in the form of caviar displays. Bread boards entered 2023 on a high note, and now this trend is expanding to include all different types of bread-centric items (think crostini or focaccia boards). Brunch boards were trending in 2022, and now this concept has expanded to include waffle boards and even fruit and yogurt boards.

For more photos and ideas, head over to www.catersource.com for our grazing board photo gallery.

Beyond getting creative with what to put on your boards, there's also plenty of opportunity to get creative with how to serve. Rather than a traditional board, consider unique platters such as surfboards, clipboards, skateboards, car panels, or wood pallets. Package them individually with cones, jars, or on forks. Display them on a charcuterie wall for more impact. You can even bring them to guests through the use of hawker trays.

"It's all about abundance, it's all about choice, it's all about that amazing display," said Michael Stavros (M Culinary Concepts) during his session, *Caterers, Assemble! - Tantalizing Trends, Captivating Concepts, Inspired Interactivity*, at this year's Catersource + The Special Event (held this past March in Orlando, FL). "You can't just rely on the attraction of the food itself anymore." **CS**

—Amber Kispert



Charcuterie forks | Elegant Affairs Weddings and Events | Photo courtesy Elegant Affairs Weddings and Events



Fall grazing station | The JDK Group | Photo courtesy Mark Buckwalter Photography



Salad table | Rosemary's Catering



courtesy



Charcuterie hawker tray | Catersource + The Special Event 2023 (*Caterers, Assemble! - Tantalizing Trends, Captivating Concepts, Inspired Interactivity*) | Photo courtesy M Culinary Concepts



Country Harvest | Bonura Hospitality Group (Catersource + The Special Event 2021) | Photo courtesy WTA Photos via SpotMyPhotos



Catering | Photo courtesy



Mediterranean grazing station | The JDK Group | Photo courtesy Courtney Dueppenglesser



A flight of different aged prosciuttos | Di Bruno Bros | Photo courtesy Prosciutto di Parma



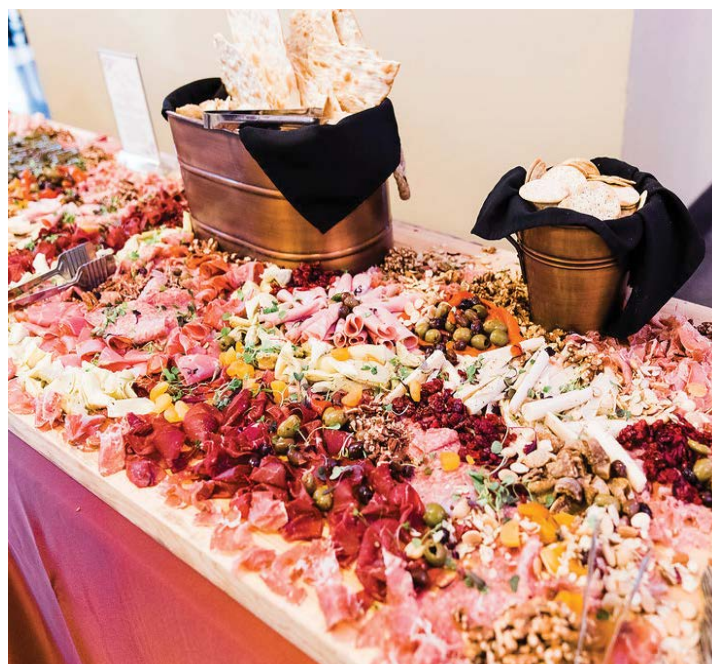
Crostini station | Catersource + The Special Event 2023
(*Caterers, Assemble! - Tantalizing Trends, Captivating Concepts, Inspired Interactivity*) | Photo courtesy M Culinary Concepts



Connect Live grazing table | Catersource + The Special Event 2022 | Photo courtesy WASIO Faces



Grazing display | Alaska Coastal Catering |
Photo courtesy Alaska Coastal Catering



Grazing table | Beyond the Box Catering |
Photo courtesy Scott Aleman Photography



24-foot charcuterie table | Peace Arch Hospital Foundation | Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy



Grazing table | THYME & HONEY | Photo courtesy John F. Martin Photography, Inc.



Charcuterie table | Primal Alchemy for Catersource + The Special Event 2022 (*How to Create Grazing Boards That Will Dazzle Your Clients & Their Guests!*) | Photo courtesy WASIO Faces



Grazing table | Brancato's Catering | Photo courtesy Brancato's Catering



Prosciutto + Burrata Table (prosciutto, burrata, onion jam, tomato jam, caramelized pear, arugula, balsamic, extra virgin olive oil, house made focaccia, grilled ciabatta, and grissini) | Colette's Catering & Events | Photo courtesy Colette's Catering & Events



Cheese table | Assaggiare Mendocino for Catersource + The Special Event 2022 (How to Create Grazing Boards That Will Dazzle Your Clients & Their Guests!) | Photo courtesy WASIO Faces



Grazing table | Forest Lodge Catering | Photo courtesy Forest Lodge Catering



Macarons display | 24 Carrots Catering and Events | Photo courtesy Jackie Culmer



Charcuterie table | Red Table Catering | Photo courtesy Red Table Catering



Fruit and cheese display (Danish blue, sharp cheddar, pepper jack, sage derby, Manchego, Red Windsor, brie, sweet grapes, berries, dried fruits, nuts, crackers, and lavash) | Beyond the Box Catering | Photo courtesy Rachel Elaine Photography




Indian-inspired grazing display | District Events & Catering | Photo courtesy Enmuse Photography



Sushi boats | Metz Culinary Management | Photo courtesy Metz Culinary Management

AS SEEN IN... CHICAGO

By Amber Kispert

The National Restaurant Association (NRA) Show made its return to Chicago May 20-23, and *Catersource* magazine was there to take it all in. Between the show's tradeshow and several invite-only events, there was plenty of inspiration around every corner. Here's a quick look. 

All photos courtesy Buzz Orr Multimedia unless otherwise noted.



Nostalgia continues to reign supreme among event attendees. One example of how nostalgic ingredients can add a bit of fun to an appetizer was seen during the International Foodservice Editorial Council's Bubble Party with Flaming Hot Cheeto Loaded Idahoan Tater Tumblers from the Idaho Potato Commission.



Salads without lettuce are all the rage
During a dinner with the Idaho Potato Commission, one of the salad course options was a mix of microgreens with buttermilk, grapefruit, and...
Amber Kispert



Tarts continue to be popular bite-sized desserts during events (turn to page 30 for more on this trend). During the International Foodservice Editorial Council's Bubble Party, Bel Brands served Boursin & Berry Mini Phyllo Tarts. Photo courtesy Amber Kispert



The California Avocado Commission served up a trio of lovely bite-sized toasts during the International Foodservice Editorial Council's Bubble Party: Lime Brulee Toast, BLT Toast (shown), and Crab Toast. Photo courtesy Amber Kispert



Action stations that get guests moving
during events. At the Pop Rock Party, the International Foodservice Editorial Council's encouraged guests to dip the rim of a glass in... then roll it in Pop Rocks.



the rage during events. Potato Commission, featured spring peas mint. Photo courtesy



Chilled soups are a great option for spring and summertime events. During the International Foodservice Editorial Council's Bubble Party, the Watermelon Promotion Board served a Watermelon Rind Gazpacho.



During the International Foodservice Editorial Council's Bubble Party, the Watermelon Promotion Board served a Watermelon Burmese Salad with watermelon, green beans, lentils, kaffir lime, and peanuts during the Bubble Party.



in on the action are trending Bar during the International Bubble Party, attendees were champagne flute in frosting and



The sober curious movement continues to rage on, and the International Foodservice Editorial Council got in on the trend during its Bubble Party. The National Honey Board mixed up a non-alcoholic cocktail called the Bright One featuring lemon juice, clover honey, yuzu juice, spirit-free gin, and ginger beer.



Think outside the box with your individual charcuterie options. Rather than a cone or miniature board, consider placing your charcuterie atop a soft pretzel like this version shown in the Milwaukee Pretzel Company's booth. Photo courtesy Amber Kispert



By Maya Rotman-Zaid



Editor's note: Maya Rotman-Zaid is the founder and principal of **BellaRu Catering** out of Chicago, which helped to feed over 40,000 local families during the pandemic.

Giving is Sustainable

In 2017, I began BellaRu Catering to cater multicultural events with international cuisine and exceptional service. Our approach has always been to give our clients a unique experience while incorporating their cultures. Our staff is comprised of people from many countries around the globe, and each brings a unique "flavor" to our company, which we enthusiastically embrace.

In March 2020, we lost 100% of our catering business overnight. We had to shift gears quickly. BellaRu Catering went from a full-service catering company to a team of amazing people dedicated to feeding the underserved, senior, and homeless communities in Lake County, IL and beyond.

Our area, like most, has a very big disparity of wealth. The families we wanted to help first were those we knew would be left behind. These were the families largely represented in my company, so our focus became the severely underserved Hispanic communities. We knew if we weren't on the giving end of things, we would be on the receiving end.


We were asked if we could start making meals for a homeless shelter to feed 100 people who were sheltering in place within local hotels. We brought them three meals a day, seven days a week. We then began helping with the Meals on Wheels senior program delivering fresh groceries, prepared meals, and emergency supplies to their homes. We began to pack grocery bags full of Hispanic-preferred ingredients including chicken, pork, eggs, chiles, cilantro, tomatoes, tortillas, rice, beans, and more. We were then able to distribute these items to the underserved communities in our area. Word spread and grants started rolling in to help us help more people. Because of this, we hired 27 full-time employees that were immigrants and out of work from their restaurants to

help with packing and distribution. I had my staff bring their children to work, and we built a school room for the kids to go to virtual school together, so no one had to miss work.

We also connected with several urban, BIPOC, and local farms to purchase everything they had available to sell. This helped them stay afloat and gave our families the freshest food possible. By September, we were providing over 3,000 families a week with fresh, culturally relevant grocery bags.

Despite the pandemic, our second brand (**Mis Dos Magos**) was born. We started making tamales and including them in each bag we distributed. At the height of our giving program in 2020, we were producing 12,000 tamales a week.

In December 2020 our federal funding dried up and circumstances in 2021 were looking much different, so we had to adjust again. We connected with several non-profit organizations that rescue food to combat food waste from large manufacturers and distributors. We became a hub and received endless pallets of food, created giveaway events, and informed our community through our social media channels. From 2021 onward, we now feed between 200 and 1,000 families each week with almost zero funding.

Through our catering and wholesale/retail revenue streams, we now fund 98% of the out-of-pocket expenses for our giving program. We have given away almost 7 million pounds of food since March 2020. The food rescue and giving work has given us a larger presence in our community. Our catering customers like the idea that part of what they pay goes back to our giving program. It has grown our catering business tremendously. Carving out a portion of the profits to help feed the underserved is now part of our mission statement. 

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